

“Let us form a body guard for Liberty” –
Conceptions of Liberty and Nation in
Georgetown College’s Philodemic Society,
1830 – 1875

Jonathan Marrow

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Department of History, Georgetown University
Advisor: Professor Adam Rothman
Honors Program Chair: Professor Katherine Benton-Cohen

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Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam

Utraque Unum

Eloquentiam Libertati Devinctam

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: “A fervid tone of exalted patriotism” – The debating society at Georgetown	4
Chapter 2: “That Magic Word” – Defining Liberty in the Antebellum Period	21
Chapter 3: “The Glory Of Children Are Their Fathers” – Catholic Commemorations	41
Chapter 4: “We may not with impunity turn our eyes from the past” – War, Reunion, Reconciliation	66
Chapter 5: Conclusion	86
Appendix	90
Bibliography	97

Chapter 1

“A fervid tone of exalted patriotism” – The debating society at Georgetown

1830 was late in the day to found a debating society devoted to the lofty concepts of eloquence and liberty at Georgetown College. Georgetown, the oldest Catholic college in the United States, had been founded just over four decades previously, amidst the surge of educational institutions that took place in the heady days following the founding of the new American republic. For a literary society too, 1830 missed the rush of extracurricular frenzy which surged in the last decades of the eighteenth and first decades of the nineteenth century, whether at the long-established colonial colleges or new institutions like Georgetown, which usually witnessed such extracurricular clubs sprout up within years of the schools' founding. But predominantly Catholic students at Georgetown founded in that year a debating society devoted to literary pursuits, quickly choosing for itself a name, “Philodemic,” whose etymological roots translated to “love for the people.” They may have been late, but the club was not unique, largely adapting the debating practices, oratorical exercises, and constitutional frameworks of other college literary societies of the day.

What was exceptional about this debating society in particular was its rather un-Catholic commitment to particular American and enlightenment-based ideals; captured by its motto “Eloquence in the Defense of Liberty.” Catholic-Americans in 1830 were still a small minority in the United States, concentrated in only a few states, especially Maryland and Louisiana. Yet this existing demographic minority—unlike the wave of immigration from Catholic, European countries, especially Ireland, that would begin in the 1830s and 1840s—was fairly well integrated economically and socially into the American polity. Despite a long-standing discomfiture among many Protestant Americans—including many of the Founding Fathers—

about the status of Catholics in the new Republic and their potential political inclinations and loyalties—Catholics had increasingly begun to assert themselves as legitimately American, on par, and even in accordance with their religious identity. The Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, drawing its membership from elite Catholic families in the surroundings of the nation's capital, and from those farther afield who could afford to send their children to Georgetown, was a prototypical expression of this national aspiration.

Philodemicians, in the three decades before the Civil War and in the immediate years succeeding the conflict, sought to define themselves as more American than Americans, aspiring to contribute a positive Catholic-American citizenship to this new country devoted to religious freedom and democratic, tolerant liberal ideals. Their quest to do so was not just opposed by the bigoted biases of non-Catholic Americans; rather, the ideological policy they pursued was in contradiction to the ideology of the Catholic Church in Europe, and even among many prelates in the United States. Yet they continued to do just that, using a variety of media innate to the collegiate debating society—festivals, celebrations, patriotic anniversaries, orations, toasts, dinners, debates, resolutions, and eulogies—to proclaim their simultaneous American-ness and Catholicism, the former marked by a definite commitment to the ideal of liberty, supposedly unhindered by the latter.

In the following pages of this chapter, I will give an overview of the college debating society of the mid-nineteenth century and how Georgetown College and the Philodemic fit into this phenomenon. In Chapter 2, I show how the Philodemic idealized liberty to a quasi-religious ideal, imbibing the republican values of antebellum America to a fever pitch level, even as they defined it broadly enough to incorporate diverse conceptions of patriotism and American history. I outline how the society sought to exclude divisive issues of the day like slavery and abolition

that were always implicitly present in their celebrations, in their quest to define an archetypal American republic, a public forum free from partisan politics and mass demagoguery. In Chapter 3, I address the explicit question of Catholic identity, examining the Philodemic's practice of "Pilgrim's Celebrations" in the 1840s and 1850s, and their concurrent ideology of religious freedom. Despite proclaiming their undying commitment to the American tradition of tolerance for all faiths—a practice they emphasized by inspired by Catholic emigrants to the colonies—the Philodemic struggled to put this ideal into action in the decades, stumbling over issues like toleration of Mormons, and the nativist crisis inspired by the Know Nothing Party in the decade before the Civil War. And finally, in Chapter 4, I discuss the Society's experience in the war and its recovery, arguing that the Philodemic fashioned for its members and alumni a unique form of "reconciliation" conceived around college unity and nostalgia, which challenged much of the ideology of postwar reconstruction. Drawing on a population disproportionately from the Southern or border states of North and South, the Philodemic aimed to use its traditional ideals of liberty to move past the divisive results of the nation's internal conflict, even as it slowly moved over to a style of debate and oratory more focused on minor political concerns than grand and abstract philosophical issues.

Although each chapter addresses a distinct forensic theme of the Philodemic Society, the common media involved, of speeches, commemorative festivals, and weekly debates, as well as the unique demographic and geographic position that the Philodemic represented—largely Catholic students at a college in the nation's capital—make it a distinctive and rare institution to study. Moreover, in its unifying principle of "Eloquence in the Defense of Liberty," the Philodemic committed itself to a specific political, national, and social ideal, nuanced and evolving over the decades, but always broadly in tune with what they believed to be the core of

American republicanism. The nineteenth century debating society too, offers an ample pool of evidence, with a tremendous amount of written and printed material that describe and record its activities. From the Philodemic Archives at Georgetown, I compiled over 1200 debate resolutions and decisions from the years 1830 – 1875, along with the meeting minutes for those years; 46 printed orations for events like Commencement, Washington’s Birthday, Independence Day, and the Celebration of Catholic Pilgrims, and a mass of other materials like letters, officer and committee reports, financial records, calligraphed constitutions, specially composed poems, and even, in one case, a musical tune entitled the “Philodemic Grand March.”¹

The literary society was a particularly American institution in the nineteenth century, a form of student organization that had grown out of the need for students to shape their own extracurricular life out of the narrow, restrictive confines of academic university life. Beginning in the colonial period,² and gaining momentum in the university “rush” after the Revolutionary War, they quickly became the primary form of student organization outside of the classroom, and maintained this status until fraternities eclipsed them in the years after the Civil War. Chroniclers of literary societies have generally ignored societies at Catholic schools in favor of those at Northern, Protestant institutions, offering another particularly rich site for analysis.³ Not just

¹ Philodemic Society Archives, Box 5, Folder 4, Georgetown University Archives.

² Historians generally date the foundation of the first such society to the establishment of the “Spy Club” at Harvard in 1722. See David Potter, *Debating in the Colonial Chartered Colleges; an Historical Survey, 1642 to 1900* (New York: Teacher’s College, Columbia University, 1944).

³ This glaring omission is most tellingly invoked in the most comprehensive history of nineteenth century societies to date, by Thomas S. Harding, who casually notes in a closing footnote: “the author regrets that he was unable to include at least one Roman Catholic college literary society in this study.” Thomas S. Harding, *College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815-1876* (New York: Pageant Press International, 1971), p. 321n20. Harding, however, on p. 319, notes to future historians: “Another such study [that could be made] would be that of the literary societies of Roman Catholic colleges before the Civil War. The latter should be especially rewarding in ascertaining the reaction of Roman Catholic college students to the attacks made upon their religion, and to the criticisms of the societies of

groups that met for debate, they encompassed a broad range of activities, forming almost a “college with a college” as one scholar put it:

Elaborately organized, self-governing youth groups, student literary societies were, in effect, colleges within colleges. They enrolled most of the students, constructed—and taught—their own curricula, granted their own diplomas, selected and bought their own books, operated their own libraries, developed and enforced elaborate codes of conduct among their members, and set the personal goals and ideological tone for a majority of the student body.⁴

Another historian has called them “virtually little republics, with their own laws and a democratically elected student administration.”⁵ Despite a multitude of activities, debate was their central activity, occurring on a weekly basis in these groups. This was where students could address, in a formally outlined process, the leading political debates of the day on the same stage with the philosophical, religious, and moral questions that were more intimately connected with their day-to-day studies. The debates were the primary vehicle for students to aspire to not just personal edification and intellectual maturity, but greater heights of citizenship and civic engagement, what a chronicler of pre-war Southern student societies, Timothy Williams, calls “intellectual manhood.”⁶ For Williams, these societies helped men on the brink of adolescence and adulthood make their transition, finding the skills to “speak like men, not boys” and acquire the practice of public, virtuous citizenship in the republic. The students took their exercises deadly seriously: to a point that seems, to a modern eye, more befitting the activities of an actual legislature, than a undergraduate student club, and one, it should be recalled, whose members

Protestant and State-supported colleges and universities.” This thesis is an attempt to answer Harding’s call to interpret Catholic college student societies according to their confessional identity, although the broader historiography on these societies should include Catholic societies in their larger analyses.

⁴ James McLachlan, “The Choice of Hercules: American Student Societies in the Early 19th Century,” in *The University in Society*, ed. Lawrence Stone, vol. II, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 472.

⁵ Harding, *College Literary Societies*, p. 1.

⁶ Timothy J. Williams, *Intellectual Manhood: University, Self, and Society in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

were much younger than today's undergraduates, perhaps with an average age of sixteen or seventeen.

This unique form of organization—however limited to the elite, educated students of the day—gives us an invaluable look into student opinions, philosophies, moral outlooks, personal concerns, on a scale reached by few other mediums or forms of social organization. This is not least the case because of how strenuously (and self-consciously) the students recorded their own exertions, printing speeches for wide distribution, recording meeting and debate minutes, celebration toasts, organizing the printing of reports of their celebrations in newspapers and periodicals. This also presents for the historian a treasure trove of documents of different varieties, purposes, and intentions for the same group of people over the course of many decades—allowing us a close look at a concentrated population in a way few other documentary sources do. Although the extremely self-aware and intentional nature of many of these records necessitates a critical reading on the historian's part, and may detract from a careful reading of *what* these students believed, they concurrently give us a much better sense of *how* they wished to be perceived in the context of their time, and perhaps to prosperity as well.

The Philodemic Society, although sharing a broad degree of similarity to fellow societies at non-Catholic schools, nonetheless differed substantially. For one, although it possessed its own library and handed out diplomas to graduates starting in 1839, it sponsored a significantly smaller degree of extracurricular activities than comparable societies, founding no literary magazine or newspaper, and requiring no quasi-academic exercises like compositions. Instead, debates and public speeches formed the core of its activities.⁷ Its founding was another important example of its differences from other societies. Not only was it founded later than for

⁷ “Amanuensis Book, October 7, 1838 – March 8, 1840” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 2, Folder 6, Georgetown University Archives, see entries for April – June 1839.

comparable institutions, it did not grow out of a need for student autonomy, as seemed to be the case at other schools, but was founded in part by a Jesuit professor, Fr. James Ryder S.J. Traditionally, the literary societies were in large part free from faculty control and intensely jealous of their rights vis-a-vis the faculty and school administration. By contrast, the Philodemic was not only founded by a faculty member, but decreed in its constitution that its presiding officer would always be a Jesuit professor—revealing a degree of willingness for faculty involvement that few other societies had. This may seem unimportant, but it is vital to keep in mind that student autonomy in these groups was not just advocated for its own sake, but because it helped these societies resemble, more similarly, the constitutional structure of the United States. Some societies took this very seriously; in 1840, for instance, the American Whig Society at Princeton (then the College of New Jersey) reorganized and rewrote its constitution to base itself directly on the U.S. Constitution, with a Senate and House of Representatives (for graduate students and undergraduates respectively).⁸ Much like Congress and following in the footsteps of other societies, the Philodemic appointed committees of investigation, elected officers, passed resolutions of respect upon the deaths of eminent alumni or community members like the President of the U.S.; it even conducted treaties with other debating societies in the college. Various subsidiary debating societies were founded at Georgetown in the decades after the Philodemic's establishment, going by names like Phileleutherian, Philhistorian, and Philonomosian. Georgetown differed from other schools, however, in that it decreed that only students of the three highest classes—Poetry, Philosophy, and Rhetoric—could join the Philodemic, while the students in the younger grades would join the other groups which were essentially societies-in-training for the Philodemic.

⁸ Harding, *College Literary Societies*, p. 147.

The curriculum at Georgetown was also different from that of other schools. Structurally, Georgetown in the antebellum period comprised multiple divisions including, a preparatory collegiate division, only the last of which admitted students to the Philodemic Society. That meant that although Georgetown might possess an enrollment of ~300 students in the 1840s or 1850s, only forty or so would be old enough and sufficiently academically advanced to join the Society. And the classes at Georgetown—structured around the traditional “Ratio Studiorum” of the Jesuits—were more flexible than those at non-Catholic schools. The Jesuit plan of education put a particular emphasis on active learning in the classroom, as opposed to passive memorization and recitation, as was the case at other American schools. Nevertheless, the Georgetown curriculum, like other nineteenth century American colleges, was primarily focused on the Latin and Greek classics, with little discussion of issues of contemporary social or political importance. Joining the Philodemic offered the opportunity to debate contemporary issues like dueling, temperance, or recent historical events like the Napoleonic Wars.

Yet Georgetown students did not turn to the Philodemic Society because they were starved of rhetoric. Forensic exercises were the main focus of two of the top three classes from which the Philodemic drew its members. In the decade in which the Philodemic was established for instance, a student in the class of Poetry could expect to read Cicero, Livy, Virgil, Horace, Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, Thucydides, and Homer, and in the class of Rhetoric, Cicero, Quintilian, Horace, Demosthenes, Sophocles, Juvenal, Persius, and Tacitus, as well as some English and American authors.⁹ In 1831, students in the upper classes were supposed to spend

⁹ Herbert Russell Gillis, “The History, Theory, and Practice of Speech Education at Georgetown, 1789 to 1890, First Jesuit College in the United States” (Western Reserve University, 1958), p. 124-126.

five hours per week in preparing classroom recitations, on top of their own English compositions, and any society activity they might do.¹⁰

So why were these students apparently speech-crazy? A number of answers can be posited. One is the broader feature of the importance of public, civic-minded speech in the early Republic, as young citizens reveled, self-consciously, in their republican freedom to opine on public topics, where every speaker could opine on public topics of their choosing. The spread of printed media in the first decades of the nineteenth century as well as the slow but steady growth of political partisanship gave way to public festivals of all variety with a special emphasis on rhetorical exercises like speeches and toasts that could be recorded and printed in publications for after-the-fact dissemination.¹¹ The Philodemic took part in this national trend, inaugurating annual celebrations of Washington's Birthday, Independence Day, along with dedicated speeches for the College's annual Commencement, and printing them for later distribution, as early as 1831. Even the festivals without an explicitly patriotic emphasis, like the college Commencement, were generally expected to take on national themes in their addresses, and capture an ideal related to the Society's motto of "Eloquence in the Defense of Liberty."

As much as printed speeches from annual events form a significant degree of the rhetorical records that survive, the hallmark of Philodemic—like other societies—were its weekly meetings. Weekly debates offered an important change from academic life or formal festivities in their emphasis on extemporaneous speech. Each weekly meeting saw a debate chosen for two weeks out, the assignment of keynoters (who would prepare speeches to open that

¹⁰ Ibid, 123.

¹¹ David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

debate), and a debate itself. The order of activities, preserved on the cover of one of the Philodemic's minute books, gives an idea of their weekly activities as they stood in 1859:

“Order of the Day”

1st The calling of the roll.

2nd: The reading of the last meeting's proceeding's, which shall be considered adopted if no objection be made at the time of their reading.

3rd: The debators shall be chosen for (Sunday) two weeks hence.

4th: The subject which they shall debate.

5th: The weekly report of Librarian, Treasurer, and Censors.

6th: Quarterly reports upon days when due.

7th: On the second Sunday of October, January, and April the reading of the Constitution and by-laws.

8th: Miscellaneous business.

9th: The debate for the day.¹²

The thrice-yearly reading of the Constitution by-laws gave the members of the Society the added feeling of permanence and allegiance—again, with similarities to the Constitution of the United States—although this did not stop them from frequently altering its provisions as they saw fit.

Assigned debaters were “drawn out” from a formal box in the debate meeting room like a raffle, and assigned sides, so that the first name drawn out was the first affirmative speaker, the second the first negative speaker, the third the other affirmative speaker, and the fourth the other negative speaker. This meant that students were required to give speeches supporting sides of debating questions they might not have agreed with, even though all could vote as they wished, leading to a number of results that were unanimous or heavily one-sided. Votes appear to have been made both on the merit of the speeches delivered, as well as on students' substantive opinions on the debates offered, so any specific vote result must be taken with a grain of salt.

With this said, debating societies over the course of the nineteenth century moved towards deciding less on personal opinions and more on the merits of the debate, even students could

¹² “Amanuensis Book, October 2, 1859 – June 24, 1866” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 7, Georgetown University Archives.

have many reasons for deciding a debate a certain way.¹³ Nonetheless, a trend of one-sided results over the course of several years on certain debate topics can give a rough idea of the society's viewpoints on an issue, even if the binary structure of the debate—affirmative or negative—meant that the society generally attempted to choose questions that were sufficiently controversial to result in good, balanced debates.¹⁴ Debates could drag on for several days, whether for lack of time, special interest in the topic, or particular long-windedness of certain rhetoricians. A debate on February 5, 1832 on the topic “Which is the better life, that of a Farmer or that of a Lawyer?” continued on for another five consecutive nights, before finally being negated by a vote of 4-12.¹⁵ Ten months later, a December 1832 debate on poetry continued on six more nights, pausing on the following Sunday to debate the topic that had been previous assigned for that night; the resolution that had inspired so much focus was “A comparison between Ancients and Moderns with regards to Poetry?”¹⁶

What topics did students most often choose to debate? A broad variety of classical, sociological, philosophical, political, and religious topics, among others. A typical entry in the Philodemic minute books, for October 9, 1831, shows that debaters proposed the following debates for two weeks out:

A comparison between Cyrus the Elder King of Persia and Philip of Macedon?
Is the Tariff beneficial to the U.S.?
Who is the greater Orator, Cicero or Patrick Henry?

¹³ David Potter, “The Literary Society,” in *History Of Speech Education In America*, ed. Karl R. Wallace (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), p. 243.

¹⁴ A note on debate decisions—when the debate topic was not phrased in a yes/no answer, “affirmative” or “negative” refer to the first and second clauses of the resolution phrasing. E.g. for the following debate on farmers and lawyers, an affirmative decision would mean the Society voted for the life of a farmer, and the negative decision, the life of the lawyer.

¹⁵ “Amanuensis Book, September 18, 1831 – February 10, 1832” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives, entries for February 5 – February 10, 1832.

¹⁶ “Amanuensis Book, November 19, 1832 – February 27, 1833” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives, entries for December 9 – December 17, 1832.

Which makes the more impression upon man, Fear or Joy?¹⁷

Ultimately, the society chosen to debate the last topic. Certain favorites that were debated frequently over the antebellum periods included variations on the following:

Whether duelling is justifiable?

Whether the Crusades were beneficial?

Should the verdict of a jury be unanimous in criminal cases?

Ought Horatius have been put to death for murder of his sister?

Is republicanism or monarchy more conducive to a nation's happiness?

Is it right that a man should be imprisoned for debt?¹⁸

A particular common form were debates pitting great men against each other, whether contemporaries or not. For instance, certain pairings include Caesar vs. Pompey, Constantine vs. Charlemagne, William Wallace vs. Robert Bruce, Cardinal Richelieu vs. Wolsey, and perhaps most famously, the society's inaugural debate, "Whether Napoleon Bonaparte or General Washington was the greater man?" Although Washington was a popular topic in the Society's speeches, Napoleon held the primary focus of historical interest for Philodemicians in their weekly debates, a similar charisma that he seemed to hold for many college debaters of this era. Napoleon was the subject of 53 debates out of ~1200 between 1830 – 1875, an significantly large number not surpassed by any individual topics, and one which does not even include debates on related topics, like the French Revolution. Why was Napoleon such a draw for these young debaters? According to one scholar of college debating societies, Bonaparte "could offer unique lessons for self-construction and heroism... framing their own pursuit of manhood,

¹⁷ "Amanuensis Book, September 18, 1831 – February 10, 1832" Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives, entry for October 9, 1831.

¹⁸ A full list of debates by topics relevant to this thesis, along with their dates and decisions, is given in an appendix. For the citation of debates throughout this text, see the explanatory note on sourcing. For a thorough, comparative sampling of debates from nineteenth century college literary societies, by topic, time period, and region, see Harding, *College Literary Societies*, pp. 336-537.

especially tensions between impulse and restrain and between mind and temperament.”¹⁹

Napoleon, unlike Washington, was a better topic for debate, rather than mere praise or calls for emulation. His military prowess and patriotism, for instance, could inspire imitation, but his perhaps excessive pursuit of glory could raise questions about how much emulation was deserved, providing a good source of controversy.

The Society neglected debating or even discussing at commemorative events issues of local interest or college level controversy—Philodemicians preferred the broad, national, international, or abstract debate. Yet even as they did so, the Philodemic strenuously avoided debating issues of partisan controversy, adopting a provision in their Constitution in 1832 prohibiting discussion “religious or political subject[s].”²⁰ In practice, this meant to allusion to political parties or partisan issues, and several debates over the years re-litigated what this prohibition meant, at one point referring to no political topic “of a date later than the year 1800” and “no religious subject whatsoever.”²¹ By 1840, it meant no “religious questions of a controversial or sectarian character, [or] political questions of a party nature.”²²

This prohibition extended beyond weekly debates. In February 1832, for instance, members of the Society who wished to make toasts at the annual celebration of Washington’s Birthday were required to submit them in advance to the Committee of Arrangement “for inspection,” two days in advance of the celebration “in order that no political matter might be

¹⁹ Harding, *College Literary Societies*, p. 138.

²⁰ “Amanuensis Book, November 19, 1832 – February 27, 1833” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives, entry for February 28, 1833.

²¹ “Amanuensis Book, November 23, 1834 – December, 1835” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives, entry for October 27, 1835.

²² “Amanuensis Book, October 1, 1837 – November 26, 1848” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 2, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives, entry for July 1840, “Constitution of the Philodemic Society.”

introduced at the occasion.”²³ These two prohibitions were common, if not uniform, at other college debating societies, and took on special relevance at Georgetown, a college run by the Society of Jesus, but which had a substantial percentage of non-Catholic students in the antebellum period, forming on average about one third of the student body in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, but perhaps even reaching a small majority for a year or two in that last decade.²⁴

Debates could get divisive—but not necessarily for the reasons that might be expected. In the spring of 1832, the Philodemic’s minutes record two altercations taking place—on debates about the Crusades and one comparing William Wallace and Robert Bruce.²⁵ In 1850, the Society was the cause of a school-wide riot, after choosing to meet during the “late studies” period despite the prohibition of the Prefect of Studies. When the Prefect attempted to expel three of the guilty students, they raised a ruckus throughout the school, and led several dozens of students off campus in protest at the measures of the faculty. The uprising ended several days later when the administration, after threatening to tell the student’s parents, worked out an agreement with the campus exiles, taking them back on conditions for a formal apologies for their misconduct.²⁶ In the spring of 1859, as the Civil War approached and sectional tensions ran at an all-time high, a debate on the topic of slavery rendered a full out brawl between members of the Philodemic in the Society’s meeting room. A member from Mississippi sprang at the Vice-President—a Louisianan—and other such interstate fisticuffs ensued between students. The fight

²³ “Amanuensis Book, February 12, 1832 – May 15, 1832” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives, entry for February 19, 1832.

²⁴ Curran, *From Academy to University*, p. 184 and pp. 369-394.

²⁵ “Amanuensis Book, February 12, 1832 – May 15, 1832” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives, entries for March 22, 1832 and April 10, 1832.

²⁶ Curran, *From Academy to University*, pp. 197-198; Eric M. George, “The Cultivation of Eloquence at Georgetown College: A History of the Philodemic Society from 1830-1890,” in *Swift Potomac’s Lovely Daughter: Two Centuries at Georgetown through Students’ Eyes*, ed. Joseph T. Durkin (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), p. 111.

only ended when a Jesuit came down in his nightgown to put out the candles and, by darkness, forced the scuffle to cease. This brawling earned the Society's a three-month suspension from the president of the College that terminated the Philodemic's debates for the remainder of the year—a rather paternalistic end to a serious, national debate.²⁷

Student societies at other schools were often the sources of riot and protest at what was a particularly rebellious period of higher education in the United States, as students chafed at the paternalistic styles of the faculty and college administration and sought to guarantee their own independence. Although the societies were a focal point of student efforts for autonomy, this was as much a product of the fact that at many schools, they enrolled a majority of the students and constituted the major form of extracurricular activity, as due to any particular inherent quality or activity of these societies. On account of this, many histories of individual societies have used them as a central framework from which to understand student life and opinions in the nineteenth century.²⁸ Many histories of literary societies date the beginning of their decline in the postwar period in 1870s, as many societies never recovered from the effects to campuses from the Civil War, and others found new competition in Greek fraternities and newer student organizations, an improved university library, and more inclusive curriculum.²⁹ But for most of the nineteenth

²⁷ “Amanuensis Book, February 10, 1856 – July 7, 1859” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 5, Georgetown University Archives, see entry for April 10, 1859 relating to three month suspension of Society. A nostalgic account of this fight is given in J. Fairfax McLaughlin, *College Days at Georgetown* (Philadelphia: Press of J. B. Lippincott Company, 1899), pp. 97-99. Curran, *From Academy to University*, pp. 233-234, places the debate in December 1859 as opposed to April.

²⁸ The two best studies of this kind are those of the University of Virginia and the University of North Carolina. See Williams, *Intellectual Manhood*; Thomas L. Howard III and Owen W. Gallogly, *Society Ties: A History of the Jefferson Society and Student Life at the University of Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017).

²⁹ Harding, *College Literary Societies*, p. 318; Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 145; Cf. Henry D. Sheldon,

century, these literary organizations were broad tents for student opinions, interests, and academic focuses.

Given this, it is well worthwhile to compare the ideological missions of different societies against each other. The mission statements of other societies held as their objects “to promote friendship, Social Intercourse, and Literary Improvement” in the case of one society at Yale, whereas its school rival declared its objective “to promote the intellectual improvement, the gentlemanly character, and the mutual good will of its members,” while a Colby College society’s purpose was to “secure religious information, discuss practical topics in Christian living, and afford mutual sympathy and restraint.”³⁰ By contrast, the 1840 version of the Philodemic Society’s constitution announced in its first Article that “This society commenced in the year of our Lord 1831 and the 53rd of the Independence of the United States, and is essentially a debating society, having for its objects the Cultivation of eloquence, the promotion of Knowledge, and the preservation of our Country’s liberty.”³¹

This special focus on patriotism, national liberty, and eloquence in the service of national goals was the crucially defining aspect of the Philodemic Society. As students of Georgetown, a university founded in the conscious desire of integrating Catholics in the new Republic, Philodemicians aimed to give off an air of deliberately cultivated patriotism. One laudatory

Student Life and Customs (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1901), p. 126, which dates their decline earlier, to around 1840.

³⁰ Harding, *College Literary Societies*, 34. The Philodemic often got its founding date wrong in the years following its founding, variously reporting it as January 17, February 22, and sometimes reporting its year of foundation as 1825 or 1831. The cause of the January 17 and February 22 confusions seems to have been due to, for the former, the choosing of the Philodemic’s name, motto, and badge on that date in 1831, and for the latter, the Society’s choice to celebrate the Society’s “anniversary” on that date, starting in 1832.

³¹ “Amanuensis Book, October 1, 1837 – November 26, 1848” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 2, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives, entry for July 1840, “Constitution of the Philodemic Society.”

newspaper report from 1870 about a Philodemic celebration of George Washington's Birthday, gives an idea of the ideal Philodemic celebration that expressed unabashed patriotism:

A fervid tone of exalted patriotism pervaded all their addresses, and gave ample proof that the learned Jesuit Fathers, while instilling into the hearts of their students true principles of morality, and enriching their minds with treasures of knowledge, are equally mindful to inculcate a warm and generous love of country—thus stamping with falsehood the silly charge that their teachings are inimical to public liberty. It is questionable whether, throughout this broad land, a more fervidly patriotic remembrance of the great a good Washington, or a more generous appreciation of the noble principles he taught, was manifested to any gather on the 22nd February, than that which graced the memorable Georgetown College of Tuesday afternoon last.³²

One easily imagines the joy on the part of the Philodemic members on being able to prove, and be validated in print, the success of their own cultivation of patriotism. In order to be patriotic, Philodemicians needed a central American idea—which, for them, was liberty. Liberty bridged religious and ethnic identities, and united patriotic Americans in a national community of republican zeal.

Philodemic members were neither exclusively Catholic, nor exclusively American, nor citizens of their state and region—and indeed, in reading over the myriad documents of these students, one arrives at a new respect and appreciation for the multiplicity of their identities and the appeals that they perceived throughout the course of their student days. Their interests stretched far beyond the narrow confines of American and Catholic identity—to all manner of political and philosophical question. But it is nonetheless remarkable to what degree the Philodemicians from the 1830s through the period of Reconstruction paid much more than lip service to their dedicated motto of “Eloquence in the Defense of Liberty.” Liberty—so variously defined, frequently to the point of debates stretching into the night and physical altercations—was the central organizing principle of these young men, growing up in a fast changing country.

³² Newspaper cutout (Newspaper cutout, February 27, 1870), Philodemic Society Archives, Box 7, Folder 10, Georgetown University Archives.

Chapter 2

“That Magic Word” – Defining Liberty in the Antebellum Period

When Benjamin Rush Floyd spoke at the Commencement of Georgetown College in July 1836 on invitation of the school’s literary society, just under six years after he and 30 odd confederates had established the Philodemic Society, he aimed to identify the founding principles of the literary organization:

In the first place, we endeavored to adapt it to the peculiar institutions of our country; we went back to the source of all power—to the foundation stone of the republic—the people. As our government is an anomaly in government—as it is established on principles the reverse of all upon which political institutions have heretofore been based, so much necessarily be every institution which has the same foundation, and has for its object the support of that system which grows out of it. Therefore, did we base our infant society, upon the same permanent pedestal, by which the stupendous fabric of our government is supported—the people. The object of thus establishing it on an attachment for the people, was a wish at some future time, to assist our countrymen in watching over and defending the government, which guaranteed to all the inestimable blessing of Liberty.³³

Floyd, who had graduated from Georgetown in 1832, would go on to practice law in Virginia, eventually serving as a member of the House of Delegates, State Senate, and the 1850 Constitutional Convention. In many ways, Floyd’s forensic efforts, ideals, and future career marked him out not as an outlier but as the culmination of everything a member of Georgetown’s Philodemic Society aspired to be, and often achieved: a dedicated, principled patriot and a prominent Catholic citizen devoted to public life. Although the rhetoric of Floyd and his compatriots over the course of the antebellum period may seem overblown, overly idealistic, it is a faithful testament to the skills they practiced and ideals they attempted to foster and encourage in each other as members of the oldest literary society at the country’s first and oldest Catholic

³³ Benjamin Rush Floyd, *Annual Address of the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, Delivered at the Annual Commencement, Held on Tuesday, July 26, 1836 by Benjamin Rush Floyd, A.M. of Wythe County, Va.* (Metropolitan Office, 1836).

college. His 1836 speech highlighted not only the modeling of the Philodemic Society off the country as a whole, but its specific commitment to what Philodemicians saw as the ideological core of the nation, Liberty.

First and foremost in the universe of the political ideals that Floyd and other members of the Society worshipped—for the patriotic exertions of the Philodemic Society often resembled those of religious ritual—was Liberty. Liberty, often framed as a quasi-spiritual civic and political ideal, was broadly and flexibly defined but generally attempted to incorporate the founding values of the American Republic, the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, and the “Spirit of ‘76” or the values expressed by Founding Fathers like George Washington. What this meant in action was much less clear. Mostly Catholic Philodemicians turned Groucho Marx’ famous phrase on its head—whatever Liberty was, they were for it. Liberty was so often the theme of Philodemic speeches, yet seen as so central to its efforts, that an 1837 orator opened his address by asking rhetorically “Shall I speak of Liberty, a theme hackneyed as it is inspiring?”³⁴

Liberty was often conceived of as a literal inheritance from the generation of founding revolutionaries, an inherited reality captured in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and the Union of the states, something to be preserved at all costs. But it was also a consciously calculated feeling—an expression of sentimentality which young patriots like the Philodemicians had to commemorate in regular festivities, reviving memories of past heroes and generations. To do so, they read documents of the past, and where possible, they joined their celebrations with individuals who represented their values, whether surviving veterans of the Revolutionary

³⁴ Charles Constantine Pise D.D., *Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, July 25, 1837 by Charles Constantine Pise, D.D.* (Washington: Jacob Gideon, Jr., 1837), p. 4.

generation or descendants of their heroes. Besides the weekly meetings of the body, the three most prominent occasions on the Society's calendar were the July 4th Independence Day exercises, the orations at the college commencement in late July, and commemoration of Washington's Birthday on February 22nd, an event which served simultaneously as a commemoration of George Washington's Birthday and the "anniversary celebration" of the Philodemic. In January 1832, a Society-appointed committee resolved to fix the "anniversary" of the Society on February 22 despite its actual foundation date of September 25,³⁵ a slightly incongruous choice but one that allowed the Philodemic to combine its patriotic exertions towards the memory of the "Father of the Country" with its celebration of itself as a distinctly patriotic institution.³⁶ Washington symbolized for Philodemicians not just the paramount figure of patriotic devotion, stout fidelity, and moral character, but a leitmotif of Liberty, the central American idea.

These three annual events of the Philodemic Society—Washington's Birthday, Independence Day, and the college Commencement—each featured a major event and reading, paired with an orator selected by the Society, either a student member or a prominent member of local society with some connection to the Philodemic, Georgetown, or the Catholic community. On February 22nd, it was customary to read Washington's Farewell Address accompanied by two sets of remarks—usually brief prefatory remarks by the individual selected to read the address, and a longer oration by a separate individual selected for the purpose; on the 4th of July, the order was replicated, but the Farewell Address was replaced with the Declaration of Independence.

³⁵ "Amanuensis Book, September 18, 1831 – February 10, 1832" Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives, entry for January 18, 1832.

³⁶ The Philodemic's devotion to the memory of George Washington—and that of other literary institutions in the surrounding region—is documented in Daniel F. Rendleman, "From Revolution to Rebellion: George Washington as Seen by the Collegiate Literary Societies of the Greater Chesapeake, 1813-1868" (Georgetown University, 2009).

After the forensic exercises concluded, the attendees—members of the Society, college professors and Jesuit priests, and prominent members of local society—sat down to dinners, which included numerous toasts of a patriotic and moral character. These scripted celebrations—the annual festivities on patriotic holidays, the reading of the founding documents, accompanying orations, and dinner toasts—were not a new innovation. These exercises had been inaugurated as part of the formation of American nationalism in the early decades of the Republic, and had quickly grown partisan with the development of political parties and the founding of local societies with implicit political loyalties.³⁷ The prescribed readings that accompanied speeches offered fertile ground for patriotic reflections: the Declaration of Independence provided a chance to consider the meaning of the revolutionary generation and republicanism more broadly, while Washington’s Farewell Address, highlighting especially the dangers of political partisanship, was an opportunity to reflect on Washington’s personal legacy, the current state of politics in the country, and the ideal political leader. College debating societies eagerly took up the mantle of these festivities and came up with their own innovations. At the University of Virginia, for instance, where students idolized the school’s founder, Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson’s birthday on April 13 replaced the traditional celebration of Washington’s Birthday.³⁸

The toasts that succeeded these recitations—some scripted in advance, others extemporaneous—were equally central elements of the ritual. The prescribed, “regular toasts,” usually read by the Society’s president, were followed by “volunteer toasts” the extemporaneous toasts offered by any individual present at the celebration. The scripted toasts generally

³⁷ David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

³⁸ Howard and Gallogly, *Society Ties*, p. 41.

numbered 13, to commemorate the founding 13 states of the Union; each of these toasts generally highlighted national themes and objects, like George Washington, the Army, Navy, the States, the Union, the Constitution, among others. Voluntary toasts, by contrast, were more likely to highlight smaller themes like the home state of the toast-giver, a particular revolutionary hero of subsidiary importance to Washington or Jefferson, for instance, especially foreign advisors like LaFayette, Pulaski, Kosciusko, or Montgomery. These toasts might also laud or mourn contemporary revolts or uprisings for liberty, like those of Poland and Ireland.

If the primary purpose of the annual readings of the Declaration of Independence and the Farewell Address were a ritualized form of reinscribed memory, the toasts were primarily about encouraging sentimentality in their members. David Waldstreicher, a scholar of American nationalism in the early Republic, says about these annual festivals:

The stress on behavior and appearance at these festivals and their public nature point to efforts that went far beyond ensuring politically correct speech. If the rhetoric of these reports is to be taken at all seriously, it was national virtue itself that was being searched for in the faces and the general deportment of participants... real virtue was not an abstract quality of moral character; it was experienced and seen as patriotic *feeling*. This quality of feeling was intimately bound up with every affective, natural tie among people.³⁹

Two self-referencing toasts from the inaugural celebration of Washington's Birthday make sentimental feeling clear as one of the aims of the celebration. Whereas one member toasted "The Philodemic Society—actuated by the spirit of the day," a professor in attendance raised his glass to "The members of the Philod. Soc.-may the double spirit of patriotism and Liberty, that breathed in the hearts of Cicero and Demosthenes, ever animate and emblazon the eloquence of our American youth."⁴⁰

³⁹ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, p. 73.

⁴⁰ "Anniversary Celebration of the Philodemic Society" February 22, 1832, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 14, Georgetown University Archives.

This idealization of catharsis in pursuit of liberty was advocated by many of the orators who spoke at Philodemic festivals in the antebellum years. One 1840 oration for Washington's Birthday, delivered by a member from Tennessee, contended that the value of the day's festival lay in the "feelings... which animat[e] the bosom of the patriot" for "whilst he contemplates the character of GEORGE WASHINGTON, he *feels* and *knows* himself a freeman, enfranchised by the sword of that immortal man [emphasis original]."⁴¹ John O'Neill, an orator at the July 4th celebration the following year, waxed poetic about the emotions and sentimental value of liberty, a word which had a "magic" quality to it:

What indescribable emotions are awakened in the human breast at the bare mention of liberty! It is that angelic form, which robs the glittering diadem of its imaginary splendor; it is that magic word, which captivate the heart by the witchery of its accents, governs by the influence of its own irresistible allurements, disarms the cannon of its terrors, and sweetens death with the promise of immortality.⁴²

But ironically, O'Neill went on to argue, "the only impediments to the preservations of our liberty" were "sectional prejudice and party spirit."⁴³ Capturing the right kind of "spirit" was part of the Philodemic's question to define and reach an ideal state of liberty. Party spirit, partisan loyalties—and sometimes, over-strong sectional loyalties—were dangerous to the health of the republic, as they risked inciting the popular masses away from thoughtful and informed decisions to the insinuating demagoguery of self-interested politicians.

In speeches that highlighted the danger of party spirit and demagoguery—the wrong kind of "feelings," Philodemic orators most often highlighted education and the liberal arts as the

⁴¹ William H. Lewis, *Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, D.C. on the 22d February, 1840, by William H. Lewis, of Tennessee. To Which Are Prefixed the Remarks of William S. Walker, of Mississippi, Previous to His Reading the Farewell Address of Washington.* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1840), p. 12.

⁴² John H. O'Neill, *Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, D.C., on the 5th July, 1841, by John H. O'Neill, of Maryland. To Which Are Prefixed the Remarks of James H. Bevans, of Maryland, Previous to His Reading the Declaration of Independence* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1841), p. 7.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 12

pathway to a more considered, virtuous public patriotism and civic involvement. It was most often the Commencement speeches of the Society that appropriately took education as their theme, and connected it with an ideal of patriotism. Consistent with their society's classical name that claimed a "love for the people," Philodemicians were confident in the public's innate political views and hopes, as long as they were not led astray by biased governmental institutions or instigating agitators. The 1840 commencement speaker, Daniel C. Digges, argued that,

The people, when left to the free exercise of an unbiased judgment, untrammelled by the *ex cathedra* opinions of governmental censors, and unawed by the sentiments of those above them, have never failed to cherish, to foster, and to guard, those high spirits who have left an enduring evidence to posterity of the benefits to be reaped and the happiness to be derived from a free, full, and proper cultivation of the Arts.⁴⁴

To the danger of "the unhallowed altar of odious party spirit" that produced "miserable demagoguerism... party slang and party vituperation," the Philodemic Society's exertions were the answer. Digges told his audience that, "Your duties as men, citizens, Americans, as Philodemicians urge you onward to the grateful task," that of cultivating knowledge and the arts.⁴⁵

If the passionate inflaming of the public by orators was an ever-present danger, so were pre-existing prejudices, which were, according to one 1842 orator, "more difficult to be resisted than the more violent but less persevering sallies of passion."⁴⁶ The speaker, P. P. Morris, condemned all prejudices "of the abolitionist—or the slaveholder—of the various sects of the religionists—of the American—of the European" because "to the prejudiced eye nothing wears a

⁴⁴ Daniel C. Digges, *Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, (District of Columbia,) on the Annual Commencement, Held July 28th, 1840. By Daniel C. Digges, Esq.* (Georgetown: Charles C. Fulton, 1840), pp. 3-4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁶ P. P. Morris, *Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, D.C., July 26, 1842. By P. P. Morris.* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1842), p. 10.

natural aspect.”⁴⁷ The focus on both conceptions of unhealthy bias can be easily understood according to the character of the Philodemic Society. Given that a majority of its members in most years were Catholic, it feared both the long-existing prejudices against Catholic participation in public life and against the compatibility of Catholicism with American republicanism. Likewise, although the Philodemic had begun its existence in an era of relative toleration for Catholic-Americans in public life, the 1840s saw a rising tide of attacks on the faith, especially directed toward Catholic involvement in political life. Sometimes prejudice and passion could amount to one and the same thing. The 1837 commencement speaker, Charles Constantine Pise, a Jesuit priest who had been the first Roman Catholic chaplain to the U.S. Senate, warned that the “the most fierce, the most dangerous of all prejudice” was “religious prejudice.” It impelled men “to condemn, to persecute, to burn, to torture, in every barbarous variety of manner.... actuated by mere passion.”⁴⁸

Indeed, many of the orators at these patriotic events made it clear that an added benefit to the celebrations—if not their primary purpose—was in their disproving the slurs hurled against Catholic-Americans, and especially the Society of Jesus. The orator of the valedictory address at the 1844 commencement, William Pinkney Brooke defended the Jesuits, declaring,

artful and designing men have attempted to deceive our countrymen with the false idea that the Catholics—but, above all, the Jesuits—are the deadly opponents of the free institutions of their country. This assertion, I, in the name and upon the authority of ever member of my class, whether Protestant or Catholic, and in the name and upon the authority of every student of the college, pronounce to be false, and as maliciously false as it possibly could be... Let the manner in which, by their direction, our national festivities here are celebrated, speak for them—a manner which challenges competition

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Pise, *Address*, p. 10.

with the celebrations of any class of citizens in any portion of our widely extended country.⁴⁹

The national festivities—however unconsciously—could always be construed as competing for a higher and dearer patriotism with other citizens. But Catholic-Americans did not have the benefit of being judged fairly, as they were so often ascribed with anti-American motivations, intentions, and actions. As a result, Philodemicians had to celebrate as energetically and forcefully as possible, to provide an open example of their commitment to the union of the states, to the country's free institutions, and its republican values. And Georgetown's college celebrations were remarkably distinctive, if not entirely unique. At a number of Commencements throughout the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, U.S. Presidents attended as celebrated guests of the College, often on stage with the Archbishop of Baltimore, the highest-ranking Catholic prelate in the United States. Where else in the antebellum United States would the highest secular politician and a Catholic archbishop stand together on stage to present diplomas, awards, and medals together, as they did in 1849, 1854, and other occasions?⁵⁰

But religious prejudices and the passions of sectarian bigotry were not the only expressions of feeling that threatened the republican makeup of the Union in the antebellum period. Discussions, worries, and advocacy of union—beyond mere patriotic celebration—were central to Philodemic festivals from the very beginning. Two regular toasts from the 1832 celebration of Washington's Birthday read,

11th. The Union: the Palladium of our political safety & prosperity: we would watch its preservation with jealous anxiety; and discountenance whatever may suggest ever a suspicion that it can in any event be ever [sic] abandoned.

⁴⁹ William Pinkney Brooke, *Valedictory Address Delivered before the Annual Commencement of Georgetown College, July 25, 1844. By William Pinkney Brooke, of Maryland.* (Washington: Blair and Rives, 1844), p. 11.

⁵⁰ Commencement Files, Box 1, Folder 38; Box 1, Folder 43, Georgetown University Archives

13th. Union – Union – Union. Union of charity in heaven – Union of affection in Matrimony – Union of patriotism in the Republic – a triple bond by which the three great governments, Celestial, Domestic and Political are preserved.⁵¹

Just so, a toaster at an 1836 celebration of Washington’s Birthday raised his glass to “The Union of the States:—Next to Liberty, the gravest blessing that Americans possess. May he be deemed a traitor to his country who advises a separation.”⁵²

The omnipresent threat was disunion, and the most feared policy that could bring on disunion was abolition. Abolition and related measures were debated and phrased differently in the pre-war years, as captured by the debates on union and secession, political parties, and slavery [See Appendix, Tables B, C, and G]. With the crystallization of slavery as an increasingly partisan issue after 1840, Washington’s traditional warnings again political parties took on a new meaning. The benefits of “party spirit” or “political parties” were debated just once before 1847, but were then the topic of eleven more debates in the following eleven years. In their speeches and toasts, Philodemic members and guests frequently practiced the rhetoric device of praeteritio, calling attention to the dangers of disunion by seeming to disregard it. In 1859, on the eve of the Civil War as sectional tensions reached their height, a February 22nd speaker asked,

Is there, then, a man in any State, so lost to the glorious remembrance of the past and the bright anticipations of the future, as to harbor in his breast a thought hostile to his country? Is there a demagogue in the land who would wish to see this proud Union broken into fragments and crumbled into dust? . . . No! There exists no fanatic, no demagogue, who would wish to have his name blasted through all time.⁵³

⁵¹ “Anniversary Celebration of the Philodemic Society” February 22, 1832, Georgetown University Archives.

⁵² *The Metropolitan*, February 26, 1832, Vol. II, No. 24 edition, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 19, Georgetown University Archives.

⁵³ Robert Lovelace, *Oration Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, on February 22, 1859, by Robert Lovelace, of Louisiana*. (Washington: William H. Moore, Printer, 1859), p. 16.

Such rhetoric was not just expressed on the eve of the war. A prefatory address to the reading of the Farewell Address in 1840 “blush[ed] to say that there are some who, from motives of local interest or selfish ambition, would dare to suggest the advantage of the dismemberment of our Union. Palsied be the tongue that would whisper the possibility of such a measure...”⁵⁴ But it was not clear that wishing away the problem of disunion worked very well for Philodemicians, no matter how strongly they condemned it. An 1843 toast by a Philodemic member, Richard H. Clarke, highlighted, “Disunion: The only devil whose spell can cause our *fleet* to *flee*, make our shipmates give up the *ship*; pluck out our *armies ies* (eyes,) then have our *soldiers sold*...” while a year later he toasted. “Abolition: A thing which would do in *deed*, what those most concerned in it have often done in *word*—convert THIS Union into *dis*-Union. May it be forever banished from our legislation and our language and our land [emphasis original].”⁵⁵

Abolition, the greatest perceived cause of disunion, was always waiting in the wings. Abolition was never the primary topic of addresses, but often was mentioned as a brief coda to a speech on republicanism, union, or liberty. Instead of being an issue *of* liberty, abolition *threatened* liberty. An 1839 Independence Day speaker called abolition the “one question” which could “change the whole nature of things, and sever the bond by which the several members of our confederacy are united.” Defending state sovereignty, he invoked abolition as a political cause the literally carried the appearance of conflict and war into the national polity, exclaiming,

⁵⁴ Lewis, *Address*, p. 4.

⁵⁵ John L. Kirkpatrick, *Oration Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, District of Columbia, on 4th July 1843, by John L. Kirkpatrick, of Georgia. To Which Are Prefixed the Remarks of Walter S. Cox, of the District of Columbia, Previous to His Reading the Declaration of Independence* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1843), p. 15; Edward C. Donnelly, *Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, District of Columbia, on 27th February, 1844, by Edward C. Donnelly, of New York. To Which Are Prefixed the Remarks of Wm. Pinckney Brooke, of Maryland, Previous to His Reading the Farewell Address of Washington*. (Washington: Philodemic Society, 1844), p. 15.

Look to the North and East. Tell me! What mean those societies and associations? What mean those incendiary pamphlets, carrying death and destruction into the bosoms of the young and unsuspecting? What mean those exciting addresses directed to the passions and prejudices, rather than to the judgement and understanding of men? What mean those numerous petitions which have flooded our National Legislature, praying them to do *that* which the Constitution does not grant, and which sound policy forbids?

But in decrying the threat of civil war, this Philodemic member from Georgia seemed to make it come all the more real, even as he claimed that “I would not, gentlemen, on a festive day like this, point you to the battle-field, red with the blood of our citizens, not to contending armies... [nor] speak to you of the horrors of a civil war, in which the children of the same family must appear as antagonists.”⁵⁶

Few if any Philodemic speeches defended slavery, but instead preferred to castigate abolition and its fanatic adherents. By contrast, the years 1830 – 1860 saw the specific merits of slavery debated by the society eighteen times, asking whether slavery was just, evil, consistent with republican institutions, should be extended into new territories, and whether its abolition would be beneficial or detrimental to the country [See Appendix, Table C]. Despite its mixed but strongly Southern membership, the Society was often divided on these, rendering thirteen pro-slavery decisions, but issuing five decisions favoring abolition or opposing slavery. The ambivalence of the Society towards the institution of slavery can be captured in the fact that in March 1844, it negated the debate “Is the institution of slavery just?” by a vote of 2-10, only to affirm, the following January, the question “Is slavery consistent with republican institutions?” by a vote of 13-1.

Sometimes the Philodemic’s prohibition of partisan topics kicked in when slavery was brought up in the Society; at other times, it did not. When a Philodemic speech for Washington’s

⁵⁶ Oliver A. Luckett, *Oration Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College (On the 4th of July, 1839.) by Oliver A. Luckett, of Georgia. [Published at the Request of Many of the Students.]* (Georgetown: John L. Smith, 1839), p. 14-15.

Birthday in 1837 contained remarks on the subject of abolition, minutes recorded that the Society felt itself “compelled in obedience to its laws to withhold the remarks... from publication” though it insisted on recording that the opinions expressed were “in accordance with those of many of the Society, particularly on the odious and fanatical doctrine of abolition” and the orator was asked to deposit a copy of his speech in the Society’s library.⁵⁷ An April 21, 1850 debate on “Would the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia be consistent with policy” was temporarily halted “for some time” as the members discussed whether or not it was constitutional, before deciding that it was. A meeting on March 30 of the following year ruled the topic “Would the repeal of the fugitive slave law justify disunion in the South?” unconstitutional, but the Society chose to replace it with another racially minded topic “Whether the Indian or African has received more injuries from the hand of man?”⁵⁸ Other meeting minutes require a more subtle eye; a January 18, 1845 topic “Are all men free and equal?” was changed to strike out the word “free” in what was likely an attempt to avoid discussing slavery, but the next week, the debate was dispensed with, with one member “not thinking... tonight’s debate a very argumentative one” successfully moved that it be replaced by “Which is preferable, civic or military fame?”⁵⁹

Understanding the Philodemic’s feelings towards slavery—its attempts to decry abolition as fanatic, partisan, unconstitutional and threatening to union—requires looking to its founder, Fr. James Ryder, S.J., (1800 – 1860). An Irish born immigrant to the U.S. who attended Georgetown College and entered the Society of Jesus, he served two stints as President of the

⁵⁷ “Amanuensis Book, October 2, 1830 – July 25, 1837” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 4, Georgetown University Archives, entries for February 23, and February 27, 1837.

⁵⁸ “Amanuensis Book, October 7, 1849 – April 22, 1852” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 5, Folder 3, Georgetown University Archives, entries for April 21, 1850, and March 30, 1851.

⁵⁹ “Amanuensis Book, October 22, 1843 – June 23, 1845” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 2, Folder 7, Georgetown University Archives, entries for January 18 and January 26, 1845.

College, from 1840 – 1845, and 1848 – 1851. Remarkably, in a 1835 speech to a local Catholic “committee of vigilance” that followed a series of anti-abolition resolutions, Ryder gave a stridently *Catholic* defense of slavery, or rather, an argument for Catholic opposition to abolition:

I am happy, opposed as I should otherwise be to take any part in political discussions, in having the opportunity of assuring my fellow citizens of the South that the Catholic body, both clergy and laity, North of the Potomac, will go heart and hand with them in defence of the Constitution, for the maintenance of social order, and in resistance to the unholy efforts of incendiary fanatics to mar the peace and happiness of this distinguished portion of our common country. The fidelity of Catholics to the laws of the land cannot be misunderstood. For centuries, they have bled under the lash of imperial tyrants, without one expression of resistance to constituted authorities; for centuries their creed has been outlawed and persecuted, and its professors subjected to every species of oppression and injustice by the British government; and yet, the fidelity of Catholics has been proof against every temptation to ameliorate their condition by revolt against their oppressors.⁶⁰

Ryder, repeatedly throughout the address, linked the patriotism and fidelity of American Catholics (in North and South), with resistance to constitutional changes, and the aspirations of “philanthropic” but “fanatical” abolitionists. For Ryder, first and foremost, the debate over slavery was a ready-made opportunity for American Catholics to demonstrate their civic and national bona fides, the inherent positive value of his co-religionists to the Republic. The refrain of “Liberty” recurred throughout the speech but it referred only to the liberty of slaveholders or of national institutions.

Catholic ambivalence towards slavery was not a phenomenon unique to the Philodemic. Georgetown’s first student, and an honorary member of the Society, William Gaston, represented the divide within pre-war Southern Catholics well. A representative from North Carolina who would later serve on the state Supreme Court, he owned as many as forty slaves, yet also simultaneously advocated for abolition, and authored two judicial decisions supporting the rights

⁶⁰ “COMMUNICATED Meeting of the Roman Catholic Congregation of the City of Richmond and County of Henrico,” *Richmond Examiner*, September 4, 1835, Georgetown Slavery Archive, <http://slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu/items/show/88>.

of slaves and free blacks in his state.⁶¹ In what is perhaps a more direct and pertinent example, the 1838 sale of 272 slaves owned by the Maryland Province of Jesuits to help raise funds for the college reflected a wide variety of concerns among Georgetown Jesuits, including financial pressures, some support for abolition, moral concerns for the slaves, among others.⁶²

When Ryder, a popular preacher and orator, died in 1860, the Philodemic organized a eulogy for the departed Jesuit, given by a Philodemic member, J. Fairfax McLaughlin. McLaughlin lauded the Jesuit for his commitment to a certain kind of liberty, asking, “Who will stand forth, like him, the expounder and friend of constitutional liberty, and the eloquent advocate of a higher liberty than is even guaranteed by our own cherished constitution? I refer to the liberty of the children of God.”⁶³ As long as the Philodemic focused on its primary goal of constitutional liberty and deterring anti-Catholic prejudice, it erred on the side of upholding existing positions on slavery. Upholding the existing institution allowed republican-minded Catholics like James Ryder to prove their fidelity to the existing constitutional order of society. An 1857 Philodemic speech by Georgetown alumnus William M. Merrick, then a local circuit

⁶¹ *Report of The Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation to the President of Georgetown University* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 2016), <http://slavery.georgetown.edu/report/>, pp. 93-94, 101; Alfred L. Brophy, *University, Court, And Slave : Pro-Slavery Thought In Southern Colleges And Courts And The Coming Of Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 206-209.

⁶² Robert Emmet Curran, “‘Splendid Poverty’: Jesuit Slaveholding in Maryland, 1805-1838,” in *Catholics in the Old South*, ed. Jon L. Wakelyn and Randall M. Miller (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983), 125–46; Craig Steven Wilder, “War and Priests: Catholic Colleges and Slavery in the Age of Revolution,” in *Slavery’s Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*, ed. Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, Early American Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 227–42. For a full bibliography on this topic, see *Report of The Working Group*, Georgetown University, pp. 80-82.

⁶³ J. Fairfax McLaughlin, *Eulogy on Rev. Dr. Ryder, S. J., Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, D.C., by James F. McLaughlin* (Washington, D.C.: William H. Moore, 1860), p. 8.

court judge and later a Maryland congressman, brought these arguments together. Tracing the Christian roots of liberty, he warned against

the excesses of a political fanaticism which rages in the breasts of a portion of the children of this Republic... they may yet be convinced that free institutions can flourish in a state where every inhabitant has not the right to vote; and that there are circumstances under which it is no violation of principle, but is wise and just, to restrain those of degraded race and undeveloped intellect, and that this may be done without forfeiting our claim to the name of Christian, or blighting forever the hopes of humanity.⁶⁴

Actually, Philodemic orators were happy to use the vocabulary of slavery, but not to talk about the institution itself. An 1843 address commemorating Washington's Birthday foretold that the influences which Washington sprung on the nation would progress "till every shackle, every fragment, every lingering vestige of slavery shall have been drawn in and buried."⁶⁵ A speaker at the college Commencement later that year called the lack of religious freedom a "moral slavery," while an 1847 commencement orator, Thomas Semmes, who urged unrestricted suffrage (for white males), justified his argument by saying, "Unless a man possesses this right he is not a *citizen*, but a *slave*; for without this he does not participate in self-government, and slavery is but the negation of self-government," [for Philodemic debates on suffrage, see Appendix, Table H].

⁶⁶ A citizen without suffrage, Semmes claimed, was "like the slave" in that "he feels no interest in the social and political circumstances that encompass him, because he cannot influence their

⁶⁴ William M. Merrick, *Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, D.C., July 7, 1857, by Hon. William M. Merrick, of Washington, D.C.* (Washington, D.C.: William H. Moore, Printer, 1857), p. 16.

⁶⁵ George Columbus Morgan, *Oration Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, District of Columbia, February 22, 1843, by Geo. Columbus Morgan, of Maryland. To Which Are Prefixed the Remarks of William D. Wynn, of Georgia, Previous to His Reading the Farewell Address of Washington.* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1843), p. 27.

⁶⁶ J. M. S. Causin, *Oration Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, District of Columbia, at the Annual Commencement, July 25, 1843, by J. M. S. Causin, Esq., of St. Mary's County, Maryland, A Member of the Society* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1843), p. 12.

operation...⁶⁷ As much as some Philodemicians were able to conceive of slavery as the opposite of liberty, the expression of tyranny or despotism, it still remained for many an inherent part of the American constitutional system, and for that reason, could not be opposed.

Nevertheless, Philodemicians did not just conceive of liberty in constitutional terms, or, as mentioned before, in terms of sentimental catharsis or legal inheritance. For many speakers, Liberty represented a Godlike form—and indeed, the Philodemic’s badge, intended to capture the motto of “Eloquence in the Defense of Liberty,” depicted the Roman Goddess Liberty clasping hands with Mercury, God of Eloquence.⁶⁸ In this light, the forensic exercises of the Philodemic on events like Independence Day or Washington’s Birthday became quasi-religious rituals, in which civic commemoration took on a sacred character. Various speeches took up this rhetorical theme, mixing classical, pagan, Christian, and patriotic motifs in an attempt to deify liberty. One particularly extreme example of this was a Independence Day address by a Philodemic member, Hugh Caperton Jr., who credited the founding fathers for “consecrat[ing] this day the political Sabbath of a free people,” and spoke of Philodemicians as gathered “around the shrine of liberty.”⁶⁹ The founding fathers were “the illustrious Patriarchs of Independence,” and collectively “the living oracle,” while Thomas Jefferson was “the Apostle of democracy.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Thomas J. Semmes, *Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society at the Annual Commencement of Georgetown College, D. C., by Thomas H. Semmes, Esq., of D. C.* (Washington: The Office of the Saturday News, 1847), pp. 16-17

⁶⁸ “Amanuensis Book, October 2, 1830 – July 25, 1837” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 4, Georgetown University Archives, see entry for January 17, 1831 for the original design. Today’s Philodemic still uses a version of modified version of this design as its badge, with Mercury and Liberty’s respective symbols—the liberty pole and caduceus—to represent them.

⁶⁹ Hugh Caperton, Jr., *Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, District of Columbia, on the 4th of July, 1840. By Hugh Caperton, Jun., of Virginia. To Which Are Prefixed the Remarks of John H. O’Neill, of Maryland, Previous to His Reading the Declaration of Independence.* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1840), p. 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

Caperton spoke of the Philodemic in a confusing amalgamation of Catholic, classical, and republican rhetoric:

As then Athenians of old celebrating the Panathenaeon festivals, bearing the sacrifices to offer up in honor of the Patroness of their city, so do we annually assemble on this Birth Day of our Freedom, all breathing but one great American spirit, to make a joint offering on country's altars of our gratitude and veneration to the Goddess of Liberty, through the intercession and patronage of our sainted ancestors.⁷¹

We can explain this species of rhetoric in multiple ways. One would be the Philodemic's attempts to elevate liberty to higher and higher heights, another attempt by students to integrate the curricular focus of their courses on classical texts with their contemporary patriotism and Catholic identity. Washington—his name almost always entirely capitalized in printed Philodemic orations—was also commonly deified in Philodemic rhetoric, and the other Founding Fathers raised to the level of prophetic soothsayers, if not Gods themselves. The irony of a Catholic-Americans imbibing the patriotic frenzy of the early republic to such a degree that they participated in the deification of its largely Protestant founders would not have been lost on the contemporary observer.

With this said, Philodemicians did everything they could to elevate the status and historical memory of Catholic participants in the Revolutionary War. Founding Fathers like Jefferson, Madison, Henry, and Adams, were regularly given short shrift, or omitted entirely from celebratory toasts or commemorative speeches, in favor of foreign advisors from Catholic countries like Pulaski, Kosciusko, Montgomery, Lafayette, as well as the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence, Charles Carroll of Carrollton. The focus on foreign revolutionary heroes from Catholic countries—and a concomitant focus on those nations' plight for republican liberty—helped give the Philodemicians' ideology of liberty a universal, international quality, that transcended borders and allowed them to answer, at least implicitly,

⁷¹ Ibid, 8.

Protestant claims that Catholicism was inimical to liberty. An Independence Day speech from 1839 exhorted the Society to “not forget the praiseworthy actions of foreign patriots who made common cause with us, in defence of their principles, which have a co-existence in every portion of the earth.”⁷² Three toasts from the February 22nd celebration of 1836 showcase this attempt to bring in foreign influences into the dialogue of liberty:

By Nicolas Stonestreet, Jr. Md. Treasurer. Brave but unfortunate Poland:—Should she again endeavor to throw off the yoke of tyranny, and to make ‘That Home of the Brave’ once more “the Land of the Free,’ may the Sons of Columbia, ever mindful of a Kosciusko and a Pulaski, tender to her all the assurance their wisdom can dictate, or their generosity suggest.

By Francis Kernan, N. Y. Gallant but oppressed Poland:—May the patriotism of a Kosciusko nerve her sons to the conflict... the virtues and genius of a Washington guide them to freedom.

By William Ward, D. C. La Fayette, Pulaski, and Montgomery:—May Americans ever totally remember the Patriot of France—the Freeman of Poland—and the Exile of Erin.⁷³

In the same manner, Daniel O’Connell, the contemporary Irish politician who fought for Irish rights under the British monarchy, received a good deal of focus in Philodemic debates, toasts, and speeches in the 1830s and 1840s, with one 1843 member toasting him as “The Demosthenes of Ireland; whose eloquence, like a two edged sword, is about to sever the galling chain of tyranny which England has cast around his own green isle.”⁷⁴

For the Philodemicians of the antebellum period, awash in annual patriotic festivals and weekly debates, liberty was the omnipresent but incredibly flexible center of their rhetoric. Ironically, despite their wholehearted commitment to a republican form of government, they could not stop debating issues related to the form of government, especially putting republican and monarchical systems in opposition to each other, though they almost always voted for the superiority of the republican position [See Appendix, Table D]. In their speeches, members of

⁷² Lockett, *Oration*, p. 9.

⁷³ *The Metropolitan*, February 26, 1836, Vol. II, No. 24 edition, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 19, Georgetown University Archives.

⁷⁴ Kirkpatrick, *Address*, p. 16.

the debating society sketched out diverse concepts of liberty—as deified goddess, as constitutional status quo, as sentimental catharsis, as moral inheritance, and as universal principle. In each case, the conceptions of liberty helped the predominantly Catholic debating society move towards an energetically patriotic position that allowed for inclusion into the system of American republicanism.

Chapter 3:
“The Glory Of Children Are Their Fathers” –Catholic Commemorations

"Have either of you heard of, I don't know, the something: Jamestown, Mayflower Daughters of the American Revolution Society?"

"The Jamestown, Mayflower Daughters?" *Toby repeats incredulously.*

"I may have gotten the name wrong. They're inviting the White House to participate in some kind of, I don't know, Thanksgiving, Revolutionary War re-enactment."

"C.J., let's not torture American history completely to death."

"Who the hell. . . ."

"Jamestown was the 16th century. The Mayflower landed at Plymouth in the 17th century. The fathers of the daughters of the American Revolution fought in: the 18th century."⁷⁵

-“Shibboleth,” Season 2, Episode 8, *The West Wing*, November 22, 2000

In the spring of 1852, a squabble broke out between the Philodemic Society and the Young Catholics Friends Society of Baltimore. A series of passive aggressive letters were tendered back and forth from Washington and Baltimore, event invitations withdrawn, declined, re-tendered, with accusations of misleading and stolen usurped made.⁷⁶ The subject was the hosting of the “Commemoration of the Landing of the Pilgrims in Maryland” at St. Mary’s, an event the Philodemic would host in May that year, its third such celebration since the first in 1842. The Commemoration of the Landing, which the Philodemic pioneered, functioned as a celebration of Maryland and Catholic-American history, in its memorialization of what the Philodemic termed “Civic & Religious Liberty,” referring to the policy of toleration that was fostered in the early years of the colony’s founding by Catholic refugees. The celebrations by the Philodemic walked a thin line; as much as they were intended to be particularly devoted to the Catholic experience, in their celebration of *Catholic* “Pilgrim Fathers” in Maryland, inviting

⁷⁵ “Shibboleth,” *The West Wing* (NBC, November 22, 2000).

⁷⁶ Daniel Foley to Rich H. Clarke et al., March 4, 1852; Daniel Foley to Richard H Clarke et al., March 20, 1852; Richard H. Clarke et al. to Daniel J. Foley, March 29, 1852, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

Catholic clergy and public dignitaries (indeed, the celebrations in 1849 and 1852 were timed to coincide with national Church councils held in Baltimore), they were also supposed to transcend Catholicism and serve as *American* events. This tension between the sectarian and universalist nature of the celebration was the source of the disagreement between the two societies. The Philodemic, consistent with its ethic of urging an ecumenical alliance between republican patriotism and Catholic pride, in 1852 and throughout the Pilgrim's Celebrations, advocated a policy of integrationist, open-handed Catholic patriotism, in contrast to the exclusivist position promoted by the Young Catholic Friend's Society of Baltimore. Throughout the antebellum period, the members of the Philodemic Society had to balance the line between proudly asserting their claims to Catholic heritage and identity, and finding the integrationist, patriotic American identity they so eagerly laid claim to. What had been, on the Society's founding in 1830, a more abstract, ideological wish of American-Catholic integration, became, with the rise of anti-Catholic nativism in the 1850s, an tangible political imperative, a shift reflected in the evolution of Philodemic debates and events like the Pilgrim's celebrations.

In 1842, at the urging of then Georgetown College President James Ryder, the Philodemic began its celebrations of the original Catholic pilgrims to Maryland, by choosing their initial landing point of St. Mary's City in southern Maryland. No small part of this choice had to do with a feeling of state pride and jealousy—a joint feeling of an underrated Catholic history in American retrospective and under-told Maryland history, in comparison with proud Northeastern states like Massachusetts or neighboring Virginia.⁷⁷ The orator the Philodemic

⁷⁷ Both Massachusetts and Virginia had originated their own “pilgrim's celebrations” of a similar public-political-religious nature, earlier in the century, see Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, p. 255. A study on urban life in the nineteenth century notes, “During the 1840s there was a ferocious competition for the prize of greatest ‘component’ part of American nationality.” Candidates for that honor made themselves known by celebrating, usually with a

elected for their first celebration in 1842, William George Read, a Philodemic member and himself the descendant of a Founding Father, said as much when he opened his lengthy address at St. Mary's in 1842 by asking,

But why are we so late in the proud ceremonial of this day? Why are we so far behind our brethren of Massachusetts, in testifying veneration for the founders of a time-honored community? Why is the rock of Plymouth classic ground... while Old St. Mary's and St. Inigo's, the primal seats of civil and religious liberty, known but to an occasional wanderer?⁷⁸

Many Philodemicians as Georgetown students in the antebellum period, were connected with old, famous Catholic families of the Chesapeake region—a time when, Georgetown historian Robert Emmet Curran tells us, “during the 1830-1850 period, one quarter of the Catholic students from Georgetown were from the old Families. These Brents, Brooks, Clarkes, Fenwicks, Kings, and Youngs, were, in effect, a roll call of colonial Maryland”⁷⁹ But the Pilgrims' celebrations were much more than an attempt to have St. Mary's replace Plymouth as the primary tourist site of American colonial history, or even in the highlights of school textbooks. It was, rather, in different variations over the course of the 1840s and 1850s, an attempt to rhetorically claim the birthright of Catholics in the new world and, furthermore, the distinctive, unique and integral role Catholics and only Catholics had played in promoting a key doctrine of the American republic.

convivial dinner, the anniversaries of St. Andrew, St. George, St. Nicholas, and even some Italian patron saints.” This too seems to have been an interesting ethno-religious-political overlap with the Philodemic's celebrations, see Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 85.

⁷⁸ William George Read, *Oration Delivered at the First Commemoration of the Landing of the Pilgrims of Maryland: Celebrated May 10th, 1842, under the Auspices of the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, by William George Read, a Member of the Society.* (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1842), p. 6.

⁷⁹ Robert Emmett Curran, *A History of Georgetown University: From Academy to University, 1789-1889*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010), p. 176.

Read's speech—like all the addresses delivered, printed, and published from the Pilgrim's Celebrations in 1849, 1852, and 1855—is lengthy, epideictic, and intensely exhortative. His primary goal was to reshape and re-center American history on a course which started from the establishment of a sanctuary of persecuted Catholics on the shores of the Potomac—a colony, that not unlike John Winthrop's "city on a hill," started off consciously and deliberately exceptional in its approach to "civil and religious liberty," as dedicated by Maryland's founding father, George Calvert.

More importantly, the gathering assembled that day at St. Mary's constituted the true legacy of Calvert and his associates—not just their literal, genealogical legacy, but their ideological commitment to religious liberty and perhaps their continuing communion with the faith of their ancestors. Surveying the landscape around him, Read noted,

"The huts of Yacomico are gone, with the gentle race that occupied them. But the soil is here enduring, we trust, as the everlasting hills: and there flows the river, in its tranquil course to merge with old Potomac, no unapt emblem of the peaceful generations that have passed from hence to the ocean of eternity. Have they passed, like those gliding waters, and left no trace behind? ... No, my friends, they have other prouder and more enduring monuments. These gorgeous banners, this bright array of happy faces, this wide spread and flourishing community are their monuments!—This equal friendly liberty, in which we have met without distinction of creed or party, to unite as one people to do honor to their memories, is their monument, may it be perpetual!"⁸⁰

Indeed, the Philodemic's pilgrimages to the spot of the "landing" at St. Mary's resembled religious pilgrimage, both explicitly and implicitly. Although each celebration differed slightly from the other, they generally consisted of a group of several hundred from Georgetown College charting a steamship from Washington to make the long journey down to St. Mary's, accompanied by prominent local Catholics of Maryland as well as prominent politicians and citizens from Washington and the region—and whenever the Philodemic could get them, a host

⁸⁰ Read, *Oration*, p. 6-7.

of significant Catholic prelates from across the country.⁸¹ Often, Catholic and civic societies of Baltimore would also charter their own steamships to meet Philodemic delegations. The delegations would stop at the Jesuit plantations at St. Inigoes, where an invited Bishop would celebrate Mass at the local church, before traveling onto the grounds of St. Mary's, where, joined by crowds of local citizens, the Philodemic's selected speaker would give a speech dedicated to the history of the Maryland pilgrims and their policy of religious liberty. In 1849 and 1852, the Pilgrim's Celebrations were specifically planned to coincide with the immediate aftermath of Catholic synods in Baltimore, the premier episcopal see and institutional center of the Catholic hierarchy in the United States.⁸² This probably had a double purpose—one of convenience, that it made travel easier for the Bishops and Archbishops from across the country to the celebration, and the other, symbolic, that the Pilgrim's Celebration was the secular-political joining together of Catholic America as much as the synods and councils were the institutional religious equivalent. In 1852, the first national synod of the American church, the Pilgrim's Celebration was able to secure the participation of a wide selection of the American hierarchy, including the Bishops or Archbishops of Boston, Natchez, St. Louis, Chicago, New York, and Richmond. Debates within the society often ensued on how many people should be included. One letter from two Philodemic alumni—John Carroll Brent and Richard H. Clarke—in 1852 urged the participation of women in the celebration, contending that “additional interest... will be given to the excursion by the presence of ladies,” a desire “expressed by a number of our most respectable

⁸¹ Again, much like the “pilgrim's celebration” of 1807 in Virginia which saw the attendants journey to the ruins of Jamestown and then to the graves of the first settlers, Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 268. For the metaphorical resonance of the graves of founders, see Read, *Oration*, 5: “that sublime and universal instinct, which prompts mankind, in every variety of their mortal condition, to resort to the graves of the great and good, and the scenes of their earthly probation and achievements...”

⁸² In 1849, the 7th regional council, in 1852, the first national council.

citizens.” Brent and Clarke urged, “in according the privilege, the Society will alike consult two important things, gallantry and interest.”⁸³

A high premium was put on the attendance of Maryland elected officials, regardless of their denomination—indeed, in some cases, to deepen the aspect of it being as much an event of national history and pride, rather merely of Catholic or state value. At the inaugural celebration, the Philodemic made sure to invite Roger Taney, the first Catholic Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and a prominent example of a Catholic-American in public life whom the Philodemicians aspired to be.⁸⁴ In 1841, as the Philodemic planned its first celebration, the Society’s founder Father James Ryder urged them to elect “a Catholic and prominent man” to give the central address.⁸⁵ In fact, the first orator selected for the 1842 celebration was William Gaston, Georgetown College’s first student and a prominent North Carolinian politician and judge. It had been Gaston who, as a congressman from North Carolina, had helped secure a federal charter for Georgetown in 1815 against the anti-Catholic biases of some Congressmen.⁸⁶ Gaston, who declined the speaking position on the basis of his age and his belief that a Maryland citizen should be the one to give the oration, noted that “as a Catholic” he was proud “of the heroism of that noble band, who, adhering with inflexible fidelity to the sacred faith once delivered to the Saints” preferred “exile, privation, danger, and death to a hypocritical profession of conformity to the Church by law established.” But “as an American citizen,” he could “never cease to be grateful to the glorious precedent” that “an undoubting conviction of the truth of one’s own

⁸³ Richard H. Clarke and John Carroll Brent to Daniel Lynch, April 21, 1852, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

⁸⁴ William George Read to W. M. Bradford, April 1, 1842, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 2, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

⁸⁵ “Amanuensis Book, October 1, 1837 – November 26, 1848” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 2, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives, entry for July 26, 1841.

⁸⁶ Curran, *From Academy to University*, pp. 81-82.

Religion is perfectly compatible with tenderness for the right of conscience in others.”⁸⁷ William Gaston, the exemplary Georgetown graduate, uniting Catholic fidelity and participation in American public life, found two reasons for pride at the pilgrim’s celebration—unbowed Catholic perseverance, and a positive legacy on the American political system.

But it wasn’t just Catholics the Philodemic wanted at their celebrations—President John Tyler was also invited in 1842, as well as other members of the cabinet—paralleling the practice, mentioned before, of Georgetown College’s Commencements which mixed federal politicians with local Catholic clergy.⁸⁸ As much as Philodemicians wanted it to be specifically Catholic pilgrims who were celebrated at St. Mary’s, they wanted an ecumenical audience there to help them celebrate. This is where, in 1852, a disagreement between the Young Catholics Friends Society of Baltimore and the Philodemic appeared, despite the existence of a number of Philodemic alumni who were now members and in the leadership of the YCF Society. It seems that despite the long-term plans of the Philodemic after 1849 to celebrate the next Pilgrim’s Celebration in 1852, the YCF Society wanted to move forward with their own plans for a celebration that year, co-hosted with the Philodemic. Their proposed celebration would have been an exclusively Catholic event and focused on the religious import of the Landing. After some miscommunication that involved letters conveyed between the President of Georgetown College, and a refusal to co-host by the Philodemic which prompted a huffy refusal to attend the celebration on the part of the YCFers, the Philodemic shot back, revealing the principal purpose of their celebration, a letter whose contents are groundbreaking enough to be quoted at length:

⁸⁷ William Gaston to James Ryder, November 24, 1841, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 3, Folder 9, Georgetown University Archives.

⁸⁸ John Tyler to Joseph Johnson, May 1, 1842, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 2, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives. At the 1857 College Commencement, for instance, the President attended, along with the Secretaries of the Treasury, Interior, and the Attorney-General. See Commencement Files, Box 1, Folder 46, Georgetown University Archives.

[W]e would have supposed [your celebration] to be a distinct & exclusive affair of [?] as it seem to be professedly a religious and ~~exclusive~~ [sic] catholic celebration and not intended in the spirit of the Pilgrim Fathers, for all the friends of liberty, of whatever creed. The Philodemic Society could not become a party to such a celebration, for a majority of its members are not Catholics and courtesy to those Protestant gentlemen who have so kindly granted the use of their grounds to the celebration,⁸⁹ would forbid such illiberality... The Philodemic Society claims no exclusive right to celebrate the Landing of the Pilgrims, on the contrary we have always been happy to welcome such other bodies as desired to participate in it. In this spirit we have invited the Govr [sic] and General Assembly of Maryland, the Corporation of Baltimore, the Maryland Historical Society, the Calvert Beneficial Society, and others as well as the Young Catholics Friends Society to join in the celebration and all except yourselves have promptly accepted the invitation... The Rev'd Pres't of the College claims no authority to compromise the rights of the Philodemic Society-and if he possessed such authority, he does not consider the correspondence alluded to in your letter as giving even a color to the position you assumed... He now acquiesces in the decision of the Society that the celebration shall not be exclusively Catholic, because if the actions of the Pilgrims are [sic] worthy of celebration they are equally worthy of imitation.⁹⁰

What is so remarkable about this letter is the Philodemic's rejection of the legitimacy of an exclusively Catholic celebration of the founding. Three reasons are given but the primary one, of the received "spirit of the Pilgrim Fathers, for all the friends of liberty, of whatever creed," showed that members of the Philodemic had received the legacy of early Catholic settlement in America as distinctly ecumenical; defined more by its associations with religious liberty than with its own religious character, a remarkable statement for its time. Even though a majority of Philodemic members were non-Catholic, it still maintained a special interest in celebrating a festival devoted to Catholic pilgrims. As mentioned before, the Young Catholics Friends Society of Baltimore comprised members who were alumni of Georgetown and the Philodemic. The YCF Society was one of several religiously oriented societies of the Baltimore-Washington region that appear among the lists of invitees to Pilgrim's celebrations. Given this shared membership, geographic location, and inherited cultural history in Maryland, it is worth asking

⁸⁹ The Philodemic used the grounds of an Episcopal church in St. Mary's.

⁹⁰ Richard H. Clarke et al., "Letter to Daniel J. Foley, Esq & Others, Committee of the Young Catholics Friend Society," March 29, 1852.

why the Philodemic marked itself out as so signally committed to an interfaith, ecumenical celebration at St. Mary's.

The answer lies in the Philodemic's early commitment to an early kind of political liberty, inflected in their status as publicly-oriented Catholics in America. Georgetown, despite some imprecise intentions at its founding, was never a serious school for the training of priests, and many more Philodemic alumni went into the legal profession, local, state, or federal politics, than joined the priesthood or academia, if we inspect its membership roles from the mid nineteenth century. For such Catholics, committed to a public life in the capital or in their home states, many of whom came from more assimilated Catholic communities rather than more recent immigrant communities like Irish-Americans, a more natural sentiment to preach at St. Mary's may have been that of integration, rather than an exclusivist pride.

But certainly, it seemed, the celebrations of the Landing of the Pilgrims could occur in the antebellum period for vastly different motivations on behalf of the Catholic community at Georgetown and regionally. Whereas the original celebration in 1842 could be regarded as a "coming-out" party for both the Philodemic Society and Catholic-Americans in public life more broadly, the fourth event in 1855 was more sharply a reactive event, consciously conducted against the backdrop of rising anti-Catholic animus in the United States. The growth of the Know Nothing Party and associated nativist, anti-immigrant tensions in country had put Catholic-Americans—never a group completely accepted in American life—in a more persecuted and potentially "dangerous" position than ever before, or at least any time subsequent to the American Revolution. This explains the flood of letters received by alumni and invited guests to the 1855 celebration who wrote encouragingly of the Pilgrim's Celebration as a timely,

necessary, and vital event in the life of the country as a whole: specifically for Catholics, but for the cause of an wider, national, American liberty as well.

The first celebration of 1842 was predominantly upbeat and optimistic, focused as much on rewriting history from a positive standpoint and taking away the unjust laurels of Massachusetts and Virginia to colonial pride, as it was in combating serious anti-Catholic prejudice. The 1842 orator, William George Read, spent much of his time giving a long biography of George Calvert, Maryland's Catholic founder, and bemoaning the unfair credit given to the other two states for their overestimated civic and political policies, and especially their relations with Native Americans. He spoke continually of the "Maryland Pilgrims" without stressing the title of "Catholic Pilgrims," the appellation that later Philodemic orators would tend to give to the celebrated refugees. The closest Read came to a remark of any serious division between his multi-denominational audience was to ask,

will my separated brethren blame me, if I say, even in the presence of this vast composite assembly,—in which I would not willingly offend the feelings of a single individual—that these just and gentle planters did well to name their virgin settlement from the spotless mother of the 'Prince of Peace?'⁹¹

At the conclusion of the celebration, George Washington Parke Custis, the famous stepson of George Washington and a frequent attendee of Philodemic events (though a Protestant himself), stepped up to the podium to recite a commemorative ode he had composed for the occasion, where he was joined with one of the Georgetown Jesuits, along with the granddaughter of Charles Carroll, the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence. Such a moment of ecumenical American unity at a Catholic-inspired event, Custis would later note, set the tone for an exceptional moment in American political life.⁹²

⁹¹ Read, *Oration*, 23.

⁹² *Ibid*, 38.

The same was true of the 1849 celebration, where the first Catholic chaplain to the U.S. Senate, C. C. Pise S.J., gave a prayer, and a Protestant speaker, Z. Collins Lee, gave the Philodemic oration. Pise's prayer—markedly patriotic—was the type to rebut the anti-Catholic slurs of the age—as he prayed gratitude to God “for all the blessing since showered upon our beloved country; for having raised up a Washington in the day of her need” and asked further prayers “for the President of the Republic, the unconquered Hero of many battles... for the Army... for the Navy.”⁹³ Lee's speech, just like Read's seven years prior, waxed lyrical in its emphasis that it was the Catholic pilgrims, not those of Massachusetts or Virginia, who were “entitled to the honour of having promulgated *first* in America one of the most vital privileges embraced in [the Constitution's] letter and spirit—the liberty of the human conscience.”⁹⁴

This contention represented a shift in Philodemic oratory from broadly declaring primacy in the history of religious liberty in the country, to asserting a definite claim that the ideology and practice of the Catholic pilgrims was instrumental in shaping the constitutional framework of the United States. On the cover of the printed oration by Joseph R. Chandler, the 1855 speaker, were two epigraphic quotes embodying religious liberty: one, the original oath of office of the colonial governor of Maryland, the other, an excerpt from the Constitution's prohibition of religious tests for office.⁹⁵ This small detail on the printed oration's frontispiece indicates the changing winds of public sentiment in the country that made the 1855 event so different from those prior.

⁹³ Z Collins Lee, *Oration Delivered at the Second Commemoration of the Landing of the Pilgrims of Maryland, Celebrated May 15, 1849, under the Auspices of the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College by Z. Collins Lee, a Member of the Society* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co, 1849), pp. 12-13.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 32.

⁹⁵ Joseph R. Chandler, *An Oration Delivered at the Fourth Commemoration of the Landing of the Pilgrims of Maryland, Celebrated May 15, 1855, under the Auspices of the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, by Hon. Joseph R. Chandler, a Member of the Society*. (Philadelphia: J.B. Chandler, 1855).

The trends of European, especially Irish and German, immigration to the U.S., rising in the 1840s and 1850s, had produced a forceful political reaction across the country of mixed anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, nativist sentiments, reaching their height in the middle of this decade with the establishment and success of the Native American, or “Know-Nothing” Party. The impact of this political trend was deeply palpable both in the 1855 event and the reaction it received from the local community. In inviting Chandler to serve as orator—an invitation, moreover, they tendered weeks following a speech he gave in the House of Representatives, defending Catholics from charges of disloyalty and infidelity—the Philodemic made special reference that it had invited him “particularly at this eventful period, when folly and religious bigotry seem to have usurped the places of reason and truth.”⁹⁶ They asked him to help

To place before the country with renewed lustre and force the glorious fact that the Catholic founders of that good old state first proclaimed on the banks of St. Mary’s the testimonial blessing of civil and religious... that that sect which is now so vilified and calumniated, as opp[os]ed to republican institutions, an enemy of religious toleration, was the first in America to proclaim these salutary doctrines.⁹⁷

The letters that poured into the Philodemic’s mailbox in advance of Chandler’s speech make it clear how Philodemic alumni and Catholic citizens saw now a special need to proclaim, publicly the alliance of Catholic and American values and history. The threat of nativists like the Know-Nothings was intimately felt, in the accessibility of anti-Catholic orators and politicians who expressed such sentiments in the public arena. One letter from a Philodemic alumnus then at Harvard University, hoped that the 1855 celebration would “tend to efface from the public mind, the shallow pretexts which are used to subserve the interests of those, who earn their daily bread,

⁹⁶ Julia A. King, *Archaeology, Narrative, and the Politics of the Past: The View from Southern Maryland* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2012), p. 78.

⁹⁷ Robert C. Combs to J. R. Chandler, February 1, 1855, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives.

and make their living, by arraying against our another, sectarian influences, and encouraging religious persecution.”⁹⁸

One particularly expressive and eloquent letter from an invited alumnus named John Jackson, is in tune with many of the letters received by the Society in the lead-up to the 1855 celebration. Jackson assured the Society that

The announcement of your patriotic purpose will be cordially responded to by every Philodemician throughout the Union... At no previous period since the American Revolution did the signs of the times so loudly call for a commemoration of the Landing of the Maryland Pilgrims, as at this time. For, when Civil and Religious liberty are seriously threatened by the united efforts of fanaticisms & bigotry it is surely our duty to remind the country of the persons from whom and the circumstances under which we obtained those priceless blessings. And, as Lord Baltimore and his pilgrim colonials brought with them the sacred germs of that only rational and just liberty now universally acknowledge in this country, let it be known and well known throughout the land that bigotry may be silenced and fanaticism weakened in the exposure and condemnation of its ally...

As Philodemic, let us form a body guard around Liberty – political, civil and religious – let us maintain the Constitutions, state & federal and, whatever whenever & by whomsoever the issue is made let us hold that [?] for their religious sentiments are accountable to God, and to God only.⁹⁹

Philodemic and its pilgrim celebrations were “body guard[s] around Liberty,” promoting a celebration whose purpose was predominantly patriotic and political, not religious, historical, or communal.

Many similar sentiments to those of John Jackson’s are expressed in the letters the Philodemic received at the time, though suggestions by friends and alumni of the society offered different solutions. The Philodemic’s founder and a two-time President of Georgetown College, Fr. James Ryder S.J., for instance, in a strange echo of 1852, wrote in suggesting that the Philodemic invite *more* local Catholic societies, that

⁹⁸ Eugene Longuemare to Harvey Bawtree, Robert Combs, and Scott Smith, March 19, 1855, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives.

⁹⁹ John Jackson to Harvey Bawtree, May 6, 1855, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives.

in order to render the celebration more thoroughly catholic, you ought to address the various catholic societies throughout the country requesting them to send at least a deputation to the celebration and thus prove to the anticatholic [sic] bigot who effects to doubt our American spirit, that as catholics we cherish the memory, admire the virtues, should perpetuate the example of the glorious founders of Maryland, the pioneers & champions of Civil Religious liberty on our shores. I trust you will meet with cordial response from the whole country, and thus secure additional honor to your already distinguished Society.¹⁰⁰

The tensions between more and less Catholicity (and the consequences of the increased or decreased numbers of Catholic participants on this Catholicity), we can see, were endemic throughout this period, and took special form when the Philodemic was responded to the threats perceived from Catholic bigotry by Philodemicians.

It is worth remembering, however, that the rhetoric surrounding these celebrations was always flexible. Take as a case study, the invitations issued by the Philodemic Society to various potential guests, which differed widely based on who they were. In an invitation, sent to a local literary society in Washington, the Jeffersonian Lyceum, whom the Philodemic often collaborated with, a Philodemic committee asked them “to unite with the Philodemic in commemorating the excellent virtues of the noble and patriotic men who pledged their lives & fortunes in defence of Civil & Freedom in America.”¹⁰¹ By contrast, a letter to the Archbishop of Baltimore, Francis Kenrick, inviting him to attend on conclusion of the national council that year, wrote,

The Chief Pastors of the American Catholic Church can not but feel a deep interest in seeing commemorated the Christian charities and Religion, as well as Civil Toleration of the Catholic Pilgrims, who were the Founders of that State which is deservedly called the cradle of Catholicity in America.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ James Ryder to Robert C. Combs, February 7, 1855, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives.

¹⁰¹ Committee of Correspondence of the Philodemic Society to The Jeffersonian Lyceum, April 22, 1852, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

¹⁰² Philodemic Society to Francis Kenrick, n.d., Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

The Philodemic's different framings of their celebrations are no surprise, especially in their attempts to secure as many notable guests as possible. But the extreme flexibility of the meanings of the events is notable—ranging from no emphasis on Catholic identity to a central emphasis on the religious meaning of the event—especially in such a tumultuous decade for the American Catholic community.

Chandler's speech at St. Mary's was more strident than those of previous years. Proudly noting that "every day brings to our coast more than a thousand European emigrants, who are crowding out cities, peopling our plains, felling our forests, swelling our commerce and augmenting our national resources and national importance" he boldly claimed that future generations "would commemorate the benefits which they have derived from these [emigrant] ancestors" in the same way that Philodemicians were commemorating their Catholic forefathers.¹⁰³ More assertively Catholic, he denied "that there is aught of political intolerance in the creed of the Catholic church," claiming that the responsibility for intolerance is "the political man, and the religious creed." Yet Chandler then turned around, somewhat hypocritically, and contended that one should judge the American colonies' tradition of tolerance by "the effect of the divers creeds upon the different colonies" not just elevating the Catholic tradition but condemning the Protestant tradition of intolerance in the U.S.¹⁰⁴ And by contrast at this celebration, the presence of non-Catholics in the celebration came off more as a pleasant afterthought, rather than as something to be deeply proud of:

Eminently appropriate, also, is the presence of those of various creeds in this celebration, which... is intended as a commemoration of social and political which are universal in their character, and may be and have been, practiced by men of all creeds. God forbid

¹⁰³ Chandler, *Oration*, 22.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 37-38.

that in celebrating the beautiful example of Christian virtues of those who are of our own faith, we should do injustice to the merits of those who profess a different faith.¹⁰⁵

Today's circumstances, Chandler noted, supply "the opportunity and the means for a deserved and triumphant vindication. *Not for the triumph, but for the vindication* [emphasis original]."¹⁰⁶

Ultimately, Chandler would be proved right, as the electoral successes of the Know Nothings in the late 1850s gave way to electoral ineffectiveness, and the outbreak of the Civil War tended to draw attention away from the nativist rush of previous decade.¹⁰⁷ Despite the focus in the Pilgrim's orations, the Philodemic actually addressed intolerance and the larger issues of divisive Catholic identity in relatively few debates and speeches during the antebellum period. On the issues of nativism, anti-Catholicism, or tolerance, only nine debates can be found of the over 1200 debated in the years 1830 – 1875, eight of which were debated in the years 1854 – 1858 [See Appendix, Table F]. Several, like "Is the existence of Secret Societies in this country dangerous to its liberties?" (June 25, 1854, Affirmed 18-3) and "Are the Know Nothings dangerous to the Country?" (October 15, 1854, Affirmed 8-1) are fairly straightforward responses to the nativist crisis and reveal unsurprisingly overwhelming anti-Nativist positions. But an interesting coda follows in four debates in 1854, 1856, 1858, and 1873, which tackle the issue of toleration for the emerging sect of Mormonism. In three out of four cases, the Philodemic strongly voted to that the United States should suppress, or not tolerate, the Mormon faith, even in the years in which they were loudly trumpeting their proud memorialization of their commitment to "civic and religious liberty." What can explain this contradictory, seemingly hypocritical position? One of the four debates was even phrased with this contradiction, asking

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 55.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 43.

¹⁰⁷ Maura Jane Farrelly, *Anti-Catholicism in America, 1620-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 182.

“The Constitution promises civil and religious liberty to every citizen of these United States; should then Mormonism be tolerated?” (October 26, 1855, Negated 3-8).

This was a topic debated by a number of other American college debate societies in the 1840s and 1850s, often with the same phrasing and concern they gave to Catholic toleration in the United States.¹⁰⁸ The irony of a Catholic debating society taking all of the intolerance heaped upon non-Protestant sects, and preserving its force even as it eliminated the anti-Catholic animus, cannot be understated. And this in the midst of this decade when they propounded so strongly the ideology of religious freedom! One 1852 Philodemic commencement address, entitled “Socialism in America” which described a mishmash of contemporary radical and reformist movements under the heading of “Socialism” gives one clue as to this course of action, in assigning Mormons the socialist label. The alumni speaker, Richard H. Clarke, decried the Mormons for supposedly abolishing marriage and neglecting to observe the laws of the states in which they reside. His fanciful connection of Mormons to émigré French radicals is an exemplary piece of political insinuation:

It is quite a curious fact that the colony of about four hundred French socialists, to whom I have already alluded, should have planted themselves in the very spot where communism had so flourished under the Mormons. They have been observed by travellers among the ruins of the once magnificent Mormon temple, no doubt talking of beautiful France, the last coup d'état of Louis Napoleon, or harranging [sic] about ‘*liberty, fraternity, and equality*.’¹⁰⁹

In one respect, it seems, Philodemicians were able to treat the Mormons more as a political sect than as a religious group, allowing them to condemn their departures from traditional American patriotism and observance of law and custom. This, ironically, was not unlike much of the anti-Catholic bias of the decade, the loudest advocates of which, including the Know Nothings, often

¹⁰⁸ Harding, *College Literary Societies*, p. 197; Potter, “The Literary Society,” p. 253.

¹⁰⁹ Richard H. Clarke, ‘*Socialism in America.*’ *An Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society, Georgetown College, D.C., at the Annual Commencement Held July 20, 1852, by Richard H. Clarke, A.M., of Washington City* (Washington: Jno T. Towers, 1852), p. 29.

tried to proclaim “their indifference to Catholicism as a religious creed” and only to its “political” features and influences.¹¹⁰ Another piece of irony abounds. Clarke’s speech, a speech of a Catholic literary society devoted to civic and religious liberty decrying the Mormon sect, was set and produced by a major local printer named John Towers, who had printed several Philodemic addresses in the past. Towers would be elected mayor of Washington D.C. in 1854 on a Know Nothing ticket, though he—like so many of other elected Know Nothings—would achieve little of substance in the field of religious tolerance.¹¹¹

But even if the Know Nothings appeared relatively rarely in Philodemic speeches and debates, one of the issues they championed—immigration and naturalization—was a frequent topic for Philodemic, with twenty one debates in the years 1830 – 1875 [See Appendix, Table E]. The Society seemed especially torn between the positive benefits and drawbacks of immigration, and whether or not to adjust naturalization laws, rendering, in 17 debates with clear sides, nine pro-immigration decisions and eight decisions of the contrary opinion. These debates tended to have closer results, and could often be re-debated soon after conclusion—the question “Should immigration to the U.S. be encouraged?” was debated twice in 1845, once on March 27, and again on April 27, the first time negating 7-8, the second, affirming 8-6. But interestingly, the Philodemic neglected to debate one of the primary issues of Catholic-Protestant division in the 1840s and 1850s—public education policy—or even to address the topic in any extant speeches.

As much as I examined what changed in the rhetoric of pilgrim’s celebrations over the two decades prior to the Civil War, one consistent note is worth mentioning in connection with the Catholic focus of the celebrations. An aspect of Catholic colonization of Maryland that Read,

¹¹⁰ Thomas J. Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), p. 67.

¹¹¹ William W. Warner, *At Peace with All Their Neighbors: Catholics and Catholicism in the National Capital 1787-1860* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994), p. 216.

Lee, and Chandler all highlighted at length was the treatment of Native Americans by the Catholic settlers. These examples were both used as one more comparison to the detriment of Massachusetts and Virginia, as well as for their own sake. For Read, the success of Catholic-Native relations was due to both the political and religious values of the early Marylanders, noting, “While the brethren of New England went armed to the cornfield... the pilgrim of Maryland and the Indian were sitting in peace together, at the feet of Jesus.”¹¹² Read goes as far as to claim that “had [Jesuit] principles [toward Natives] obtained more extensively in British America... the wretched aborigines would not have been annihilated.”¹¹³ Chandler’s emphasis is more theological in tone, emphasizing that in contrast with other early colonists, “the plan adopted by the Catholic Pilgrims of Maryland, who acknowledged the poor Indian to be the proprietor of the soil, and recognized in him the form of the Creator, and the object of the sacrifice and redemption of the Savior.”¹¹⁴

Indian relations form an interesting coda of these speeches, in that they correlate with a larger focus of the society on the fate of Native Americans by Philodemicians in the antebellum period [See Appendix, Table A]. The Society debated Indian issues seventeen times in the years between its founding and the 1875, almost exclusively in three main formats: comparing their fate to that of African-Americans, debating their contemporary treatment, and debating their right to the land. Some resolutions, such as “Were the Americans justifiable in employing bloodhounds against the Indians?” (November 6, 1840, Negated 6-10), referring to contemporary practices in the Seminole War, seem deeply unsympathetic, while others, like “Whether or not Florida should be given to the Indians?” (January 12, 1840, Negated 2-10) and “Whether the

¹¹² Read, *Oration*, p. 24

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 27.

¹¹⁴ Chandler, *Oration*, 29.

Indian or the African has received more injuries from the hand of man?" (April 13, 1851, Affirmed 12-7), seem, if paternalistic, at least advanced for their time. Indeed, the Philodemic was consistently pro-Indian in the antebellum period, rendering pro-Indian decision in twelve out of fifteen debates in which a there were clear pro- and anti-Indian sides to the debate, and votes were recorded.

The contrast between the treatment of Native Americans and African Americans is deeply informing, as in every case when the Society debated who was more deserving of pity or good treatment, black Americans were defeated. The overall racism of the Society may have had something to do with this. Two particular execrable debates from 1856 and 1857, "Which is the better material for constructing breast-works and fortifications, niggers' heads or cotton bales?" and "Which is harder, a negroe's head or a brick-bat?" both of which were probably intended as primarily humorous debates, render clear the Society's callous attitude toward the African-American minority in the country. These two debates came at a time of increasingly vocalized racism in nearby Maryland amidst the rise in national tensions, when proslavery advocates ramped up their rhetoric and even antislavery voices tended to increase racism to increase the perceived merit of their arguments.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, the positive treatment of Native Americans cannot be said to only arise from antipathy to blacks, not when the Society repeatedly condemned the confiscation of Indian lands by European colonists, and even, on December 18, 1866, went so far as to affirm to resolution, "Which is the nobler, the Indian or the Whiteman?" So why did the Philodemicians consistently take this stance, which involved often condemning U.S. treatment of Native Americans, both past and present? Historical memory seems to offer the best answers.

¹¹⁵ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 38, 90.

The orators of the pilgrim's celebrations were not the only ones to highlight the past treatment of Native Americans by Maryland colonists. Roger Taney, the Catholic Supreme Court Chief Justice and a man not known to history for his enlightened racial views, in responding to the Philodemic's invitation to a pilgrim's celebration, wrote that the pilgrims'

descendants can look back with pleasure upon the just & humane policy pursued in relation to the native Indians; & upon the early legislation of the colony, imbued strongly with the principles of liberty, and marked by a spirit of justice and toleration in matters of religion, very far in advance of the age in which they lived.¹¹⁶

The Philodemic's historical memory seems to have been more than a mere rhetorical tactic, but was rather a real, living sense of inheritance. If Maryland history did not offer much for the Philodemicians to claim as their birthright—at least not on par with the revolutionary heroes of Massachusetts or Virginia, or even the political history of Pennsylvania—they could claim two distinctive histories. One was their founding tenet of religious liberty; the other was a (comparatively) benign treatment of Native Americans. In the Philodemic Archives are preserved two cloth badges from the 1849 celebration. A shield topped by a cross and surrounded by the motto of the celebration forms the design. The motto, “The Glory Of Children Are Their Fathers. Prov. XVII,” captures well the ritual of genealogical inheritance that the Philodemic pursued at their pilgrim's celebrations in the 1840s and 1850s.¹¹⁷

But overt Catholic identity for the Society extended far beyond the pilgrim's celebrations and debates over other marginal groups like Native Americans and Mormons. Catholic identity became an inter-literary society issue in a brief episode recorded in the letters preserved in the Philodemic archives. A proposal was made by students at Pennsylvania College (now Gettysburg College) and Shelby College (Kentucky), to form an association of literary societies, a “Philo

¹¹⁶ Roger Taney to George Columbus Morgan, May 9, 1842, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 2, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

¹¹⁷ Cloth badge, May 15, 1849, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 3, Folder 16, Georgetown University Archives.

Union” for the prefix these societies shared in common.¹¹⁸ The Philodemic, along with a number of other peers, was invited to join. But the only other society from a Catholic school invited, the Philomathian Society of St. Mary’s College, put off responding to such an offer before soliciting the advice of the Philodemic Society, writing

as we, being the only Catholic Societies on the list, would, in case of the proposed confederation, have a peculiar bond uniting us. The principal features of the Association, are, in all probability well known to you, and it, therefore, only remains for me to state that, while we suspect the union of having a radical tendency, we still deem it advisable to unite, even if it were only as drawback in case of any dangerous proceedings.¹¹⁹

The Philodemic eventually replied saying that they could not make such a decision until their next grand annual meeting, and as such were declining the offer for the meantime.¹²⁰ But this exchange comes as another distinctive part of societal identity whereby even the decision to join an inter-state, inter-university association of literary societies was tinged with the danger of religious intolerance. This perhaps speaks more to the heightened religious rhetoric of the 1850s, but it is interesting to note that even despite their claims to an ecumenical bond uniting Philodemicians around the cause for “liberty,” a separate “peculiar bond” united Catholic debating societies against others with the same cause.

A major historian of college literary societies, Thomas Harding, speaks of the spread, rise, and decline of such groups as a form of what anthropologists or sociologists would call “cultural diffusion” as students at different schools throughout the country quickly picked up on the form of organization and created a common form of society, which, despite minor variations

¹¹⁸ Corresponding Secretary of Philo Soc. of Pennsylvania College, Gettysburg to Gentlemen of the Philodemic Society, July 23, 1852, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

¹¹⁹ John T. Knight to Philodemic Society, October 8, 1852, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives.

¹²⁰ T. J. Semmes to Philo Soc of Penna College, October 20, 1852, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives.

from institution to institution, were alike in so many ways.¹²¹ The Philodemic participated in its own form of cultural diffusion on a minor scale; other literary societies at Catholic schools in the area like Mount St. Mary's college picked up the tradition of celebrating the celebration of the Maryland Pilgrims (even if they did so locally, as opposed to at the site of the pilgrim's landing). In 1855, moreover, students at St. Vincent's College in Pennsylvania wrote to the Georgetown Prefect of Studies, asking for copies of rules by which the literary societies at Georgetown were governed, so that students at that Benedictine college could form a literary society according to the same model.¹²²

Catholic identity may not have been the preeminent focus of the Philodemic Society in the antebellum period, but it was nonetheless an important part of its historical ideology and political positions as the Pilgrim's Celebrations of the 1840s and 1850s make clear. 1855 would prove to be the last time the Philodemic Society was able to celebrate the pilgrims at St. Mary's. This occurred for a number of reasons. First, a number of local Maryland Catholic societies like the Young Catholics Friends Society chose to prefer commemorating the event at home in Baltimore, rather than making the lengthy and expensive trip down to St. Mary's.¹²³ When the Philodemic contemplated celebrating the pilgrim's landing in the late 1850s, it commissioned a committee to look into the matter, which recommended that future celebrations take place at the College instead of at St. Mary's. The report noted that the celebrations in recent years had produced a "moral effect" which had been primarily "transitory and local," as that the Philodemic should wait "until the People of the State of Maryland as a matter of State Pride

¹²¹ Harding, *College Literary Societies*, p. 315.

¹²² M. A. Scanlon to Prefect of Studies, October 2, 1855, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives.

¹²³ Alex J. Brand, Benedict Gough, and Bernard Cassidy to Philodemic Society, November 7, 1858, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 3, Georgetown University Archives.

undertake to commemorate this great event in her history, without distinction of Sect or Party...”¹²⁴ The outbreak of the Civil War put a dampener on any further celebration of the pilgrims, whether at St. Mary’s or on campus, but even as late as 1869, Philodemic minutes still show discussions of possible future commemorations.¹²⁵

A letter the Philodemic received in the fall of 1855 captured what the Society had hoped to achieve in its expressions of religious liberty in that decade. A Louisianan, C. E. Greneaux, having been elected an honorary member of the Society, wrote,

I have always admired the efforts of any society whose object is the diffusion of useful knowledge; for this tends to melt away the clouds of ignorance and fanaticism, which in every country, envelop the masses, and render them liable to be led astray, and, in their delusion, attach themselves to every new creed—no matter how innocuous may be the principles which it advocates. The aim of your society is in that direction, and ought, therefore, to enlist the warmest sympathies of every man who is a true lover of his country. Your society is a people-loving association as its name denotes, and, true to its professions, it has even been found among the foremost of those who advocate equal rights to every citizen of every creed and every clime. The praiseworthy ambition of the Philodemic Society to celebrate the important event in our national history, when the banner of civil and religious liberty was first unfurled upon the western continent, shows that there are still hearts in the land which keep alive that spirit which one actuated the Pilgrim fathers for the preservation of the sacred rights granted to us by our Constitution.¹²⁶

Although it only conducted four excursions to St. Mary’s, the Philodemic Society had carved out for itself a distinctive identity as the ideological descendants of the Catholic pilgrims of the seventeenth century, establishing a distinctive form of historical memory that acted as a “body guard for liberty” against the anti-Catholic bigotry of the 1850s. As the Civil War put an end to

¹²⁴ John Carroll Brent, Jno C. C. Hamilton, and J. Andrew Wise, “Report of the Committee in Relation to the Celebration of the Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers of Maryland” October 27, 1859, Georgetown University Archives.

¹²⁵ “Amanuensis Book, October 7, 1866-June 16, 1872” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 6, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives, entries for January 24, 1869, and October 10, 1869.

¹²⁶ C. E. Greneaux to Henry Bowling, November 26, 1855, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives.

the worst excesses of nativist intolerance, the Philodemic moved on to new considerations of liberty and freedom, connected with the national divide of slavery and union.

Chapter 4:

“We may not with impunity turn our eyes from the past” – War, Reunion, Reconciliation

When the Jesuit presidents of Georgetown College and the College’s Philodemic Society, sent out an invitation in April 1867 to Georgetown and Philodemic alumni for a “grand Reunion” and “Celebration Festival” of the Society to be held that June, they made no explicit mention of any ideological purpose of the coming event. Only “wishing to renew the ties of association which once bound to the College and the Society their many children now scattered throughout the land,”¹²⁷ they sent out invitations to Philodemic alumni across the United States and as far away as Peru, where an American Georgetown alumnus—a U.S. Diplomat named Henry M. Brent—was able to share it with his old classmate and (presumably) the only other Philodemic alumnus in the country, the Peruvian civil servant (later Ambassador to the U.S.) Felix Cipriano Zegarra.¹²⁸ But the timing of such a reunion was not coincidental.

In the spring of 1867, the country was only just beginning to pull itself back together after a tumultuous and destructive civil war, and many of Georgetown’s alumni—a strong majority of whom had fought for the South—had indeed found themselves scattered across the country.¹²⁹ Georgetown College in particular had been heavily affected by the war, when its enrollment had fallen to historic lows, and much of the main campus had been converted to military quartering for Union troops. Politically, too, the Hilltop’s strongly pro-Southern Jesuits professors and students had been forced into an artificial political silence by the war’s political ramifications, with Georgetown only miles from the Union capital, and scarcely a day’s journey

¹²⁷ B. A. Maguire S.J. and James Clark S.J., Circular Letter, April 10, 1867, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 6, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

¹²⁸ F. C. C. Zegarra to Secretary of the Philodemic Society, June 14, 1867, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 6, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

¹²⁹ Curran, *From Academy to University*, p. 238.

from not just Confederate territory, but key battles of the war. Throughout the war, Jesuits on campus tried to tamp down on student—and their own—Southern and Confederate sympathies, especially with the nearby presence of Union soldiers, and the easy prospect that the college’s ongoing operation could be affected by potential antipathy of the federal government.¹³⁰ This attitude seems to have been reflected in the debating topics of the Philodemic Society, which despite the tumult and controversy of the war, eschewed political or even semi-political questions during the ongoing conflict’s tenure.

Whereas during the war, the Society followed a policy of “escapist” topics (whether voluntarily or by preemptive self-censorship), unrelated to the war being waged around the College, in the years following the conflict, its debate topics betrayed a specific interest in questions of law and order, in ways that could occasionally touch on the still sensitive issues of the war. Moreover, in its larger celebrations and “Grand Reunions” (conducted in 1867, 1871, and 1874), it pursued a rhetoric of reunion and reconciliation between members of all sections and former loyalty. This rhetoric—striking in its call to dismiss, forget, and go beyond the division and destruction of war, using oratory and a common Alma Mater as a shared common ground—was an early form of the “reconciliationist” rhetoric that historians have elsewhere suggested only emerged on the national stage in the late 1870s and 1880s.¹³¹

Georgetown started off the postwar period much the worse for wear, but in substantially better condition than many colleges just miles to the south. In the months after Lincoln’s election and the opening of hostilities at Ft. Sumter, the College had dropped its enrollment from over

¹³⁰ Curran, *From Academy to University*, pp. 242-243: “The College authorities attempted also to publicly maintain political neutrality among the students on campus. Presumably under such direction, the Philodemic Society removed anything political from their debate topics.”

¹³¹ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001) pp. 2-5. Cf. Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

300 to around sixty. In May, a Union regiment from New York of over 1000 soldiers occupied College buildings for a month; only to be replaced weeks later by another regiment for the same amount of time. When the school year opened in the fall of 1861, only fifty students were enrolled, and worries were vocalized among the faculty that the school might have to be suspended, or moved to a location up north. The following fall, the college opened up with only forty students enrolled, and most of the campus was converted as a military hospital for union troops for much of that year. Nonetheless, the College remained open with a diminished, but still token enrollment (not least of the sons of military officers in the District).

The Philodemic reflected this meager existence that nonetheless maintained continuity. After most of its members enlisted in April 1861 (for both North and South), the society ceased operations until the following fall. It returned to campus for the remaining years of the war a shadow of what it once was. Debate minutes show a preponderance of debate topics on philosophical, abstract, or historical questions—even more than the full-headed college students of the antebellum period had pursued. This contrast is especially striking given the Philodemic obsession, through 1859, 1860, up to February 1861 with “political” questions of the war: the possibilities of secession, Lincoln’s nomination and election, and the end of slavery [See Appendix, Table B]. Indeed, it is notable that of the twenty six debates in which Philodemic covered topics relating to secession, nullification, or union between 1830-1861, twenty-four occurred in 1850 or later, and ten occurred from 1858-1861. Despite many pro-Southern decisions on debate merits in those years, Philodemic members still expressed a certain ambivalence on the righteousness of the war in their last two debate on the topic before the war’s commencement, affirming in November 1860 “Ought the Southern States to oppose the coercion of any States of the Union, should any secede in the event of a Black Republican President?” by

a vote of 8-1, but only 3 months later, as secession began to be put into motion, tied 5-5 on the debate: “Are the Southern states justifiable in seizing upon the property of the Federal Government?”¹³²

During the war, the Philodemic muzzled itself. The preeminent historian of Georgetown University, Robert Emmett Curran, suggests that this was due to the well-known pro-Southern (if not also pro-Confederate) sympathies of the College’s Jesuit professors and many of its Southern students. Indeed, when Georgetown students and alumni went to war, they flooded the ranks of the Gray far more than those of the Blue—to the tune of 86% of all those who fought in the war. Even among students and alumni who hailed from Maryland—a state which remained in the Union camp, albeit with a good deal of dissent—85% crossed south to join the Confederacy, a remarkable number that suggests the allegiances of many Georgetown alumni even from Union-aligned states.¹³³ There was certainly a Catholic alignment to this allegiance—a good example might be found in Richard H. Clarke, a Philodemic member who we saw in Chapter 2 offering so many toasts in the 1840s to Union and against abolition, and in Chapter 3 railing against proto-communism. Clarke, a local of the District and a descendant of one of the early founders of Maryland, later a New York resident in the 1850s, was arrested in 1863 as a suspected Confederate spy.¹³⁴ Even more infamously, James Ryder Randall—a member from the 1850s named after the Philodemic’s Jesuit founder, composed a Confederate anthem for his home state “Maryland, My Maryland” in April 1861. He did so upon hearing the (erroneous) news of the death of his former college roommate, Francis Xavier Ward, in a riot between Southern

¹³² “Amanuensis Book, October 2, 1859 – June 24, 1866” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 7, Georgetown University Archives, entries for November 18, 1860 and February 17, 1861. Note that “Black Republican President” refers to political allegiances, and not to ethnicity.

¹³³ Curran, *From Academy to University* p. 238.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 223, 242.

sympathizers and Northern soldiers on the streets on Baltimore. Randall's injunction to "Avenge the patriotic gore / That flecked the streets of Baltimore" and his confident claim that his home state "spurns the Northern scum" left little to the imagination in the instinctive loyalty to the Southern section.¹³⁵ The traditional demographic provenances of the Philodemic Society in the pre-war years made it clear where most members fought for during the conflict; the graduating members of the Philodemic Society in July 1860, for instance, comprised eighteen members—five from Louisiana, four from Maryland, two each from Mississippi, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and D.C., and one from Georgia.¹³⁶

Amidst the war's torrents, activities at the College were significantly minimized. The Philodemic put off its traditional February 22 celebrations for Washington's Birthdays, and certainly, commemorating the anniversary of the Maryland Pilgrims was out of the question. Even its "Grand Annual" meetings—usually scheduled to coincide with the University commencement—were moved to January to coincide with the miniaturized, limited University exhibitions of the war years. But in the Society, speech making had to go on. The orator called upon to speak in July 1862, John C. C. Hamilton (who would pass away only days after his address), only obliquely touched on the war, remarking that "amid troubles like those convulse the outer world, it is with peculiar delight that we find ourselves once more within these quiet precincts, where, for a brief time, at least, we can enjoy that peace for which so many thousand hearts are yearning."¹³⁷ But in a speech that called for a reinvigorated commitment to liberal

¹³⁵ Curran, *From Academy to University*, p. 237.

¹³⁶ "Amanuensis Book, October 2, 1859 – June 24, 1866" Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 7, Georgetown University Archives, entry for July 7, 1860.

¹³⁷ John C. C. Hamilton, *An Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, D.C., by John C. C. Hamilton, Esq., of Washington, D.C.* (Washington: Henry Polkinhorn Printer, 1862) p. 3.

education—hardly an original theme for the Philodemic Society—he did once more transgress the taboo of the war, using the conflict as a justification for studying the classics:

“The Greek and Latin classics should be dear to the American youth. They are the disembodied spirits of noble nations which were the prototypes of our own. He should love the classics because he loves free institutions... but most of all he should love them because they will teach him noble sentiment, honor, justice, filial affection, patriotism—not that sickly, undefined species of sentimentalism so often called patriotism, but the patriotism which loves and respects a country’s laws, reveres its constitution, and clings to its liberties. We may not with impunity turn our eyes from the past. Greece had her Peloponesian war, where States were arrayed against States in deadly conflict... Rome, too, felt the terrible effects civil war engendered by the rival pretensions of Caesar and Pompey. On the tombs of nations, as on those of men, the living often read grave and solemn lessons; how many woes might be spared a people if these warnings were heeded in time.¹³⁸

If Hamilton’s call was to understand the war not by present political debates, but in retrospective glances to the past and to the lives of great men, then the Philodemic certainly did live up to his words in the war years. As mentioned before, the Philodemic debated no topic of serious or contemporary political import during the war, beyond those that were classic, perennial debates, like the morality of dueling and capital punishment. Several times the Philodemic debated issues regarding the severity of war in the abstract, but that was as close as they seemed to dare to approach the central business of the nation. Many of the decisions from debates from the early years of the war, moreover, were not even recorded, suggesting possibly an even higher resistance to any sort of potential for public harmony, or at the very least a sloppier attitude to record taking—in either case, an ample demonstration of the war’s impact on the debating society. One of the few exceptions to this rule was the passing of resolutions in February 1863 opposing the recent French invasion of Mexico, possibly passed at the behest or inspiration of

¹³⁸ Ibid, 13-14.

Mexican members of the Society, which were sent to the Mexican ambassador to the U.S. when the Society offered him honorary membership.¹³⁹

And silence can be taken as a message of its own. No record is found of any “resolutions of respect” offered in April 1865 on behalf of assassinated President Lincoln, though the Philodemic had regularly issued such resolutions on the deaths of former presidents in the past, even when they were not honorary members of the Society, and on the two meetings following the assassination, committees were drawn up to issue such resolutions for two recently deceased Philodemic alumni.¹⁴⁰ Whether this is an omission in direct antipathy to Lincoln, or whether his death was seen as sufficiently politically divisive to make issuing resolutions, in both cases it indicates the change away from an automatic respect for the President.

It is hard not to read in too much from orations and debate topics from the wartime and postbellum years, assuming for instance that every debate on the morality of Caesar’s assassins contained a veiled reference to Booth’s murder of Lincoln, when in fact Philodemic had debated this topic many times before the war, let alone Lincoln’s assassination. J. Fairfax McLaughlin’s 1864 address on Sir Thomas More—“a good man in a bad age”—with its bold claim that “virtue can make no compromise with vice” is one such example of a source we might take to have deep

¹³⁹ “Amanuensis Book, October 2, 1859 – June 24, 1866” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 7, Georgetown University Archives, entry for February 15, 1863; M. Romero to Felix Cypriano Zegarra, February 5, 1864, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 3, Georgetown University Archives.

¹⁴⁰ See, for instance, resolutions on the death of James Madison: “Amanuensis Book, May, 1836 – July, 1836” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives, entries for July 1836; “Amanuensis Book, October 2, 1859 – June 24, 1866” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 4, Folder 7, Georgetown University Archives, entries for April 30, 1865, and May 6, 1865.

political overtones, though it is hard to prove clearly.¹⁴¹ But Philodemic speakers—more dramatic perhaps, than even the average orator—were often explicit enough to avoid such a resort to implications and inferences. The 1865 exhibition day speaker, James Wise, with the war’s conclusion fast approaching, used its lessons to urge a conservative perspective towards political reform:

The enemies of republican institutions may point to the present unhappy condition of our country as an evidence that self-rule is destined to be short-lived on this continent; but the American can point them to the fact, that even among the revolutionists of his country self-rule has not lost its devoted adherents, its earnest defenders. They may wish to change the form; they can never consent to change the substance... Where will [the American] find a government whose fundamental principles have been less vague or uncertain? Where have the great ends of all good government more successfully attained? ... All the powers of our government being so nicely balanced, must we not now view with alarm any attempt to touch that balance, the disturbance of which may bring confusion on the nation. Fidelity to its principles will insure us all the advantages of good government. Hasty legislation, enacting to-day and rescinding to-morrow, is a reproach to any government professing stability... The subject of reform, then, of any of the fundamental principles of our Government demands at least the deliberation that attended its formation.”¹⁴²

Already, Philodemicians were anticipating the end of the war and potential political reform that might accompany it—and, relying on their traditional commitment to a limited conception of “liberty,” warning against quick measures. Wise’s suggestion that the South’s cause was based on a common commitment to “self-rule” reflects another symptomatic Confederate sympathy—and a line of argument that would manifest itself over time in the postwar “Lost Cause” mythology of Southerners and sympathetic Northerners. Part of that mythology, historians like Caroline Janney and David Blight tell us, was the belief that the Confederate cause was anchored not in the “minor” issue of slavery, but the substantive issue of state’s rights, sovereignty, and

¹⁴¹ J. Fairfax McLaughlin, *Address Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, D.C. at the Grand Annual Celebration, January 21st, 1864, by J. Fairfax McLaughlin, A.M.* (Baltimore: Kelly & Piet, 1864), p. 19.

¹⁴² James A. Wise, *Address and Poem Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, D.C. at the Grand Annual Celebration, January 19th, 1865. The Address by James A. Wise. The Poem by R. Ross Perry.* (Washington: H. Polkinhorn & Son, Printers, 1865), p. 19.

self-rule, and that the soldiers of Dixie were merely trying to follow in the steps of their Founding Fathers, in the “Spirit of ’76.” This was an argument that the Philodemician—firmly committed to holding the value of “liberty,” however defined, above all else, together with the ancestor worship of founders like Washington—could appreciate.

But sympathy for such arguments needed to be preceded by a genuine desire for reconciliation. We find ample evidence for this in the reunion, mentioned above, that the Philodemic conducted on behalf of the College in 1867. By 1865, the Philodemic could boast a rich membership of over 609 individuals, with sixteen resident members, 226 graduates, 221 sub-graduates (those having left college without a degree), and 146 honorary members (including several former presidents of the United States such as Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, and Zachary Taylor).¹⁴³ As the College began to recover in the years after 1865, such a reunion—a proto-University-wide reunion, in this case organized around a debating and literary society devoted to questions of liberty and democracy—was bound to touch on political questions, and those of the war’s aftermath, at least tangentially. The April 1867 invitation to alumni asked those not able to attend to send in an autographed portrait of themselves for preservation in University archives, and a “toast or sentiment” to be read at the celebration.

¹⁴³ “List of the Members of the Philodemic Society” 1865, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 5, Folder 20, Georgetown University Archives. Another interesting fact is that the Philodemic had appended thorough lists of membership (including resident, non-resident, and honorary members) to Society orations printed throughout the 1850s, but ceased doing this in during the war years in the early 1860s. One possibility is that war exigencies forced them to cease to conserve paper or save costs, but it is also possible that this was done to avoid the controversy of having so many members of confederate affiliation again publicly connected with the Society. It appears that the first time the Society resumed this practice of printing full lists of alumni and honorary members was in the publication of the oration and texts associated with the 1867 reunion, having not done so even at the January 1867 Grand Annual Celebration six months prior, see William Hill, *Address and Poem Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown University of Georgetown College, D. C. at the Grand Annual Celebration, January 17th, 1867*. (Baltimore: Kelly & Piet, 1867).

Alumni from across the newly reconstituted Union—from Texas to Louisiana to Maine—sent in long and short “sentiments” that made it clear they saw such a university reunion as symbolic and portentous of a wider, ideological and national reunion after the civil war. Indeed, many stated this explicitly; one letter offered a toast simply to “[t]he reunion of the members of the Philodemic Society—an emblem—may it be a forerunner of the speedy & happy reunion of all the states of our Republic.”¹⁴⁴ The author of that toast was from a Maryland slaveholding family, and the brother of a Confederate veteran.¹⁴⁵ Another, from a former Union army officer, toasted, “Our once happy country—may this reunion typify the good feeling and harmony that will soon pervade all sections of our beloved land.”¹⁴⁶ Hopes for a happy and conflict-free reunion were by no means limited to the South, as significant scholarly research has shown.¹⁴⁷ What the toasts of the Philodemic make clear is that these men saw reunion primarily in terms of emotional and ideological reconciliation, not in economic restoration or concrete political steps.

A scholar of Civil War memory, Caroline E. Janney, has understood herein the difference between “reunion,” a legal reality after 1865, and “reconciliation,” the harder-to-define question of individual feelings, sentiment, harmony, and forgiveness, whether a “performance, a gesture, or a ritual.”¹⁴⁸ The contemporary word used for the dinner toast—a “sentiment”—accurately describes the public and forensic purpose of such a toast—a kind of *sentimentality*. A nostalgic reunion of sentiment is what the college professors hoped for Georgetown’s 1867 celebration,

¹⁴⁴ N. S. Stonestreet to James Clark, June 28, 1867, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 6, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

¹⁴⁵ Curran, *From Academy to University*, p. 177; James S. Ruby and Thomas E. Prendergast, *Blue and Gray and the Civil War* (Georgetown University Alumni Association, 1961), p. 65.

¹⁴⁶ William J. L. Nicodemus to B. A. Maguire S.J., July 1, 1867, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 6, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

¹⁴⁷ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁸ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, pp 5-6.

and a national reunion of sentiment is what the alumni attendees hoped that such a celebration would portend for the recovering country.

It should be said that by no means were all Georgetown alumni starkly optimistic about the prospects for reunion. Indeed, many were left economically devastated by the war, and were scarcely able to make a costly trip across the country to their alma mater for a rhetorical celebration, no matter how fond the ties of nostalgia. Moreover, many letters sent in betray a starkly pessimistic attitude, and are evidence of the unsettled political state of the country. A letter from a Texas resident and Confederate veteran, Edward Pye, sounded a distinctly somber note:

Political degradation – social ruin – the future gloomy & uncertain – the present filled with the stern duties of life – the incessant struggle for bread! – cultivated men at the plow – women at the wash – lib & the needle! With all this – you can readily imagine that we have little time for the pleasant memories of Lang Syne – nevertheless, I can say for myself, that it would give me the greatest pleasure to spend a day amid the shades of old Georgetown College and the pleasant memories that would meet me at every turn.¹⁴⁹

Rhetorical and forensic exploits could not heal all material, economic, and social wounds left by the devastation of war. But for those who did believe in the unifying power of rhetoric and forensic reunion—or, alternatively, collegiate pride and nostalgia—what distinctive mechanism did they believe it was that could break apart the stubbornly divisive feelings of North and South, of regional antipathy and political stalemate? This was often unclear. The fact that such hopes for reunion spontaneously arose on hearing of the coming celebration, is made clear by a letter from an alumnus Robert Ray, who wrote, in a fashion typical of many:

It has occurred to me that no more timely step could have been taken for a Reunion of the members of the Philodemic Society than now—scattered, as they are, through every state of our widely extended country—holding, no doubt, different views on the subjects that

¹⁴⁹ Edward A. Pye to B. A. Maguire S.J. and James Clark S.J., June 24, 1867, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 6, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives; James S. Ruby and Thomas E. Prendergast, *Blue and Gray and the Civil War* (Georgetown University Alumni Association, 1961), p. 82.

have been settled by a desperate war just ended, it will be a grand sight to see them gathered around the festive board proposed by Alma Mater, where they will have a chance to obliterate all differences of opinion, that has tended to activate them since they left her sacred walls.¹⁵⁰

But what was the singular quality of the coming reunion that offered the potential to “obliterate all differences of opinion” among alumni? Was it the unifying effect of a national religious university, replete with the calming, spiritually affirming presence of the Jesuit priests? The opportunity to celebrate something—anything—in the aftermath of the war? Or the ideologically driven mission of the Philodemic Society, devoted, however circumspectly and abstractly, to a specific conception of liberty and national pride? One last toast sent in from Cincinnati, offered,

To the Philosophy Class of 1856... though scattered over the face of the Globe; though mountains & rivers are between us; though civil discord and strife have torn us asunder; ay! Even though the black [?] of the grave may be yawning between us, we are still to one another, one heart, one in sentiments, one in brotherly love, and our earnest is; the uninterrupted prosperity and success of our alma mater.

Perhaps it was the spirit of Georgetown, of old college days and old friends from a simpler time, that brought these alumni from disparate political and regional backgrounds. It is worth noting that one of the proposed poets for the following year’s celebration, George H. Miles (not a Philodemic or Georgetown alumnus, but a graduate of the Catholic college of Mt. St. Mary’s) was the author of “God Save the South,” the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy. At the 1867 reunion, James Ryder Randall was chosen over Miles as poet for the next year’s Grand Annual meeting, with Miles as his substitute.¹⁵¹ But at the same meeting, the Philodemic voted to make General Horace Porter, a major Union military commander during the war, an honorary member of the Society, so perhaps the Society was true to its more or less explicit mission of

¹⁵⁰ Robert Ray to B. A. Maguire S.J. and James Clark S.J., June 11, 1867, Georgetown University Archives.

¹⁵¹ Frank Rudd to B. A. Maguire, July 8, 1867, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 6, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives;

reconciliation. The selection of alumni who actually attended the reunion—judged by the 32 who signed their names on the reunion rolls—was actually rather ecumenical, and strongly represented from the North and border states: excepting the three who did not list their names, there thirteen from D.C., eight from Maryland, three each from Pennsylvania and New York, and one from Kentucky.¹⁵²

The orator at the 1867 reunion, Alexander Dimitry, who had served as an assistant postmaster for the Confederacy, issued another call—symptomatic of many Philodemic speeches in these years—for a reinvigorated liberal education, inculcated by virtue and truth, to guide American youth.¹⁵³ By implication, Dimitry seemed to be eager to lay the troubles of recent times at the feet of moral or social failings, not political differences. Urging the students in his audience to learn from “this premature experience of the deadliness of fanatical madness and rival ambitions” he struck out at the real offenders of the recent war:

Still, in the roar of all devouring cupidity—in the maelstrom of passionate greed—in the extravagance of an insatiate luxury—in the fanaticism of pretended reformers—and mainly in the vulgar ambition of political charlatans—many might trace the cause of much of the horrors which have sundered the bonds of brotherhood, convulsed the country to its foundations, appalled the sensibilities of mankind, and hunted out all feeling of truth from the heart.¹⁵⁴

Such sentiments do not exactly seem fitting for a celebration that modeled reconciliation. The call for fanaticism in particular seems to have been a reiteration of pre-war Southern sentiments against the irresponsible fanaticism of Northern abolitionists. But Dimitry’s solution—a new moral commitment and social hierarchy—was classically Catholic in its commitment to religious

¹⁵² “Amanuensis Book, October 7, 1866-June 16, 1872” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 6, Folder 2, Georgetown University Archives, entry for July 2, 1867.

¹⁵³ Curran, *From Academy to University*, p. 239.

¹⁵⁴ “*Grand Annual Celebration of the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, Held July 2d, 1867* (Baltimore: The Sun Book and Job Printing Establishment, 1868), p. 26.

ideals over civic solutions, offering a strong contrast to the anti-religious, heavily political moral rhetoric of Philodemic speakers before the war:

It is not in human power long to preserve the moral being called Society, if it be reduced to the control of merely material interests. Its path is marked like the orbit of planets in the heavens. Like them it has laws which cannot be violated with impunity. They rest of religious faith—on the slavery of duty—on submission to the laws—on the obligations of filial piety—on the reverence of parental authority, and on the reciprocal loving-kindness—the contrast of selfishness—which convert the members of a great body into one great family.¹⁵⁵

In fact, Dimitry's sketch is compelling in its uniting traditional Southern claims to a positive social hierarchy with a Catholic commitment to the same—traditionally, the Catholic Church had not opposed slavery if reciprocal moral obligations between slave and slave-owner were preserved and pursued.¹⁵⁶ The largely Protestant slaveholding elite of the South had advocated a similar code of slavery and Southern society, perhaps best known according to the slavery as a “positive good” argument of John C. Calhoun. To hear the loud, ringing echoes of such an argument in the immediate aftermath of the South's defeat and emancipation may seem jarring. But it is also a reminder that even when citizens of North and South came together after 1865 with the expressed wish of reunion, they did so to pursue reunion on their own terms.¹⁵⁷ Clearly, for Dimitry, that meant the Southern values of hierarchy, authority, duty, contrasted with the supposed fanaticism and commercial greed of the North.

In understanding the kind of celebration that transpired in July 1867, we might do well to consult the fact that at the celebration, a letter was read from former Confederate general Robert

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 25.

¹⁵⁶ John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1956), pp. 70-71; John T. McGreevey, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003), pp. 52-56.

¹⁵⁷ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, p. 161.

E. Lee, in which he accepted honorary membership in the Society.¹⁵⁸ Lee had emerged after the war as the champion of a distinctive Southern form of reconciliation, publicly conceding defeat and pledging to be above the political disputes of the post-war period, even as he privately conceded that this was done for more pragmatic than ideological reasons, to reassume leadership and rebuild the South after the war.¹⁵⁹ I suggest that we can understand the kind of reconciliation adumbrated at the 1867 reunion by using Lee as a de facto model. The majority of the audience in attendance were likely of Southern sympathies, but were reunited at a college with former classmates who had fought for both sides and who resided in all parts of the newly reestablished Union. Even the 14 student members of Philodemic in attendance at the celebration reflected this diversity: three each from Maryland and Mexico, two from D.C., and one each from Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Georgia, Connecticut, and South Carolina.¹⁶⁰

Another may be found in the surge of “reconciliationist” efforts that began in the nation especially in the 1880s, which purposefully forgot the questions so often litigated in the immediate decade and a half of the war’s end of right vs. wrong and the Confederate vs. Union causes. Instead, “a new national memory of reconciliation... triumphed over earlier memories of the war,” allowing veterans of both sides to come together in a mutual atmosphere of respect, fraternity, with a common desire to remember some aspects of the conflict, and forget others. The best examples of this phenomenon were the so-called “Blue-Gray reunions” of the 1880s, frequently seen at veteran meetings on battlefields and commemorative sites, where Confederate

¹⁵⁸ *Grand Annual Celebration of the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, Held July 2d, 1867* (Baltimore: The Sun Book and Job Printing Establishment, 1868), p. 55; Robert E. Lee to Samuel H. Anderson, July 14, 1866, Philodemic Society Archives, Box 6, Folder 1, Georgetown University Archives.

¹⁵⁹ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, pp. 136-138. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 149.

¹⁶⁰ *Grand Annual Celebration*, p. 65.

and Union veterans “embrac[ed] in the spirit of brotherly love and American progress” and “mutually (if silently) agreed not to discuss the causes or consequences of the war.”¹⁶¹

Indeed, such a description, though applied to events that historians have claimed only truly began a decade and a half after the event in question, seems to describe almost perfectly the 1867 Philodemic reunion, showcasing a style of reconciliation advanced for its time. What was unique about the celebration, I suggest, was the use of a college reunion as a pivot for a different kind of national reunion. Instead of a battlefield commemoration, a college reunion was one of the few places in this time period in which Americans of different allegiances and sectional loyalties could come together around a common, optimistic spirit explicitly committed to reunion. It surely is no coincidence that it was also at Georgetown in 1876 that the crew team—newly organized in the College Boat Club—extemporaneously chose Blue and Gray as its team colors, soon to become the College’s own official colors.¹⁶² The purpose of this effort was not primarily reconciliationist—rather, rowing, where the scene of action took place far from the spectators, necessitated distinctive and visible colors to allow the audience to make out the different teams competing. But the Club’s committee on colors selected them “as appropriate colors for the Club and expressive of the feeling of unity that exists between the Northern and Southern boys of the College.” The Boat Club’s choice of the colors Blue and Gray—which remain Georgetown’s school colors to this day—exemplify the College’s special commitment to inter-sectional reconciliation.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, pp. 161-671.

¹⁶² Curran, *From Academy to University*, p. 326. Lawrence H. Cooke, “The History of the Georgetown Crew,” in *Swift Potomac’s Lovely Daughter: Two Centuries at Georgetown through Students’ Eyes*, ed. Joseph T. Durkin (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), pp. 330-331.

¹⁶³ On September 21, 2017, the Philodemic Society debated “Resolved: Georgetown should remove Gray as a school color.” It was affirmed 30-24-5.

Two pieces of verse offered at the 1867 reunion—one, a lengthy thematic poem entitled “Peace” and the other a song based on “Auld Lang Syne”—make clear the reconciliationist impulse at work at Georgetown in the postwar period. The first, despite its title, includes lengthy battle scenes yet still offers, “Yet now the flush is over, let us think: / Is Peace mere rest, and shall we feast and drink, / Laugh and make merry, fling all care away, / And live once more our idle holiday?”¹⁶⁴ Certainly the participants of the celebration did not entirely forget the war, as the eighteen stanzas of the poem on “Peace” largely consumed by consideration of wartime scenes, implies. But still, the atmosphere for celebration, for a holiday from the aftermath of a conflict that was itself a hangover Americans still wanted to wake up from. The anthem of the reunion, a modified version of the famous Scottish ballad, also demonstrates the desire to use the friends of yesteryear and the nostalgia of the campus to fully end the hostilities of war:

Since then we’ve seen both time and war
 With ruthless hand combine,
 To sever wide and scatter far
 The Friends of auld lang syne
 ...
 But now ‘tis over, and once more
 Our yearning hearts incline,
 Our steps from many a distant shore,
 Towards scenes of auld lang syne.¹⁶⁵

Compare the above poems to one offered at the next Philodemic reunion in 1871, whose composer, in similar language, posits Alma Mater as a refuge from life’s rough struggles, but not the martial ones described four years prior. The nostalgia remains the same, but the sanctuary of one’s old college campus is appropriated for different oratorical purposes:

Returned to this revered Retreat,
 Whose hallowed walls, to me, repeat
 The story of a time replete
 With happiness—

¹⁶⁴ *Grand Annual Celebration*, p. 40.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 60.

...
My Alma Mater's tranquil shades
A beauty ill that never fades;
Her bounds the peace of God pervades
And sanctifies.¹⁶⁶

If a reader were to make the assumption that Philodemicians seemed to have eschewed oratory for poetry in these years, it would not be an idle guess. Charles James, the keynote speaker at the 1874 reunion—the last the Philodemic would offer—sounded a note that was practically against the very basis of the Society's self-image: the power of oratory to influence, to persuade, and to inspire. Giving a narrative description of the Webster-Hayne debates of almost half a century prior (occurring, by no small coincidence, in the same year of the Philodemic's founding), renowned to be one of the heights of oratorical prowess, he nonetheless claims that there were certain political advances that eloquence could not overcome, not while the sectionalism of the South could never co-exist with the unionism of the nation as a whole. Yet even so,

For thirty long years afterwards we clung, North and South alike, to our boyish faith that eloquence could save us. We still argued, we persuaded, we recriminated, we denied, we descended to oburgation, we argued and persuaded again... It seemed impossible to comprehend that our disagreement was one no words could settle; that our dispute was of things and forces, not of voluntary and controllable purposes.¹⁶⁷

Recognizing his mixed audience, he apologized if his recollections prompted any "heart-ache" in his listeners, which is not intended, but

A Society which professes the culture of eloquence will not shrink from remembering as well the hour of its failure as the hour of its triumph; and if we differ in our estimate of the past, you will deem it one of your own duties, as the orators of the future, not merely to tolerate, but to cherish and promote the frank expression of sincere convictions, as the habit of all Americans.

¹⁶⁶ Tallmadge Lambert, *Poem Delivered at the Grand Triennial Meeting of the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, D. C., by Tallmadge A. Lambert.* (Georgetown, D.C.: Courier Print, 1872) p. 15.

¹⁶⁷ Charles P. James, *Oration of Hon. Chas. P. James, LL.D., (of Ohio,) Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College, June 24, 1874.* (Washington: Joshua L. Pearson, Printer, 1874), p. 15.

It seems almost impossible that an alumnus of such a society at the Philodemic, committed and reaffirmed at each celebration, lecture, debate, and reunion to “Eloquence in the Defense of Liberty” that any could concede any failure of eloquence. But according to James, the orator of the future must return to a moral purpose and activity, for “The soul of a nation needs saving as much as the soul of a man, and there must be some one to preach to it; there must be orators to wake its conscience, to move its heart, to persuade its will.”¹⁶⁸

For this speaker, the war had forever changed the nature of oratory—the nation had altered its focus from sectional politics to the politics of commerce and business. But there was still a role for the budding debaters and orators in the Philodemic society—to understand liberty anew, and return to a different kind of politics. James’ speech ended with an appeal to state sovereignty, while acknowledging the tense meaning of this call in the postwar year, and his parting wish was that his student audience would “become, from this time, in the truest and highest sense, politicians.”¹⁶⁹

The Philodemic of the first forty five years had not aimed to create politicians—men of public service and civic exemplars, but not a more limited example of a civic politician. It is hard to mark, in any institution, a time of extreme change, a point of discontinuity from which we can fence out absolute differences. But the mid 1870s seems an apt choice for a shift in the Philodemic Society’s consideration of liberty and nation. As its debates started to slowly leave behind the more abstract debates of old, in 1874 a Georgetown alumnus and eminent local judge endowed an award of a gold medal to be won in a prize debate by the Philodemic’s best speakers. The inaugural prize debate, on April 22, 1875, asked, “Should the Federal Government grant subsidies to Railroad Corporations?” It was a far cry from the very first debate topic in

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 18.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 21.

1830 of “Whether Napoleon Bonaparte or George Washington was the greater man?”¹⁷⁰ The country had changed, so had the college debating society, and so had the Philodemic Society of Georgetown University.

¹⁷⁰ “College Jottings,” *College Journal*, May 1875.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Few modern day observers would expect that even a nineteenth century society dedicated to “Eloquence in the Defense of Liberty” would have a perfect record when it came to the fast-paced, emerging moral and political issues of the age. But when it took on issues of liberty—in debate topics and printed, annual orations, in dinner toasts, eulogies, and sponsored celebrations of patriotic or religious resonance—a less chequered record might have been anticipated. In so many topics—conflicting religious freedom for Catholics and Mormons, the continuity of slavery before the Civil War and reconciliation after, American expansionism abroad—the Philodemic pursued a rhetorical path whose end goal did not always seem to be one of ideological and practical liberty.

What is so surprising about this fact is not that the Philodemic did not always preach a single, consistent ideology of liberty. For instance, in the 1850s, the Philodemic celebrated several anniversary celebrations of the original Catholic settlers of Maryland, religious refugees seeking civil and religious freedom, claiming it as the Catholic-American heritage in the new Republic. Amidst the rising tide of Know-Nothing nativist politics, these Philodemic celebrations quickly became less about symbolically placing themselves in the history of America, and more of a practical political purpose to fend off bigoted anti-Catholic political attacks throughout the country. It could even exert such a defense in a way that did not rely on Catholic exceptionalism, but was instead committed to an ecumenical, broad-tent ideal of religious freedom. Yet in the same decade, Philodemic’s Catholic members could debate several resolutions about toleration of the emerging faith of Mormonism and negate the American tradition of religious liberty that they in so many other contexts, hailed, celebrated, and to which they had proclaimed their undying commitment. One resolution on Mormonism even read, “The

Constitution promises civil and religious liberty to every citizen of these United States; should then Mormonism be tolerated?”

Indeed, what is surprising about the Philodemic’s stance on many issues like these is how insistently it simultaneously proclaimed its commitment to liberty; how it held the concept of liberty up as the American *sine qua non*, the basic organizing principle around which America was based and founded. How could Americans so self-consciously devoted to certain ideals at the expense of personal biases and more material concerns like regional loyalties and partisan concerns, so often get it wrong?

The answer is that Philodemicians could not always transcend the very biases—the prejudices and passions—that they sought to throw off. In the aftermath of the Civil War, Philodemicians came back to campus from states devastated by the conflict; finding in their old, schoolboy home and former forensic endeavors, a respite from the division that had not ended with the cancellation of hostilities, and perhaps a hope for future diminutions, reconciliation, and reunion. In other cases, they were unable to move from the ideal of a “liberty,” associated with the founding revolutionary generation of heroes like Washington and Jefferson, to a more practical, contemporary liberty. Liberty came across in speeches as an abstract, over-intellectualized concept, which could shed little light or influence on current questions of the day. “Liberty” showed up almost non-stop in the speeches of Philodemic orations at its major events—Washington’s Birthday, Independence Day, College Commencement, Pilgrim’s Anniversaries—but rarely in its debate topics, except in two cases: historical debates about past political events, or “liberty of the Press” which became a frequent refrain in certain years.

What then can the Philodemic’s ideological relationship—however complicated—with “liberty” inform us? The Philodemic, a small, elite literary debating society at the principal

Catholic college in the United States still forms a very small sample size indeed. It gives us only a small hint about how elite Catholics of the antebellum and immediate post-bellum circumscribed political, literary, moral, and historical issues around the ideal of a distinctly American “liberty.” Nevertheless, the Philodemic Society forms a window into Catholic-Americans; it teaches us about the American literary society and nineteenth century University, by showing how their rare religious and ethnic identity influenced and inflected the normal activities of the American college and debating club. Philodemic speeches, toasts, and debates reveal to us how Catholics combined—or did not combine—their local religious and ethnic political ideas with broader national ideas of patriotism and national distinctiveness.

1830 was an inflection point for the American Catholic community, the beginning of a new wave of European Catholic immigration with myriad sociopolitical ramifications on this domestic religious community. Over the course of the next several decades, Catholics went from being on a trajectory towards greater political, social, and economic integration to a more exclusive, isolated divide. Catholic colleges—Georgetown among them—turned away from ecumenical, non-denominational enrollments, towards recruiting and focusing more heavily on Catholics and Catholics alone—it was not until the 1850s that the first Catholic school which limited enrollment to Catholics alone was founded. Yet coincidentally, 1830 was also the year in which a society that purported to transcend the American and Catholic divides was founded. It professed an enlightenment-based, distinctly “modern” concept of liberty at the time when the institutional Catholic Church in Europe was doing the exact opposite. It sought not Catholic exceptionalism, but integration of Catholics into the American story. In many ways, at many events, it tried to out-do “native” Americans at their own game of patriotism.

But Georgetown—and the Philodemic—could not escape the trends of the national community. In the generation after the Civil War, Georgetown’s enrollment steadily became more and more Catholic, and its commitment was no longer its original one to the bridging of the national capital with Catholic spirituality. The Philodemic too, moved from deeper philosophical questions to more mundane questions of railroad policy and tax rates. In some ways, this tracked with the larger national trend toward professionalization of degrees and the systemization of the research university, away from the more holistic ideal of the liberal arts college in the Jesuit tradition that Georgetown had ably represented. But the shift also represented a turning away from what had been a distinctive commitment to the merging of the American and Catholic ideals, a trend that would not resurface in force until well into the twentieth century, reaching its peak and culmination at the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965).¹⁷¹

American historians have long undervalued the Catholic-American experience in writing nineteenth century history. Tracing the history of the college debating society—and the experience of those societies at Catholic schools—offers an important starting point to overcome this longstanding exclusion. For a brief moment in the nineteenth century, in a small plot of land in the District of Columbia, to be Catholic was to be American, to be American was to be indebted to Catholic history, and to be Catholic-American was to have a special relationship with liberty. In these pages, I have endeavored to show this extraordinary phenomenon—distinctive for its time—up close, in its many permutations, as many as the surviving written and printed records of a collegiate debating society allow.

¹⁷¹ See John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Appendix: Philodemic Debates by Topic, 1830-1875

Here follows a selected list of Philodemic debates according to the following topics: Race, Union and Secession, Slavery, Form of Government, Immigration, Religious Tolerance, Political Parties, and Suffrage.¹⁷² This was compiled out of a list of over 1200 debates, debated in the years 1830 – 1875. These are not exhaustive lists, and some debates might apply to more than one category, but I have attempted to arrange according to the following topics as closely as possible, in the aim of giving a rough idea of the Philodemic’s debates on these issues relevant to the topics covered in this thesis. In some cases votes were not taken or decisions were not recorded, in others, the decision (affirmative, negative, or tied), but without specific vote counts, some times with accurate vote counts, and in others with descriptive terms like “a large majority” or “unanimously.” In all cases, I have provided as descriptive a count as possible.

Table A: Debates on Race

Resolution	Date	Decision
Were the English justifiable in depriving the Indians of this country?	October 19, 1834	Affirmed 4-2
Whether or not Florida should be given to the Indians?	January 12, 1840	Negated 2-10
Should Bloodhounds be employed in the Florida war?	March 27, 1841	Tied 5-5, chair negated
Were the whites justifiable in expelling the Indians from this country?	February 27, 1842	Negated 5-7
Were the Americans justifiable in employing bloodhounds against the Indians?	November 6, 1842	Negated 6-10
Was the treatment of the Whites towards the Indians justifiable?	March 12, 1843	Negated
Who are the more miserable, the Indians chased from their lands & properties or the Negroes brought from the shores of Africa and reduced to slavery?	October 27, 1844	Not voted upon
Which is the most deserving of our pity, the Indian or the Negro?	December 20, 1846	Affirmed 10-5
Which deserves more our pity, the Negro or the Indian?	October 16, 1848	Negated 4-9
Whether the whites had a right to dispossess the Indians of their territories in America?	November 25, 1849	Negated 6-11
Did the Indians originally emigrate from the Eastern Continent?	April 7, 1850	Affirmed

¹⁷² For a thorough, comparative sampling of debates from nineteenth century college literary societies, by topic, time period, and region, see Harding, *College Literary Societies*, pp. 336-537.

		unanimously
Were the Whites justifiable in expelling the aborigines?	January 19, 1851	Negated 6-9
Whether the Indian or the African has received more injuries from the hand of man?	April 13, 1851	Affirmed 12-7
Were the white justifiable in driving the aborigines from their lands?	January 23, 1853	Negated 5-10
Are Negroes more worthy of sympathy than Indians?	October 28, 1855	Negated 3-7
Which is harder, a negroe's head or a brick-bat?	June 29, 1856	Affirmed 5-4
Which is the better material for constructing breast-works and fortifications, niggers' heads or cotton bales?	January 18, 1857	Affirmed 5-4
Do savage nations possess a right to the soil?	May 6, 1860	Affirmed 7-3
Do savage nations possess a right to the soil?	March 23, 1862	No vote recorded
Was the expulsion of the Indians from the Eastern States justifiable?	March 25, 1866	No vote recorded
Did the Moors at the time of the reconquest of Granada by Ferdinand and Isabella possess a right to the soil?	April 16, 1866	Negated 2-3
Which is the nobler, the Indian or the Whiteman?	December 16, 1866	Affirmed 5-3
Do savage nations possess a full right to the soil?	May 16, 1868	Affirmed 6-5
Should a hostile or conciliatory policy be pursued towards the Indians?	November 29, 1868	Affirmed
Which was the superior race, the Mongolian or Caucasian?	March 27, 1870	Negated 6-7
Could America avoid the policy pursued in regard to the Indians?	March 4, 1875	Affirmed 14-4

Table B: Debates on Union and Secession

Resolution	Date	Decision
Is nullification justifiable?	December 5, 1847	Affirmed 6-4
Ought nullification to be extended to one state?	May 18, 1849	Affirmed 10-7
Would the south be justifiable in separating from the north?	January 6, 1850	Affirmed 7-6
Has a state the right to secede from the Union?	October 20, 1850	Affirmed 10-6
Whether the influences which tend to perpetuate, be stronger than those which tend to dissolve the union of the United States?	February 29, 1852	Affirmed 11-3
Whether the circumstances which tend to perpetuate are greater than those which tend to dissolve the union of the U.S.	March 20, 1853	Negated 6-7
Are the circumstances which tend to perpetuate greater than those which tend to dissolve the Union?	April 24, 1853	Negated 8-10
Do present circumstances tend more to dissolve than to perpetuate the Union?	October 16, 1853	Negated 4-15
Is the extension of territory calculated to endanger the preservation of the Union?	November 27, 1853	Affirmed 13-7
Has a state to the right to secede from the Union?	December 18, 1853	Affirmed 8-6
Were the political doctrines of John C. Calhoun in any manner detrimental to the welfare of the country?	May 21, 1854	Affirmed 10-9
Has a state a constitutional right to secede?	January 21,	Negated 4-9

	1855	
Does the present political condition of the country argue its preservation or destruction?	April 22, 1855	Affirmed 6-5
Can a state nullify a law of Congress and remain in the Union?	June 10, 1855	Negated 4-9
Does the present state of the country argue the preservation or destruction of the Union?	January 13, 1856	Affirmed 9-3
Do the indications of the present time threaten a dissolution of the Union?	January 4, 1857	Tied 3-3, chair negated
Does the present position of affairs of United States tend to their preservation or downfall?	January 10, 1858	Affirmed 10-1
Has a state the right to secede from the Union?	November 9, 1858	Tied, chair negated
Should the South now secede from the Union?	December 11, 1859	Affirmed 8-5
Should Democrats or South Americans assist in the election of Sherman or any Black Republican?	December 18, 1859	Negated 1-11
Should governor Wise have sent so many troops to Charlestown?	January 8, 1860	Affirmed 8-2
Should Southern Democrats vote for Douglas for President if he be nominated by the Charleston Convention?	February 26, 1860	Affirmed 6-5
Whether as the Union now stands under the present constitution & the fact of slavery in some states should the question of slavery be agitated either privately or publicly?	March 4, 1860	Negated 3-9
Whether the Union will be dissolved in the case of the election of Lincoln as President of the U.S.	October 13, 1860	Negated 1-9
Ought the Southern States to oppose the coercion of any States of the Union, should any secede in the event of a Black Republican President	November 18, 1860	Affirmative, 8-1
Are the Southern states justifiable in seizing upon the property of the Federal Government?	February 17, 1861	Tied 5-5
Is a nation ever justified in rising against its rulers?	March 1, 1863	Affirmed 9-2
Which is more efficacious in quelling rebellion or for preserving tranquility, a lenient or despotic exercise of power?	November 11, 1866	Affirmed 8-4
Are the influences which tend to perpetuate, greater than those which tend to dissolve the Union of the U.S.?	March 6, 1870	Negated
Has a state a right to secede?	February 27, 1873	Negated 5-10
Have states the right to secede from the Union?	November 13, 1873	Tied, chair negated
Has a state the right to secede?	October 15, 1874	Negated 6-7

Table C: Debates on Slavery

Resolution	Date	Decision
Should slaves be liberated?	December 12, 1830	Negated
Have the different States of the Union the right to send off their free coloured population?	February 26, 1832	Affirmed 11-9
Would the expulsion of all Negroes, both bond[ed] and free contribute to the welfare of the nation?	March 11, 1832	Affirmed 11-9
Would the abolition of slavery be beneficial to the Union	March 3, 1833	Affirmed 11-10

Would the abolition of slavery be beneficial or not to the union?	October 28, 1833	Negated
Is the institution of slavery just?	March 28, 1844	Negated 2-10
Is slavery consistent with republican institutions?	January 18, 1845	Affirmed 13-1
Is slavery consistent with a republic?	January 4, 1846	Affirmed 8-4
Is slavery consistent with Republican institutions?	January 3, 1847	Affirmed 11-4
Would the abolition of slavery be detrimental to the country?	December 12, 1847	Affirmed 13-3
Is slavery consistent with a republican government?	June 25, 1848	Negated 4-6
Should slavery be restricted from our new territories?	April 21, 1849	Affirmed 8-7
Would the abolition of slavery in the D.C. be consistent with justice?	November 18, 1849	Negated 3-12
Would the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia be consistent with policy?	April 21, 1850	Negated 1-7
Would the expulsion of all negroes, both slaves and freemen, contribute to the welfare of the country?	June 22, 1851	Negated 1-12
Whether or not the Nebraska bill should pass Congress?	March 5, 1854	Affirmed 13-4
Is slavery an evil as it exists in America?	October 29, 1854	Negated 3-11
Has Congress a right to exclude slavery from the territories & from the District of Columbia?	March 4, 1855	Negated 5-9
Should the African slave trade be reopened?	May 20, 1855	Negated 3-12
Is slavery an evil?	February 17, 1856	Negated 3-5
Is the extension of slavery beneficial to the welfare and prosperity of the Union?	February 1, 1857	Affirmed 7-4
Is the extension of slavery beneficial to the welfare and prosperity of the Union?	October 24, 1858	Affirmed 15-8
Has the emancipation of slaves been beneficial to the South?	February 5, 1874	Negated 5-10

Table D: Debates on Form of Government

Resolution	Date	Decision
Is republicanism or monarchy more conducive to a nation's happiness	October 13, 1833	Affirmed 15-1
Was the government of Rome from the expulsion of the kings to the overthrow of the Republic more conducive to the happiness of the people than that from the downfall of the Republic to the end of Constantine's reign?	November 24, 1833	Affirmed 11-4
Which form of Government is better calculated to ensure the happiness of the people, Monarchical or Republican?	January 25, 1835	Negated 3-11
Which is the preferable form of government, the Monarchical or Republican?	March 4, 1838	Negated 2-8
Whether a Monarchical or Republican form of government is more permanent?	November 17, 1839	Affirmed 7-4
Is the veto-power vested in the Presidency of an injurious tendency?	October 30, 1841	Affirmed 6-4
Which conduces more to the maintenance of civil order, Religion or the Civil Law?	March 20, 1842	Negated 2-9
Which government is the more favorable to literature, Monarchy or Republic?	June 5, 1842	Negated 3-9
Should the executive power be increased?	April 14, 1844	Negated 1-11
Is republicanism the destiny of the world?	June 2, 1844	Negated 2-4
Which government is better calculated to promote Literature, Monarchy or Republic?	December 22, 1844	Affirmed 10-4

Which form of government is better calculated to encourage literature, a Monarchy or a Republic?	November 2, 1845	Affirmed 5-4
Is republicanism the destiny of the world?	January 18, 1846	Negated 4-8
Should the clergy be permitted in polytics?	March 29, 1846	Negated 5-7
Is extension of empire compatible with the principles of a Republican government?	May 2, 1846	Affirmed 7-5
Can aristocracy be beneficial to a state?	June 21, 1846	Affirmed 5-3
Is extension of territory dangerous to republican institutions?	October 18, 1846	Tied 4-4, chair negated
Which have the most beneficial influences on literature, Republican or Monarchical institutions?	December 6, 1846	Affirmed 7-3
Are colonies beneficial to a nation?	February 28, 1847	Negated 2-11
Is the veto power consistent with pure democratic principles?	March 28, 1847	Affirmed 12-3
Is the veto power consistent with republican principles?	November 7, 1847	Affirmed 7-6
Is a republican or monarchical form of government more favourable to the growth of literature & science?	January 2, 1848	Affirmed 9-1
Is the veto power consistent with our form of government?	October 29, 1848	Affirmed 10-5
Are secret societies (such as the Freemasons) injurious to Republican Interest, and Institutions?	November 4, 1849	Affirmed 8-5
Which is the stronger, a monarchical or a federal government?	May 5, 1850	Negated 4-7
Which is the stronger, a monarchical or a federal government?	June 2, 1850	Negated 3-5
Is republicanism or monarchy more conducive to a nation's happiness?	June 1, 1851	Affirmed 15-6
Which form of government is best calculated for the present age, a monarchical or Republican?	April 18, 1852	Negated 712
Whether the election of President for life would be beneficial to the U.S.?	June 20, 1852	Negated 7-13
Are republics ungrateful?	October 24, 1852	Affirmed, 6-5
Is it right for a republican government to forbid its citizens from helping another people to achieve their freedom?	February 13, 1853	Affirmed 13-6
Which is better calculated for the preservation of Society, Monarchy or Democracy?	June 5, 1853	Negated 6-11
What form of government is best for the real interest and true happiness of man, a republic or a monarchy?	November 20, 1853	Affirmed 14-6
Which form of government is better calculated to ensure the happiness of a people, a monarchical or Republican?	December 11, 1853	Negated 6-16
Whether this government tends to monarchy or democracy?	November 7, 1854	Negated 3-7
Is the veto power consistent with Republican principles?	February 4, 1855	Tied 6-6, chair affirmed
Which is the better government, a republic or limited monarchy?	October 23, 1859	Affirmed 6-5
Which is preferable, a monarchical or republican form of government?	February 4,	No vote

	1863	recorded
Should secret societies be tolerated in any government?	May 31, 1863	Negated 2-6
Whether extensiveness of territory be favorable to the preservation of a republican form of government?	February 7, 1864	Negated 4-5
Which is the better form of government, a limited monarchy or a Republic?	March 6, 1864	No vote recorded
Which is the better form of government, a monarchy or republic?	November 13, 1864	Affirmed 7-2
Is extent of territory favorable to a republican form of government?	March 12, 1865	No vote recorded
Is monarchy the strongest and most stable form of government?	November 12, 1865	Negated 4-5
That a monarchical is preferable to a republican form of government?	February 22, 1867	No vote recorded
Is an established religion beneficial to a state?	May 28, 1867	Affirmed 7-6
Is an oligarchy to be preferred to a despotism?	May 10, 1868	No vote taken
Does a democracy offer equal inducement with other governments in the cultivation of the fine arts?	May 23, 1869	Affirmed
Is it right that a Republic should clothe its President with unlimited powers as granted by the Ku-Klux bill?	April 30, 1870	No vote recorded

Table E: Debates on Immigration

Resolution	Date	Decision
Should we encourage the emigration of foreigners?	January 10, 1836	Affirmed 9-2
Should the right of citizenship in the present condition of America be extended to any but native born Americans?	March 26, 1843	Tied, chair affirmed
Is China justifiable in excluding foreigners?	November 19, 1843	Negated 4-6
Should the rights of citizens be extended to foreigners?	January 28, 1844	Affirmed 10-3
Should immigration to the U.S. be encouraged?	March 30, 1845	Negated 7-8
Should immigration to the U.S. be encouraged?	April 27, 1845	Affirmed 8-6
Is naturalization of benefit to the United States in their present condition?	January 25, 1846	Tied 6-6, chair negated
Is the naturalization of Foreigners conducive to the interests and welfare of our country?	January 31, 1847	Affirmed 8-4
Is the naturalization of emigrants beneficial to a country?	December 19, 1847	Affirmed 9-3
Should the emigration of foreigners be encouraged?	January 27, 1850	Affirmed 8-1
Ought a foreigner be naturalized before he shall have been twenty one years in this country?	December 12, 1851	Negated 10-12
Is the encouragement of open and unlimited immigration beneficial or detrimental to the public interest?	April 17, 1853	Negated 7-13
Is the exclusion of foreigners beneficial to the union?	February 19, 1854	Negated 7-11
Is the emigration of foreigners conducive to the advancement o this government?	November 14, 1854	Negated 6-8
Is the emigration of foreigners beneficial to this country?	March 11, 1855	Negated 7-8
Should foreign emigration be encouraged in the United States?	December 21, 1856	Affirmed 7-2
Would the modification of our present naturalization laws be a judicious measure?	May 17, 1857	Affirmed 8-6

Should emigration be encouraged?	November 8, 1857	Affirmed 7-3
Does immigration tend to the benefit of a republican government?	May 18, 1862	Affirmed unanimously
Is foreign immigration beneficial to the United States?	March 17, 1867	Negated 5-7
Would the introduction of the Chinese into the Southern states be beneficial?	October 17, 1869	Negated

Table F: Debates on Religious Tolerance¹⁷³

Resolution	Date	Decision
Is the existence of Secret Societies in this country dangerous to its liberties?	June 25, 1854	Affirmed 18-3
Are the Know Nothings dangerous to the Country?	October 15, 1854	Affirmed 8-1
Should Mormonism be suppressed in the United States?	December 10, 1854	Affirmed 9-2
Are secret societies dangerous to government?	April 1, 1855	Affirmed 10-1
Ought secret societies to be tolerated	December 8, 1855	Negated 3-6
The Constitution promises civil and religious liberty to every citizen of these United States; should then Mormonism be tolerated?	October 26, 1856	Negated 3-8
Are secret societies injurious to Republics?	November 15, 1857	Affirmed 8-4
Should Mormonism be tolerated?	February 21, 1858	Negated 1-10
Has the U.S. a right to abolish Mormonism?	March 20, 1873	Negated 8-11

Table G: Debates on Political Parties

Resolution	Date	Decision
Is the spirit of party of benefit than harm to Republican forms of government?	November 25, 1838	Affirmed 9-2
Is party spirit provocative of a national happiness?	June 20, 1847	Affirmed 7-3
Is party spirit beneficial to the interests of the Union?	April 1, 1849	Negated 3-8
Is the spirit of a party of more benefit than harm to a republican form of government?	June 23, 1850	Affirmed 7-2
Is party spirit of more benefit or harm to a republican form of government?	November 3, 1850	Affirmed 13-5
Whether in times of political discussion, it is the duty of every citizen to declare his opinion, and to attach himself to some party?	May 25, 1851	Negated 6-8
Is Party spirit beneficial to the United States?	June 6, 1852	Affirmed 13-3
Is the existence of two great political parties in this country desirable?	February 12, 1854	Affirmed 14-5
Does party spirit promote the happiness of a nation?	June 24, 1855	Affirmed
Is the existence of two great political parties beneficial to this country?	January 6, 1856	Negated 3-5
Is the existence of two political parties beneficial to the government of the United States?	February 28, 1858	Affirmed 8-1
Is the existence of political parties beneficial to a state?	April 2, 1865	No vote recorded
Is the existence of political parties beneficial to a state?	March 6, 1868	Negated
Is Party spirit beneficial to a country?	February 5, 1871	Affirmed 6-4

¹⁷³ The Philodemic also debated a number of topics during this era related to the justifiable-ness of the expulsion of the moors from Spain, but the context and phrasing of the debates makes clear that these were not understood in the context of religious liberty and tolerance, but rather in the realm of ethnic rights to land.

Table H: Debates on Suffrage

Resolution	Date	Decision
Whether the right of suffrage should be universal or confined to land holders?	April 14, 1839	Negated 1-9
Should suffrage be universal or restricted to land holders?	May 9, 1841	Affirmed 8-2
Should the right of suffrage be universal?	June 11, 1845	Negated 5-9
Should universal suffrage be extended to all white men over 21?	March 21, 1847	Affirmed 10-5
Ought the right of suffrage be extended to ladies?	November 14, 1847	Affirmed 16-1
Should the privilege of voting be confined to men possessing property?	June 29, 1851	Negated 7-10
Is not universal suffrage more injurious than beneficial to our country?	December 16, 1851	Affirmed 12-4
Should the right of suffrage have a property qualification?	December 14, 1862	Negated
Should there be a property qualification for voting?	March 26, 1865	Negated
Should women have the right of suffrage?	November 26, 1865	Negated 5-6
Should negroes have the right of suffrage?	February 18, 1866	No vote recorded
Resolved, that a property qualification should be attached to suffrage?	November 22, 1868	Affirmed
Shall woman vote?	November 21, 1869	Negated
Has the Government of the United States any right to surround the election polls with U. S. soldiery?	November 20, 1870	Negated
Is the conferring of the suffrage upon the negroes of our country calculated to promote the prosperity of the United States?	November 27, 1870	No vote recorded
Resolved, that a qualification of property be required for suffrage?	October 17, 1873	Negated

Explanatory Note on Debate Sourcing

For the sake of consistency throughout the text, and to preserve the original purpose of footnotes (i.e. the easy retrieval of original sources), I have cited debate resolutions merely by proceedings date for the date on which they began to be discussed. This is done for two reasons.

First, debates in different years could stretch on for days at a time, proceeding until the Society decided to adjourn debate, which might take all week if the topic was a compelling one which each member wanted to get his turn in. Usually, as I mention in the text, debate resolutions were decided two weeks out, though often this could be changed, altered, and the set meeting for a given resolution might fill all the session with miscellaneous, non-debate business, so they would have the postpone that debate for the next week. For the sake of consistency, I have tried to date all debate resolutions insofar as possible, from the day on which the Society began to actually discuss them. With 1,200 resolutions, and 45 years of debates and meeting minutes, I hope the reader and future researcher may prove sympathetic if any citations miss the mark by a day or week or two.

The second reason is that debate resolutions for a certain week were often reworded (seemingly casually), adding prefatory or successive phrases: for instance, a common debate for-or-against the crusades might be phrased “Whether the Crusades were beneficial or not?” then changed to “Whether the Crusades were beneficial in general?” or “Whether the Crusades were

beneficial to Europe?” and so on and so forth, without any formal indication of deliberate change. This appears in the minutes frequently, so that two weeks out the Society might choose a topic, and then two weeks later the Society might announce that the resolution (with a slightly different wording) was decided. In no cases, however, in the ~1200 resolutions I recorded, does this rewording fundamentally change the basic structure or theme of the resolution, but rather generally limits or expands as seen above. Because this wording varies in various weeks, and across different proceeding books (an issue I will address shortly), I have not tried to establish a uniform system for deciding an uniform resolution style, only to make sure the decision recorded (Affirmed or Negated) is consistent with the final wording of the resolution.

Finally, the Philodemic kept a score of recording books from 1830 to 1875, including certain books that only record Society business and not debates, topics, and decisions—others are informal booklets, that were then copied over into larger record books that span a long time period (comprising the scope of multiple, earlier books). Up to now, these have been all recorded without distinction as “Proceedings” or “Journal” or “Amanuensis” books. Two large books that record 1830 – 1837, and 1837 – 1848, are secondary copies based on the original shorter proceedings books, and while often repeat the smaller books word-for-word, in other cases abridge and abbreviate those entries; in other cases, omits lengthy periods from this time periods. Because these two books are digitized, and are of the longest span, they appear to have been most often cited in prior research on the Philodemic, but I have tried to not use these books and instead used the initial, smaller scale books whose entries are often more complete and lengthy, with the exception of three periods only covered by the two longer books. In citing meeting minutes—for instance, the election of officers or constitutional amendments, I have given full citations by book, but for the sake of citing debate resolutions, in order not to overburden these appendix tables with citations, I have cited all debates according to the following list:

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- “Amanuensis Book, November 19, 1832 – February 27, 1833,” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 1, Folder 1. Georgetown University Archives.
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- “Amanuensis Book, October 3, 1869-April 23, 1874,” Actual minutes are October, 1872- April 23, 1874. Philodemic Society Archives, Box 6, Folder 3. Georgetown University Archives.
- “Amanuensis Book, September 17, 1874 – December 11, 1884,” Philodemic Society Archives, Box 6, Folder 4. Georgetown University Archives.

Debate resolutions and decisions from the periods February – April 1838, October 1836 – March 1837, and October 1841 – March 1843, not having smaller books, have been taken from the following:

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