UP FROM SLAVERY

First Responses of the
Diocese of Mississippi
to Resolution 2006-A123

Proceedings of the 2008 Seminar

Trinity Episcopal Church
NATCHEZ, MISSISSIPPI

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Moderator's Remarks

KATHLEEN JENKINS
Trinity Episcopal Church, Natchez

Good afternoon, and thank all of you for coming out on a cold, gray day. There will be hot coffee waiting for us in the parish hall immediately after the session. As senior warden of Trinity Church, I join Fr. Chip Davis, the Rector of Trinity Church, and Bishop Duncan Gray III in welcoming all of you to the parish, and to participation in this important conversation. By reaching back in time to understand more clearly the route which has brought us all here, I hope that we may with God's help see more clearly the choices in the path which leads forward from this place.

Here in Natchez I also wear the hat of National Park Service Superintendent, managing a park whose mission is "to preserve and interpret the sites associated with the history of all the peoples of Natchez, from the earliest times to the modern era...." In some cases, that is a fairly straightforward task. The free black barber William Johnson kept extensive diaries. The white McMurran family at Melrose wrote and received voluminous letters. From these documents we can glean many details of their lives. But even the best-documented narratives from Natchez history are shrouded by the veil of thousands of untold stories surrounding them, from the host of souls whose joys and unimaginable sufferings were captured in recorded history only barely or not at all. Those lives are much more difficult to tell, but are no less important to the story at hand.

The past is a strange and foreign country, though we live rather casually among its relics here today. Those who choose to visit the past must be careful about making shallow glances around them seeking only enough information to confirm their assumptions about how things were. We need to take the time and try to understand more deeply this unfamiliar, almost unimaginable, place in time where it was presumed to be normal – by much of the world – for one human being to hold another as property, bought and sold like so much livestock. Even today, 200 years after the abolition of the international slave trade and almost 150 years after the Civil War brought an end to slavery, the legacy endures, and it cannot be ignored.

The Natchez district along the east bank of the Mississippi

River has often been referred to as the cradle of Mississippi. On the bluffs here more than 300 years ago Europeans first encountered and traded with, then warred with and eliminated, the Natchez Indians whose earthen mounds provide the earliest remaining historical relics in this area. Here Europeans first brought enslaved Africans to this region to clear and till the fertile ground, and build their fine houses, and tend every detail of their lives. Here Americans formed the Mississippi Territory in 1798, then the state of Mississippi in 1817. With ownership of the land passed also the institution of enslavement of some as the foundation of economic opportunity for others.

The first Episcopal parishes began to be created around the Natchez district of southwest Mississippi in the 1820s: beginning with Christ Church, Jefferson County (Church Hill), in 1820; followed by Trinity Church, Natchez, in 1822; St. Paul's Woodville in 1823; St. James', Port Gibson in 1826. The first Diocesan Convention for Mississippi was held at Trinity Church, Natchez, in 1826.

A brief glimpse through the Diocesan history for the years before the Civil War shows that the growth of the Episcopal Church in Mississippi followed the population spread northward and eastward across the state: Trinity, Yazoo City, 1834; Christ Church, Vicksburg, 1835; St. Paul's, Columbus, and St. Mark's Raymond, 1837; Nativity, Macon, 1838; Christ Church, Holly Springs, and St. Andrew's, Jackson, in 1839; All Saints', Grenada, 1840; St. Mark's, Gulfport, 1846; St. John's, Aberdeen, Trinity, Pass Christian, St. Luke's, Brandon, and Grace Church, Canton, in 1848; Grace Church, Carrollton, and St. Alban's, Bovina, in 1850; St. Peter's, Oxford, and Redeemer, Biloxi, in 1851; Chapel of the Cross, Madison, 1852; St. John's, Pascagoula, 1855; St. John's, Ocean Springs, and St. James, Greenville, in 1856; St. Mary's, Enterprise, and Good Shepherd, Terry, in 1858; and St. Stephen's, Batesville, 1860.

The establishment and use of an enslaved African labor force underlay the social structure and the economic growth of antebellum Mississippi. In many ways, it underlay the creation and growth of each of these parishes, and the diocese as a whole. In response to Resolution A-123 from the 2006 General Convention, we are now embarked on a mission to illuminate that process. I thank Bishop Gray for his leadership in this endeavor, and I thank Fr. Chip for his conviction that Natchez should rightfully step to the fore in participation - as well as thanking those parishioners who are assisting with things today. I

thank those from across the diocese who gathered here just over a year ago for an initial planning session. I thank Hank Holmes and Bill Hanna who have served alongside me on the task force appointed by the Bishop to plan this session today, and I thank the scholars who have given of their time toward this end. We look forward to their presentations today. These are only the first steps, and we welcome others to join us on the journey.

I would now like to introduce our presenters.

Charles Reagan Wilson received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Texas at El Paso, and his Ph.D. in history from the University of Texas at Austin. His books include Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920 and Judgment and Grace in Dixie: Southern Faiths from Faulkner to Elvis. He is also coeditor of the Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, and editor or coeditor of Religion and the American Civil War, The New Regionalism, and Religion in the South. Dr. Wilson holds the Kelly Gene Cook, Sr. Chair of History and is a Professor of Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi, where he has taught since 1981 (I am sorry that I had just graduated and missed him there).

Edward Bond received his bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary and his master's degree from the University of Chicago. He received his Ph.D. in United States History at Louisiana State University, (where I had the pleasure to meet him). His books include Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony: Religion in Seventeenth-Century Virginia and St. James Episcopal Church, Baton Rouge, 1844-1994: A History, and he is co-author of The Episcopal Church in Virginia, 1607-2007. He is also editor of Spreading the Gospel in Colonial Virginia: Preaching, Religion, and Community: With Selected Sermons and Other Primary Documents. Dr. Bond is a Professor of History at Alabama A&M University, and he currently serves as editor-in-chief of Anglican and Episcopal History, the quarterly journal of the Historical Society of the Episcopal Church.

Brooks Graebner received his bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia, his master's degree at Duke Divinity School, and his Ph.D. in American Religion at Duke University. He has published several articles and delivered a number of addresses on the history of the Episcopal Church in North Carolina. He is the rector of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Hillsborough, North Carolina, and he currently serves as Historiographer of the Diocese of North Carolina

and Chair of the Bishop's study group on the legacy of slavery and racism in that diocese.

The Episcopal Church and Slavery in Mississippi: First Bishop and First Parishes

CHARLES REAGAN WILSON
University of Mississippi
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On March 4, 1857, Bishop William Mercer Green attended services at a plantation chapel at Laurel Hill, Mississippi. It was a familiar service in many ways, a special service for slaves that followed a service for whites in which Bishop Green had baptized four children and one adult. But this service for slaves made a special impression upon him, "the sight of *seventy-two* colored children of the estate, brought into the church to be admitted into the same Holy Covenant" as the whites he had baptized earlier. They ranged in age from six months to eight years, as they gathered around the chancel. As he "signed them with the holy emblem of our faith, I could not but praise God with all my soul, for bringing them to this state of salvation, and for placing them in the hands of those who feel and care for them as fellow immortals, much by the same hand, and destined for the same eternity with themselves."[1]

This scene conveyed the spirit of Bishop Green's work with slaves. He preached to and baptized and confirmed them, as he took seriously his pastoral role toward slaves. He saw them as spiritually equal with whites, yet he also affirmed their spiritual, as well as physical separateness, as seen in separate worship services. As we will see, his remarks at such times suggest a gospel of social control for a religious leader in cultural captivity. In reflecting on that service at Laurel Hill, he embodied attitudes of the slaveholder ideology that dominated not just Mississippi but the entire South, namely a paternalism that fundamentally shaped white justifications of slavery. As he said, he praised God for "placing them in the hands of those who feel and care for them." Bishop Green reminded slave owners of their responsibilities toward their dependents.

Bishop Green also reflected on his dissatisfaction that no minister worked with a slave ministry for the children he baptized in Laurel Hill. "Greatly would I rejoice to see a faithful and judicious clergyman in the pastoral charge of these numerous slaves."[2] Slaves, in other

words, represented a great community of potential Christians, yet he lamented the church's lack of resources to reach them.

William Mercer Green became the first bishop of the diocese of Mississippi in 1849, as part of the establishment of the diocese as a free standing entity. The decade of the 1850s was a momentous one in the history of the diocese, as Bishop Green and clerical and lay leaders established many of the precedents and policies that looked to the future, a future that, given the racial demography of the state, would inevitably be a biracial one. It was also a momentous time for the state of Mississippi and the South, as increasing numbers of settlers came into the Old Southwest that included the state, as evangelical groups grew in numbers and influence around Bishop Green's Episcopal community. The cotton economy boomed, bringing prosperity to many in the state, and the sectional conflict deepened heading toward the Civil War.[3]

I want to place Bishop Green in the context of antebellum Mississippi's religious culture, particularly in regard to religion and slavery, and to indicate his particular perspective on this broader southern and national issue.

Nothing is perhaps more important in understanding William Mercer Green's relationship to slavery than the missionary status of the church in antebellum Mississippi. To begin with, the church was small in numbers. In 1850, at the beginning of Bishop Green's tenure, Mississippi's population was 606,526, about half white and half black, and the diocese numbered 542 communicants. One of the greatest challenges was simply expansion of the church, and Green made clear that slaves were part of that expansion. Mississippi was largely a frontier, with rural areas of recent settlement. Albert A. Muller, rector of Natchez's Trinity Church, was president of the diocesan council in 1826, and he reflected the harshness of frontier attitudes. In his opening address to the meeting, he noted that only a few years before that meeting, "the lawless savages of the forest held their feasts of revelry, and meditated their hostile plans of revenge and murder." He praised God that "now a Christian people stand in their places, devising suitable means for the advancement of that gospel, which has brought 'peace on earth and good will toward men.'" The Episcopal church required an educated clergy, a condition that hampered its work on the frontier everywhere. Even decades later much of Green's work was literally that of a missionary to seemingly isolated places. In his first year he traveled 4,500 miles, including to many slave plantations, preached 124 times, baptized 24 people, confirmed 106, and celebrated communion on 25 occasions. The old story is not true that Episcopalians did not send missionaries onto the frontier until the Pullman sleeping car was invented. Bishop Green, in fact, recalled a day in 1851 when he "set out at sunrise, on top of a freight car," from Bovina. He wrote in his journal of a visit to Hernando, where he was "much annoyed by a dog. People ought not to let their dogs accompany them to the house of God."[4]

Despite such obstacles, many churches in the diocese find their beginnings in the energetic missionary work of Bishop Green and the clerical and lay leadership of the era, much of it accomplished with the assistance of the Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church for Diffusing Christian Knowledge in the Diocese of Mississippi, which was formally established in 1850, with the encouragement of Bishop Green and whose mission explicitly included bringing the faith to blacks as well as whites. The Society admitted it was "the duty of the Society to aid and assist owners of plantations who are desirous to give religious instruction to their slaves, and to give information of such persons to the Bishop, in order that he may provide suitable missionaries to organize parishes on said plantation." Bishop Green was an aggressive supporter of the Society, which in the decade of the 1850s had thirty-two life members and sixty-five contributing members who collectively raised over $15,000 to support missionary work. Green used each diocesan convention as a time to urge greater missionary giving and sometimes to highlight the need for work with slaves on plantations. He served as president of the Society in 1861, but the Civil War brought an end to this missionary work. Diocesan missionary activities, nonetheless, led to an increase in the number of parishes from 32 in 1854 to 44 in 1860. In the latter year, the church counted 162 black communicants, out of a total number of 1,356 communicants.[5]

The four founding parishes, in the southwestern part of the state, had been Christ Church at Church Hill, St. Paul's at Woodville, St. John's at Port Gibson, and Trinity at Natchez. From the beginning their work reflected that Episcopalians in the state would be a biracial religious community. The oldest church, at Church Hill, was formally organized in 1826. The 1857 English rural Gothic church, as with other churches throughout the antebellum South, included a slave gallery for black worshippers. Church Hill records carefully recorded black partici-

pation in the congregation. In 1843, for example, records noted that there were four slaves, designated "Coloured" and recorded by their first names—Henry, Harriett, Peggy, and Jeremiah. There were 37 white communicants in the congregation at that point. By 1848, church records at Church Hill now recorded not only the names of slaves but also their owners, as "Margaret Cosby—servant of Mrs. Juliet Green—now belonging to Robert Cox." The record also suggest the parish took disciplinary actions against slaves, noting in 1848 that Henry Johnson, the servant of Mrs. Olivia Dunbar, had been "suspended." Church Hill records showed dates of first communion of slaves as well as whites and some slave funerals.[6]

Trinity Church's Parochial Report to the Second Diocesan Convention made note of its efforts to provide worship space for slaves. It said its rector was making arrangements that would "afford to the colored people and servants a suitable and convenient place for their attendance on public worship and the Ordinances of the Church." A new gallery would accommodate the choir and organ, leaving the original gallery, "a spacious and convenient one solely for the use of such well disposed people of color and servants as are desirous of being instructed in the knowledge of God, the principles of the church, and the genuine duties of piety and religion."[7]

The stress on the duties of religion echoed the slave owner's ideology that religion could contribute to social control of slaves. One might also note that the author of this report, the church's rector, A. A. Muller, made a distinction between "well disposed people of color and servants," reflecting the important point that Natchez, and the other communities of the founding parishes, had significant free black populations, and churches included them in the same worship space as slaves.[8]

When William Mercer Green became bishop, the issue of slavery had already become not only a polarizing political issue but a divisive religious one as well. The abolition movement began criticizing slavery as an immoral institution in the early 1830s, and southerners had responded with a vigorous defense of slavery as not just a necessary evil but a positive good. By the 1840s, differences over the morality of slavery led to the separation of northern and southern Baptists and Methodists into regionally organized evangelical denominations.[9]

Bishop Green and other Episcopalians operated in a context of this growing defense of slavery and sectional division in the state of Mississippi. Presbyterian minister James Smylie authored the first biblical defense of slavery by a Mississippian with a pamphlet in 1836. Before this time, most Episcopalians probably shared the views of one ministerial traveler through the Old Southwest, who said he had never met a planter "who does not admit that slavery is an injustice and an evil." They believed, though, that "the evil must go off as it came on, by a slow and gradual method." Presbyterian Smylie, who like Bishop Green had come to Mississippi from North Carolina, was not an obscure country preacher but a prominent churchman, owner of a thousand-acre plantation and 53 slaves, making him the third largest slave owner in Amite County. At first, Mississippi's leading churches did not embrace this biblical defense of slavery. Smylie admitted in 1836 that his sentiments were at variance with the decisions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, the Discipline of the Methodist Church, "and with the Bishops of the Episcopal Church." However, when abolitionists pointedly attacked Smylie's biblical defense of slavery, opinion among southern churchmen changed, and Smylie noted that "contrary to my fears, my Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian & Baptist brethren . . . cordially approve of the doctrines of the pamphlet."[10]

The proslavery argument included a scriptural defense of the peculiar institution, which highlighted such passages as "servants obey your masters." It also included an admonition to slave owners concerning their duties. An 1836 sermon, "The Rights and Duties of Slaveholders," by the Reverend George W. Freeman, noted that the latter included obligations relating to the slaves "temporal conditions" and to "their future and everlasting state." As part of "temporal conditions," masters were not to overwork their servants and to "exercise patience and forbearance towards their faults." Slave owners were to treat slaves with "kindness and consideration," restraining themselves from excessive punishment." Slave owners were to be held accountable for the spiritual life of their slaves, bringing them "into the Christian covenant by Baptism" and then encouraging them in the faith through instruction "in the doctrines, principles and duties of Religion." Slavery had been sanctioned in biblical times, according to proslavery advocates, and in more modern times it was a "great missionary institution—one arranged by God," which empowered Christians to rescue the souls of thousands of Africans from heathenism. Because of this providential nature of southern slavery, Christian masters and mistress-

es claimed that they bore a weighty responsibility for the education and evangelization of their slaves.[11]

Episcopal parishes in more settled southern states of the time to the east had for several decades begun bringing large numbers of slaves into the church, often through creating separate services for blacks to worship. The church in those places also pointed Episcopal planters toward instruction of their slaves. Having come from North Carolina, Bishop Green would surely have known of these efforts and used them as models in Mississippi. North Carolina's Bishop Ives, for example, compiled a catechism aimed at plantation slave children. Ives undoubtedly was aware that some planters feared teaching the gospel to their servants because of its egalitarian meanings, fears that the biblically inspired slave rebellion of Nat Turner in southside Virginia had deepened. Ives assured the North Carolina diocesan convention that the Episcopal mission to the slaves was "conducted with a strict regard to the legal enactments on the subject, and under the constant supervision, in each case, of the *planter himself*. In reference also to our exertions hitherto, so far as we can discern them, we feel warranted in offering it to be decidedly favorable to due subordination."[12]

The ministerial defenders of slavery thus specifically promised that religious instruction would encourage obedience in their slaves. Bishop Green wrote that bringing slaves into the church brought a "blessed change in their spiritual condition—which will make them orderly and obedient upon principle and not from fear alone."[13]

Episcopalians in general came later to the mission to the slaves than did evangelical denominations, especially the Methodists. In 1829 the missionary committee of the Mississippi Methodist Conference began considering the possibility of religious instruction to the slaves. As a result of their missionary zeal, theological simplicity, and emotional fervor, the Methodists continued to lead in attempts to incorporate slaves into their churches. In all denominations, the mission to the slaves was most active in the plantation areas of Mississippi. Slaves received religious instruction through catechisms for children and through periodic preaching for adults. A few Mississippi plantations had full time preachers. Planter Greenwood Leflore employed a minister to preach to his 400 slaves each week. Dr. William Mercer, another of Mississippi's largest slave owners, constructed a chapel and even a rectory for a minister to slaves on his Natchez District plantation, paying the princely sum of $1,200 to a priest for his work. Planters some-

times did the religious instruction themselves, as did Dr. Martin Phillips who taught his slaves for an hour each Sunday evening. Such direct scriptural teaching by the planter promoted the image of the patriarch, a fundamental ideological underpinning of the presumed extended familial basis of the plantation, which in theory extended the hierarchical family metaphor to wives, children, and slaves as part of the God-sanctioned household.[14]

Bishop Green and other Mississippi Episcopal leaders saw blacks as possessing an inherently strong, emotional religiosity. This was a special challenge for the specific liturgical nature of Episcopalianism. The Reverend James W. Hoskins, an Episcopal priest in Jackson, wrote: "I have . . . made several attempts to get a congregation of negroes, but have failed because they have a house of their own, where they go to make as much noise as they please. The do not believe in a religion that is not noisy." This outlook suggested not only an ethnographic superiority toward blacks but also a fundamental fear of unrestrained emotionalism typical of nineteenth century southern high church Episcopalians, as Bishop Green was. The church's instruction, prayer book orderliness, and hierarchical nature would serve as a particular Episcopal contribution to social control. Historian Randy J. Sparks notes that religion was perceived to preserve "order within the system of slavery by curbing unbridled emotions."[15]

Bishop Green often praised the religiosity of slaves and even saw them as models. After preaching to slaves at the church in Oakland in 1857, he observed: "If the zeal which animates a few females of this neighborhood, was equally felt by others who call themselves friends of the Church, a neat and beautiful temple would soon rear its spire among them." At a special service for slaves at the Chapel of the Cross, Bishop Green noted that it was "very touching and impressive . . .the sight of such a congregation, on their knees, with one voice chanting their humble petition at the rehearsal of each commandment, that God would have mercy upon them and include their hearts to keep his laws." He praised "the loud and distinct manner in which these slaves make the responses," and he added that "the heartiness with which they sing both the chant and the metre tunes, may well put to shame many a congregation in our land, whose intelligence is tenfold, and who have much more reason than they to sound forth the praises of their God."[16]

Bishop Green without a doubt encouraged the church's ministry

to slaves. It often seemed, in fact, that slaves were a specially regarded part of his ministry. The rural parish of St. John's at Lake Washington, for example, had 12 white families in 1854 but "more than 1,200 colored persons" received religious instruction. In 1861, at Deer Creek in the Delta, Bishop Green baptized 49 black children, most of them belonging to William Yerger.[17]

Bishop Green's relationship with slavery was certainly not atypical for southern bishops, especially those in the Deep South. Although the Virginia church was, by American standards, a venerable one, the states to the southwest grappled with issues of founding a tradition in the antebellum era, and biracial religion was a part of it. Tennessee, for example, did not consecrate its first bishop until 1834, and the General Convention elected Leonidas Polk its second missionary bishop in 1838, with responsibility for not only Mississippi but also Alabama, Louisiana, and the republic of Texas. These Old Southwest bishops reflected the realities of a slave society. Polk, who would become first bishop of Louisiana in 1851, and Stephen Elliott, bishop of Georgia from 1841, were two of the largest slave owners in the South. Eliott denounced abolitionists as "infidels—men who are clamoring for a new God, and a new Christ, and a new Bible." Alabama's Bishop Nicholas Cobb was a tireless missionary to the slaves, baptizing more than 1,500 blacks between 1845 and 1860.[18]

Bishop Green's attitudes toward slavery were not only shared by the other southern bishops, but by national Episcopal leaders as well. New York's Samuel Seabury, grandson of the church's first bishop, endorsed slavery in an 1861 book, as did Vermont's bishop, John Henry Hopkins, who authored the *Bible View of Slavery* in 1861, affirming not only the scriptural legitimacy of slavery but the right of southern states to secede. The high church leaders across the nation were more oriented in that era toward emphasizing the church's ancient, spiritual roots, and they were sometimes inclined therefore to an indifference toward secular and political activities, generally dismissing the individualism and moral perfectionism that animated the evangelical-driven antislavery reform movement.[19]

Bishop Green and the early leaders of the Mississippi church, in conclusion, had inherited slavery as an institution coming mostly from more settled areas of the eastern South and transplanting the church's acceptance of slavery into the rich new lands of the antebellum Cotton Kingdom. The Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi was part of the Deep

South's growing defense of slavery as a missionary institution after 1830. Bishop Green and other church leaders certainly used religious instruction and slave participation in the church to encourage social control, but they also had a genuine, if sometimes sentimentalized, view of black religiosity. A recurring lament of Bishop Green was the diocese's inadequate resources to minister to the slaves.

In 1861, as the Civil War was beginning, the members of the Committee on the State of the Church in its annual report said they "cheerfully join our right reverend father in earnest urging the obligation the church and masters are under to supply our colored population with proper facilities for their spiritual welfare." If the Episcopal Church had this responsibility, it also had responsibility for the institution itself. The church ministered to some of the state's largest planters, who owned the most slaves, and their support of plantation ministries helped buttress and legitimate the slave society.[20]

In 1860, Bishop Green spent a few days on Second Creek, near Natchez, confirming seven slaves of Mrs. Raily, of whom he was guest. After the confirmation, the slaves presented him with a private communion set, described as "a token of their thankfulness for having thus enjoyed the privilege of being received as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ." Observers said he was "greatly touched" by this gift.[21]

NOTES

1. "Appendix: Journal and Address of Rt. Rev. William Mercer Green," in *Journal of the 31st Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of Mississippi, Held in Grace Church, Canton, April 24th, 25th, and 27th, 1857* (Natchez: Daily Courier, 1857), p. 37.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

3. David T. Bailey, *Shadow on the Church: Southwestern Evangelical Religion and the Issue of Slavery, 1783-1860* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); David J. Libby, "Plantation and Frontier: Slavery in Mississippi, 1720-1835," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Mississippi, 1997; James David Miller, *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South* ((New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); ChristophZer Morris, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002); Charles S. Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1933).

4. *Journal of the Proceedings of a Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi, Held in the City of Natchez, Mississippi (Diocese)*, vol. 1 (1826), pp. 9-10; *Episcopal Church in Mississippi, 1763-1992* (Jackson: Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, 1992), pp. 27, 34.

5. *Episcopal Church in Mississippi, 1763-1992*, pp. 37-38.

6. Ann Beckerman Brown, *Christ Episcopal Church, Church Hill* (Jefferson, County, Mississippi: Christ Episcopal Church, 1997), pp. 242-278.

7. Charles Stietenroth, *One Hundred Years with 'Old Trinity' Church, Natchez, Mississippi* (Natchez: Natchez Printing and Stationery Company, 1922), p. 17.

8. For the story of the most successful free black citizen in Natchez, see William Ransom Hogan, ed., *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993).

9. C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985); Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

10. Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), pp. 114-120.

11. The sermon is discussed in Richard Rankin, *Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen: The Religion of the Episcopal Elite in North Carolina, 1800-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), p. 143. See also David Hein and Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr., *The Episcopalians* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), p. 77.

12. Rankin, *Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen*, p. 144.

13. Green quoted in Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, p. 92.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 91; *Episcopal Church in Mississippi*, p. 39. See also Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

15. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, p. 93. Hoskins quote is in Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, p. 138

16. *Journal 1857*, p. 36-37, 40; *Episcopal Church in Mississippi*, p. 39.

17. *Journal 1857*, p. 41; *Episcopal Church in Mississippi*, p. 39.

18. Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 63, 91.

19. Hein and Shattuck, *The Episcopalians*, 77.

20. *Episcopal Church in Mississippi*, p. 39.

21. Stietenroth, *One Hundred Years with 'Old Trinity' Church*, p. 22.

The Episcopal Church and Race in 19th-century North Carolina

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PREFACE

The relevance of this paper topic to these proceedings may require some explanation. What is the value of adding the perspective of North Carolina to the work being done here in Mississippi?

Know that I am not here to tell a different story, but simply to expand upon and to underscore the story already laid out by Professor Bond and Professor Wilson. The Episcopal Churches in North Carolina and in Mississippi during the antebellum period were closely interwoven. For example, the first Bishop of Mississippi, the Rt. Rev. William Mercer Green, was the founding Rector of my parish in North Carolina, and he served there for fourteen years, from 1825 to 1838. His active interest in slave evangelization is as much part of our parish and diocesan history in North Carolina as it is part of the history of the church in Mississippi. So this paper is perhaps best regarded as preamble and parallel to the other two. I offer it in hope that it will strengthen our shared sense of the importance of addressing the legacy of slavery throughout the Episcopal Church.

* * * * *

"The truth's the light and the truth never hurt nobody. I'm proud of my kinfolks. Besides, I'm telling this child pure history." So Cornelia Fitzgerald, the grandmother of prominent civil-rights attorney and pioneering black Episcopal Priest Pauli Murray, responded when Pauli's Aunt Pauline would question the value of her recounting the Smith family pedigree for young Pauli as a girl growing up in Durham, North Carolina?a pedigree rooted in the fact that Cornelia was the daughter of a slave mother and a white master whose family were prominent members of the Episcopal Church and benefactors of the University of North Carolina. This made Cornelia both the niece and the slave of her mistress, Mary Ruffin Smith—and communicants of

the same church.[1]

I, too, am here to tell pure history. And I share with Cornelia Fitzgerald a surpassing confidence in the value of truth-telling. But the truth I am about to tell is neither easy nor painless to recount. To address the topic of slavery and race in the antebellum Episcopal Church requires a willingness to probe beneath glib and sentimental versions of the past and to explore the depths of a complicity which leaders of our church forged with a violent and cruel institution, a complicity which they masked from themselves with various self-serving strategies. But if we do not tell the truth about our past, including the parts we might heartily wish to avoid, we cannot properly meet the distinctive challenges and opportunities which lie before us today for healing and reconciliation.

The Episcopal Church in North Carolina before the Civil War was populated with slaveholders and with slaves. And that was as true in my parish, St. Matthew's, Hillsborough as anywhere else. The two leading rectors of St. Matthew's in the antebellum period, founding rector William Mercer Green (1825-1838) and Moses Ashley Curtis (1841-47; 1856-1872), were themselves slaveholders. And the single largest slaveholder in the state on the eve of the Civil War was Paul Cameron, owner of Fairntosh and Stagville plantations in what is now Durham County, and resident of Burnside, the estate from which St. Matthew's own property is carved.[2] But sharing baptized membership in the community of St. Matthew's along with the Camerons and Greens and Curtises and Ruffins were many slaves. In fact, of the 550 or so baptisms which were recorded in St. Matthew's parish register between 1828 and 1864, 142—over 25%?were persons of color.

That number reflects the high value placed on slave evangelization in the antebellum Episcopal Church in North Carolina. All three antebellum bishops of our diocese—John Stark Ravenscroft, Levi Silliman Ives, and Thomas Atkinson—were consistent and vigorous promoters of slave evangelization who did not hesitate publicly to commend those members of the church—lay and clergy—who embraced this work.[3] Thus we find Bishop Ravenscroft, on his first visitation to our county in 1823, noting in his journal with evident satisfaction the efforts at slave education.[4] And we find Bishop Ives at St. Matthew's a decade later, himself baptizing nine slave children belonging to the rector, Mr. Green, with Mr. Green and the children's parents serving as baptismal sponsors.[5] To demonstrate that public commitment to evan-

gelizing slaves even further, Green oversaw the 1835 addition to St. Matthew's of a slave gallery, an architectural feature which was also incorporated at the Chapel of the Cross in Chapel Hill in the 1840s, the church Green founded after resigning his Hillsborough cure to take a faculty position at the University ten miles to the south.[6]

Such sustained commitment to slave evangelization was not insignificant in time or money, so it behooves us to ask: What did the clergy and bishops of the diocese hope to achieve through these efforts? Perhaps the single best statement of the matter can be found in the 1836 pamphlet entitled "The Rights and Duties of Slaveholders" by George W. Freeman, then Rector of Christ Church, Raleigh, a pamphlet published with Bishop Ives' express encouragement.[7]

From Freeman's perspective, the call to evangelize slaves was the fulfillment of a solemn duty which Christian masters had towards their slaves as human beings whom providence had placed in their care. Indeed, slave evangelization stood at the center of a slaveholding ethic in which Freeman urged moderation in the exercise of mastery with respect to physical demands and disciplines, but chiefly urged attention to the spiritual welfare of slaves. In doing so, Freeman placed particular emphasis upon the obligations of parents for children, arguing that by extension, masters have equal-if not greater-obligations for their slaves.[8] For children at adulthood become their own masters, he observed, "[b]ut as for our slaves, their state of pupilage never ceases; they are always with us; they are always members of our families; they are always subject to our authority and control; and what is further and more to the point, though ever so far advanced in years, they are, from the very nature of their condition, always children; they are but children in intellect, children in wisdom, children in understanding and judgment!"[9] Thus, argued Freeman, the obligation to bring one's own children to the sacrament of baptism was equally applicable to one's slaves.

Moreover, he contended, the obligation does not end there, but embraces religious instruction as well. By 1830 it was illegal in North Carolina to educate a slave, so Freeman advocated use of an oral catechism with slaves. And Freeman made clear that his advice applied to all slaveholders—large and small. Should the slaveholder own too many slaves to instruct personally, he should underwrite the expense of a chaplain or minister to fulfill the work. For Freeman, then, slave evangelization was simply a concomitant of Christian slaveholding.

One could not serve as master of another person without also serving as a guardian and guarantor of that person's religious wellbeing.[10]

But beyond this, the leading proponents of slave evangelization from the 1830s onward were vitally interested in defending the practice of slavery itself. Freeman was no exception. He began his discourse with a rehearsal of the biblical justification for slavery, noting its presence (and tacit approval) in both old and new testaments. This led him to conclude that "no man nor set of men in our day, unless they can produce a new revelation from Heaven, are entitled to pronounce [slavery] WRONG; and that to brand them who, in the Providence of God, are now holders of slaves, with the epithet of ANTI-CHRST-IAN, is presumption in the extreme."[11] Rather, contended Freeman, the slaves of African descent in America are actually the recipient of God's merciful providence in that they have been delivered from much worse forms and conditions of slavery in their native land into "a land where, though slaves, they serve, for the most part, humane and enlightened masters, are secured the enjoyment of the necessaries and most of the comforts of life, and may become partakers of the blessings of the Gospel of Salvation."[12]

This benign view of slavery in the South not only bolstered the defense of slave evangelization to white readers but it also shaped the content of the religious instruction of the enslaved population. During the time Freeman served in Raleigh, there lived in the city an enslaved man named Lunsford Lane, who used his remarkable entrepreneurial skills to create a business for himself as a tobacconist and who was ultimately able to purchase his own freedom and that of his family. After leaving North Carolina in 1842, Lane wrote an account of his early life in which he describes the content of slave evangelization. His first words echo Freeman's sentiments: "I, with others, was often told by the minister how good God was in bringing us over to this country from dark and benighted Africa, and permitting us to listen to the sound of the gospel." But Lane then added a countervailing appraisal of divine providence: "To me, God also granted temporal freedom, which man without God's consent, had stolen away."[13]

Lane pointedly objected to the selective use of scripture in sermons preached expressly for persons of African descent:

> I became quite familiar with the texts, "Servants be obedient to your masters."?"Not with eye service as men pleasers."?"He that knoweth his master's will

and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes," and others of this class: for they formed the basis of most of these public instructions to us. The first commandment impressed upon our minds was to obey our masters, and the second was like unto it, namely, to do as much work when they or the overseers were not watching us as when they were.[14]

Lane conceded that intermingled with such admonitions to submission and obedience, there was sometimes excellent content, but the fixed barrier between the conditions of slavery and freedom remained a constant theme. Indeed, Lane reported that he was at one time drawn to the ministrations of "one very kind hearted Episcopal minister whom I often used to hear" until that minister "argued from the Bible that it was the will of heaven from all eternity we should be slaves, and our masters be our owners." Lane and other slaves who evidently enjoyed some liberty in the choice of religion then left the Episcopal Church, "for like some of the faint hearted disciples in early times we said, — 'This is a hard saying, who can bear it?'[15]

Thus slave evangelization ceased to be purely about the spiritual welfare of slaves and became a powerful element in the creation of a slaveholding worldview which sought to project a picture of household harmony and shared piety between master and slave, even as it articulated an unrelenting message of social control. In this picture, the cause of slave unrest and dissatisfaction was laid at the feet of masters who failed to promote the piety and order of Episcopal worship and instruction. And critics of slavery were told that they did not fully appreciate the extent of harmony and satisfaction which filled the house of exemplary Christian masters.[16]

This way of conceptualizing slavery reached its apotheosis in Bishop Ives' remarkable account to the 1846 convention of spending Holy Week and Easter at Somerset Place, the Eastern North Carolina plantation of Josiah Collins III, "holding daily services, delivering lectures, and commencing a new course of oral catechetical instructions to the servants." Ives reported to his diocese that "The services here were of the most gratifying character, fully justifying all that has been said and anticipated of the system of religious training heretofore pursued on these plantations. When I saw master and servants standing side by side in the holy services of Passion week—when I saw all secular labor on these plantations suspended on Good Friday and the cleanly clad

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multitude thronging the house of prayer to pay their homage to a cruci-
fied Saviour—and when I saw, on the blessed Easter morn, the master
with his goodly number of servants kneeling with reverent hearts and
devout thanksgivings to take the bread of life at the same altar—I
could not but indulge the hope that ere long my spirit may be refreshed
by such scenes in every part of my diocese; while I could not help
believing that, had some of our brethren of other lands been present,
they would have been induced to change the note of their wailing over
imaginary suffering into the heartfelt exclamation, 'Happy are the peo-
ple that are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people who have the
Lord for their God.'"[17]

Now to construct such a glowing and harmonious picture of the
plantation household, one had to overlook a great deal of evidence, a
point which was not lost on slavery's critics. Within months of publi-
cation of the diocesan journal, Bishop Ives' account was subject to a
withering critique from northern abolitionist William Jay. Writing as
"A Protestant Episcopalian," Jay suggested that Ives was in fact a will-
ing victim of a carefully-orchestrated event, for Ives had conveniently
overlooked two salient considerations in his account: 1st, that the
slaves had no choice in the matter of their attendance or instruction,
and 2nd, that slaves had no power to parlay their standing as co-reli-
gionists into a meaningful re-negotiation of the conditions of slavery
itself. Jay put it to the Bishop succinctly: "You well know, sir, that in
the choice of their church and creed the slaves are passive; and that,
had the Scuppernong communicants been sent to auction on Easter
Monday, they would each thenceforth have worshipped in the place
and manner directed by 'the highest bidder.'"[18]

What Jay and other anti-slavery advocates saw was this: name-
ly, that at its essence, slavery was not about benevolence but about
control—a point made with terrible clarity by Thomas Ruffin, Chief
Justice of the NC Supreme Court and chief benefactor of St. Matthew's
parish when he wrote in *State v. Mann*, his oft-cited 1829 ruling (over-
turning the assault and battery conviction of a man for shooting and
wounding a slave who was trying to run from a beating), that "the
power of the master must be absolute, to render the submission of the
slave perfect." Ruffin was not unmindful of the harshness of his con-
clusion. "I must freely confess my sense of the harshness of this propo-
sition" he continued, ". . . And as a principle of moral right, every per-
son in his retirement must repudiate it." But the restraint of cruelty

towards slaves, he contended, belonged to the realm of voluntary con-
siderations not legally enforceable, such as "the private interest of the
owner," "the benevolences . . . seated in the hearts of those who have
been born and bred together," and the "deep execrations of the com-
munity upon the barbarian, who is guilty of excessive cruelty to his
unprotected slave."[19]

Ruffin's brutal honesty about the foundations of slave law elicit-
ed the following response from Harriet Beecher Stowe: "No one can
read this decision, so fine and clear in expression, so dignified and
solemn in its earnestness, and so dreadful in its results, without feeling
at once deep respect for the man and horror for the system."[20] Indeed,
Stowe was so moved by what she saw as the conflict between Ruffin's
personal moral sensibilities and the stark realities of the law he felt
compelled to enforce as a jurist that she made Ruffin and his case the
centerpiece of her novel entitled *Dred*. What Stowe did not know, but
which more recent research into Ruffin's private papers has revealed, is
that Ruffin was perhaps more self-serving than she realized, in that he
evidently had no qualms about treating slaves harshly on occasion and
even engaged for a number of years in speculative slave-trading.[21]

But Ruffin was certainly not the only member of St. Matthew's
parish to struggle with the question of how to reconcile (or finesse) the
brutal realities of slavery with Christian obligation. The private corre-
spondence of William Mercer Green's successor, the Rev. Dr. Moses
Ashley Curtis, reveals several instances of crisis occasioned by the ten-
uous legal status of marriage between slaves. One instance occurred in
the spring of 1845, when Kitty, Mrs. Curtis's maid, wished to marry a
slave owned by the local Presbyterian minister, John Knox
Witherspoon. Evidently Curtis was against sanctioning the marriage
on the grounds that he expected to be leaving Hillsborough in the near
future, which would put the viability of the marriage at risk. He shared
his concern with his father-in-law in Wilmington, Armand DeRosset,
who had no particular scruples about a common-law relationship, but
who did make the following offer: to purchase the man-servant for his
son-in-law so that "they may marry and go with you any where . . ."[22]

But slavery in this country was never simply about the problems
raised by having human beings as property—it was always about race
and the need to develop a rationale for restricting the practice of slav-
ery only to persons of color.[23] To read the so-called 'biblical' and 'scien-
tific' defenses of slavery is to encounter the profound depth of racism in

American life and culture—a racism which settled into what H. Shelton Smith called the "racial orthodoxy" of the South in the years following the Civil War.[24] It was this 'orthodoxy' which perpetuated the notion of intrinsic black inferiority and which made the Episcopal Church in the South continue to seek solutions to the fulfillment of the Great Commission within the parameters set by racial segregation. Thus, when William Mercer Green and other Southern bishops gathered at Sewanee in 1883 to discuss the best way to minister to former slaves, they could see no better solution at hand than to call for the creation of special Missionary Organizations within each diocese for the purpose of keeping black and white congregations separate and distinct.[25]

Who, then, can be surprised to learn that following the Civil War, the former enslaved members of St. Matthew's, Hillsborough, did not voluntarily continue to seek her ministrations? The defiant exception was Cornelia Fitzgerald—Pauli Murray's grandmother. She continued to bring her children to St. Matthew's clergy for baptism, so that of the twelve baptisms of persons of color recorded at St. Matthew's in the seventeen-year period following the Civil War (1865-1881), three were her daughters and a fourth was a child she sponsored.[26] "The truth's the light," Cornelia Fitzgerald would say. By the light of the truth disclosed in our legacy of slavery and its attendant racism, may we be led to acknowledge both the *benevolence* which leaders like Green and Ives sought to achieve by their evangelical work with slaves and the *blindness* they exhibited to the fundamental incompatibility of slavery with Christian practice. And may we acknowledge with gratitude the hard, courageous, persistent, reconciling work which attended the struggle to reverse the attitudes and to dismantle the structures which defined and delimited the relationship of black and white members of our Episcopal church in the 19th century.

* * * * *

POSTSCRIPT

That work of dismantling is yet unfinished, as recent national and diocesan resolutions acknowledge. As historiographer of the Diocese of North Carolina, I see the following challenges to be addressed in the years ahead.

1. To invite the members of our church to learn the story of the church, slavery, and race; to encourage reading of excellent materials that are already close at hand and to visit historic sites where first-rate

interpretation of slavery occurs. One of the projects that I will be working on this year in North Carolina is to compile a collection of primary and secondary materials for congregational study—whether one is in a historic parish or a new mission. I want to close the gap between what scholars know and what everyone else knows?and do it in a way that will be of interest to both historically white and black congregations.

2. To encourage deeper research and scholarship in parish and diocesan records. I was blessed to be able to interest one of my parishioners, Dr. Sally Greene, in researching Thomas Ruffin. To date, she has produced several scholarly articles and helped to organize a day-long symposium on Ruffin's legacy at UNC-Chapel Hill. My hope is to support more of that kind of work with my colleagues in other historic parishes—some of whom have expressed their own personal interest in the material.

3. To foster settings and events where prayer, reflection, conversation, sacramental action can occur; where the reuniting of stories and lives that have been severed can be made whole; where we can wrestle with the significance of what we are learning and think about the steps we will want to take in light of that knowledge. In North Carolina we are blessed to have the support of our bishops and the resources of our diocesan school of ministry to sustain this work. It won't be done in this triennium, but we can "make a right beginning of repentance" in North Carolina as well as in Mississippi.

NOTES

1. Pauli Murray, *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) 33.

2. Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1992) 52,53.

3. John Hope Franklin, "Negro Episcopalians in Ante-bellum North Carolina" *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* XIII.3 (September 1944) 216-234.

4. John Stark Ravenscroft, Manuscript Journal in the Ravenscroft Papers, microfilm on deposit at the North Carolina Collection, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

5. Parish Register of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Hillsborough, North Carolina, May 19, 1833.

6. William Mercer Green offered the following comment in his parochial report to the 1835 Diocesan Convention: "The addition of a Gallery to the Church will, it is hoped, be the means of ensuring hereafter, a larger attendance of coloured persons, who have hitherto been often excluded for want of room." *Journal of the Annual Convention, Diocese of North Carolina,* 13.

7. George W. Freeman, *The Rights and Duties of Slaveholders* (Raleigh: J. Gales & Son, 1836) [3]. Freeman later became Bishop of Arkansas.

8. *Ibid* 31.

9. *Ibid* 32.

10. *Ibid* 34-36.

11. *Ibid* 12.

12. *Ibid* 19.

13. "Narrative of Lunsford Lane" in William L. Andrews, ed., *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, & Thomas H. Jones* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 108. I am indebted to my colleague, the Rev. Donald Lowery, for this reference.

14. *Ibid* 109.

15. *Ibid* 109. Lane does not name the Episcopal minister; it could well be George Freeman himself, or possibly one of his predecessors.

16. Franklin, "Negro Episcopalians" 221-224; see also Michael T. Malone, *Levi Silliman Ives: Priest, Bishop, Tractarian, and Roman Catholic Convert* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1970) 115-128.

17. *Journal of Annual Convention 1846*. In making reference to 'our brethren of other lands' Ives had in mind the criticism of the Episcopal Church for acquiescing in slavery issued by Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford. See Malone, *Ives* 124.

18. [William Jay], A *Letter to the Right Rev. L. Silliman Ives, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of North Carolina, Occasioned by his late Address to the Convention of his Diocese. By a Protestant Episcopalian* (Washington, D.C.: Buell and Blanchard, 1846) [7].

19. Quoted in Gregg D. Crane, *Race Citizenship, and Law in American Literature* (Cambridge: University Press, 2002) 72,73. See also Mark V. Tushnet, *Slave Law in the American South: State v. Mann in History and Literature* (Lawrence, KA: University Press, 2003).

20. Quoted in Crane, *Race, Citizenship, and Law* 245.

21. Eric Muller, "Judging Thomas Ruffin and the Hindsight Defense" Unpublished paper delivered at the Symposium *The Perils of Public Homage: State v. Mann and Thomas Ruffin in History and Memory*, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, November 16, 2007.

22. A. J. DeRosset to M.A. Curtis March 31, 1845. Curtis Family Papers. Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill.

23. George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: University Press, 2002) 79.

24. H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But ... Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972)

25. Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr. *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000) 12-15.

26. Parish Register of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Hillsborough, North Carolina

Slavery in the Diocese of Mississippi's Convention Journals, 1826-1861

EDWARD L. BOND
Alabama A & M University
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A committee chaired by Virginia's assistant bishop, the Rt. Rev. John Johns, offered a forthright assessment in 1860 of the diocese's efforts to provide proper religious instruction to what the committee termed the "colored population within our limits." "It may rather be regarded as a failure, and it is high time to inquire the cause and apply the remedy." (1861, 67) This finding came twenty years after the diocese's then assistant bishop, the Rt. Rev. William Meade, had asked the 1840 diocesan convention to appoint a committee to investigate the "best means of promoting the religious instruction of servants." (1841, 12) Had the bishop of Mississippi, William Mercer Green, evaluated his diocese's work among the state's slave population during those same two decades, he likely would not have described it as the failure that Johns did.

The Church Herald, the weekly newspaper of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi published for about three years during the early 1850s, proclaimed in its 15 December 1854 issue: "The Episcopal Church does not meddle with slavery." The anonymous author, perhaps the paper's editor, further explained: "Above all, she knows herself as distinct from the State: and so, as an institution dis-associated by her nature and her purposes from all political questions, measures and ideas, and even from all questions and measures of social and civil law. . . . she knows and feels herself to be *limited* by that commission. To preach Christ and to worship God, is her commission from God, and her mission among men." The editorial further denounced Northern churches that prayed for "the poor slave" rather than "for the 'oppressed' everywhere."[1] This so-called meddling in politics, in fact, led Bishop Green to complain in 1856 of the publication of *The Anti-Slavery Churchman*, a paper published by an Episcopal priest in Wisconsin, claiming that such writings would damage the church's unity because they would "stir up more and more ill blood between the North and the South; will rend asunder our hitherto United Zion; and put us upon a level with

the jarring and intermeddling sects around us." The bishop did not have to add that several of those "jarring and intermeddling sects" had already split along sectional lines over the issue of slavery.[2]

The words articulated in *The Church Herald* in 1854 suggest the Diocese of Mississippi's approach to slavery from the 1820s through the 1860s, accepting the institution but preaching Christ and the worship of God among all men. At one and the same time, Mississippi Episcopalians accepted the institution of slavery and the common humanity of the slave. And lying beneath those efforts was the idea that Christianity equaled the triumph of white civilization over the darkness of heathenism. Addressing the 1826 diocesan convention held in Natchez, the Rev. Albert A. Muller, rector of Trinity Church and president of the convention, noted: "But a few years have passed away, since, in this place, the lawless savages of the forest held their feasts of revelry, and meditated their hostile plans of revenge and murder; and now a christian people stands in their places, devising suitable means for the advancement of that gospel, which has brought 'peace on earth and good will towards men.'"[3] In 1858 Bishop William Mercer Green advised the diocesan convention that one way in which the church ministered to slaves was by *making Christians of their Masters*," for "Masters, who are Christians, will not be satisfied to leave their slaves in heathenism; nor will they be apt to think that the want of true religion can be supplied by superstition or fanaticism, or by any form of partial and perverted Christianity."[4] Sometimes in more obvious ways and sometimes in more subtle ways, this attitude permeates the convention reports through the 1860s.

As for slavery, the convention journals of 1826, 1827, and 1829 mention nothing at all either about the institution or efforts to Christianize the state's slave population. The first reference to this work appeared in 1828 when the Rev. Muller noted that Trinity Church had started a Sunday School in which provision had been made "that not only the children of the member of the Church, may be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; but a plan has been devised, that colored children may also be rightly instructed in the knowledge of religion, and in the faith of the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour."[5] Muller's parochial report listed thirty-four white and twenty colored scholars.[6] His next year's parochial report, however, indicated just thirty students, none of them listed as black.[7]

Nearly ten years later, in 1838, the Rt. Rev. Leonidas Polk con-

secrated St. Mary's Church at Laurel Hill. Built at the expense of William Newton Mercer for his family and neighbors, this church—which was in union with the diocese for several years—also ministered to Mercer's large population of slaves. This was a significant development, for St. Mary's was but the first of several churches and missions in the Diocese of Mississippi devoted largely to slave congregations. The Reverend Daniel H. Deacon explained his duties at St. Mary's: "I have been regularly engaged in visiting through the week, the servants attached to the estate, for the purpose of giving them religious instructions and in preaching to them on Sunday evenings."[8] A year later in 1843 he described the "most prominent part of my ministerial duty" as "the instruction of slaves" on Mercer's plantation, and noted not only that he had performed divine service "for the benefit of the slaves every Sunday," but also that the adult slaves who had been baptized the previous year were now candidates for confirmation, "all of them having maintained a consistent christian character." Deacon had also begun to preach on two neighboring plantations. "To the white congregation," he explained, "I preach on alternate Sundays, until the setting in of winter."[9] On Easter Day 1844, Bishop James Otey, Mississippi's provisional bishop, preached at St. Mary's to the black congregation there, confirmed sixteen people, and celebrated the Holy Eucharist.[10]

Despite the work at St. Mary's and a few other parishes, diocesan leaders urged Episcopalians in the state to do more. In 1841 the diocesan convention unanimously passed a resolution introduced by Dr. A. P. Merrill, a lay delegate from Trinity Church, Natchez, recommending that all clergy in charge of parishes "devote a portion of their time and talents" to work among slaves.[11] And in 1843 Bishop Otey used his annual address to "urge upon my brethren of the clergy the great importance of seizing every suitable opportunity to instruct these people."[12] In 1851 a planter who had recently moved to Mississippi from Maryland wrote to Bishop William Mercer Green to ask for his guidance: "I need counsel on many subjects connected with the management of those of my fellow-creatures whom Divine Providence has placed under my charge. I am particularly anxious to instruct the young children, for whom, I have no doubt, much may be done, under the Divine blessing, provided it be done in the right method. Might not much good be done, if a convention of the planters belonging to our Church were called by you to meet at some central point, and interchange opinions on this and other kindred subjects."[13]

Statistics provided in the annual parochial reports suggest that clergy did begin to take work among slaves more seriously. More parishes reported slave baptisms, confirmations, and even marriages. In 1846, for example, St. Mary's at Laurel Hill, Christ Church at Church Hill in Jefferson County, and the Washington Mission in Adams County all reported slave marriages. In 1848, slave marriages took place at Christ Church in Vicksburg, St. Mary's, Trinity Church in Natchez, and at the Church of the Crucifixion in Issaquena County.

Nonetheless, the diocese's primary evangelical mission to slaves flourished not in parish churches but in missions or parishes like St. Mary's in Laurel Hill dedicated primarily to slave congregations. Similar institutions included the Church of the Crucifixion in Issaquena County founded on Good Friday 1847 primarily for George Yerger's family and his slaves;[14] the Port Gibson Mission, organized in Claiborne County in 1844 on the plantation of a "Dr. McGruder";[15] the Mission in Washington County begun in late 1844;[16] missions established at Hurricane Place (the plantation of Joseph E. Davis) and Diamond Place (the plantation of Edward Laughlin) in the 1850s; and St. Cyprian's Chapel associated with Grace Church, Okolona.[17] When the Rev. A. P. Merrill, "the missionary to the slave population in the neighborhood of Port Gibson" proposed that he split his time between that charge and white congregations at Grand Gulf and Port Gibson, Bishop Otey denied his request, in part because the missionary appropriation paying Merrill's salary had been dedicated to clergymen working among the state's slave population.[18] These institutions drew largely on missionary funds for support, and benefited as well from the organization in 1850 of the Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church for Diffusing Christian Knowledge, in the Diocese of Mississippi, a society dedicated in part to providing support for plantation owners "desirous to give religious instruction to their slaves" and to helping provide the bishop with funds to "provide suitable Missionaries to organize Parishes on said plantations."[19]

The Chapel of the Cross in Madison County, although not founded as a slave mission, nonetheless ministered to a large slave population. Henry Sansom, the parish rector, noted in his 1855 parochial report that while the white portion of the congregation would always comprise a "little flock," the "most delightful feature in this Parish . . . is the field of usefulness it presents for the *religious improvement of the slave.*" He also shed light on the methods at least some priests used to

spread the Gospel to slaves. Sansom admitted that for a time he wondered if African Americans were "susceptible of *genuine* religious culture," complaining: "Who is sufficient for these things?" He soon decided, however, that he could not "build upon another's foundation" and that he would need to "unteach" what he considered the slaves' false understandings of religion before he could begin to preach them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sansom's approach seemed successful. He claimed that slaves from neighboring plantations whose masters belonged to other denominations, in fact, attended services at the Chapel of the Cross because "we hear so much more of the bible, and receive so much more instruction about the commandments of God."[20] In addition to reporting significant numbers of slave baptisms, confirmations, and communicants, Sansom also indicated each year between 1855 and 1859 the amount of donations to African missions made by the parish's slave members.[21] (The slaves of an Episcopal priest in South Carolina, the Rev. J. Grimke Drayton, engaged in a similar activity: they planted a missionary crop and donated the money they earned it to support African mission work.[22]) And while it is impossible to discover how much, if any, of the amount was contributed by slaves, Bishop Green noted in 1855 that a "congregation at one of our river plantations, of which nine-tenths are slaves," had donated funds "sufficient for the support" of a seminarian at Nashotah House.[23]

Bishop Green described other difficulties Episcopal priests faced when they tried to spread the Gospel among the state's slave population, particularly the influence of black preachers. He noted in 1856 that the Rev. F. W. Damus of Hurricane Place had been impeded in his work of "instructing the blacks at this place . . . for the last year or two, by the counter efforts of two or three colored preachers, whose presumptuous, and even profane teachings, their fellow servants receive with superstitious reverence and fear."[24] Green noted the next year that "the evil influence so long exerted upon" the slaves at Hurricane Place "by four or five of their number presuming to administer the sacraments will now be at an end."[25] He failed to describe what measures had been taken.

Green's annual journal reports also indicated that joint black and white baptisms, confirmations, and celebrations of the Eucharist took place from time to time. These instances, however, were often tinged by paternalism and the bishop's sentimental view of slavery. In 1851, for example, Green confirmed two people on Whitsunday at St.

Philip's in Kirkwood, "one white and the other colored. It was a truly pleasing sight thus to see the faithful servant and the young mistress kneeling side by side to receive the Divine blessing, and to dedicate themselves to the service of God in their respective stations."[26] "Blessed indeed," he wrote in 1859, "was the sight of nearly fifty of these slaves, kneeling by the side of this mistress at the Altar of their Common Lord and Master."[27] His remarks on the baptism of six slave children he owned, "after making an address to their parents on the nature and obligations of the rite," clearly showed his paternalistic attitude: "I rejoiced not only in the privilege of dedicating to God these little bond-servants whom he had entrusted to me, but also of standing surety for them in those solemn engagements imposed upon them by that Sacrament. In this holy suretyship I was joined by her, to whom, equally with myself, is committed the spiritual, as well as temporal welfare of these little dependants."[28] In 1856 Green confirmed twenty-six people at the Chapel of the Cross, one white person and twenty-five slaves. He was much pleased by this event, noting that "the gratification was no less enhanced by seeing at her side, a number of those who, in the Providence of God, will ere long look to her for both instruction and protection."[29]

We must keep in mind that Green took the rite of confirmation seriously, thanking the diocese's clergy in 1855 for not regarding it as a "mere *form*, through which the young are expected to pass, so soon as they have attained a certain age, and have committed to memory the Catechism of the Church."[30] Nonetheless, the confirmation of slaves was not necessarily equal to the confirmation of whites. Slaves could only receive the rite, as the bishop noted in 1861, with the permission of their owners, yet another indication of paternalism.[31] And more often than not, blacks and whites worshipped separately, both during Green's episcopal visitations and on other Sundays. Slaves at Christ Church in Vicksburg, for example, attended divine service in a room in the church's basement rather than in the church itself.[32] Even when they did worship together, blacks often sat in lesser accommodations. At Bolton's Depot in 1855 Green preached to a mixed congregation, the whites seated under the cotton shed on seats "covered with clean cotton bagging," while " a triple tier of bales at the further end formed a very good sort of gallery for the accommodation of the wandering but attentive blacks."[33] Green himself may even have prepared less fully for visits to slave congregations; he often preached extemporaneously to

congregations composed primarily of slaves, just as he did to groups made up largely of children, while he preached from a prepared text for white congregations.[34]

The Episcopal Church in Mississippi not only ministered to slaves, but it was also dependent on them. The diocesan episcopate may offer the clearest example in the convention records. Support for the diocesan bishop came from both parish assessments and from additional donations made by wealthy, slave-owning planters.[35] Mrs. John Quitman, John T. McMurran, Edward Turner, and George Turner, all of Natchez, George S. Yerger, of Vicksburg, and Mrs. Joseph E. Davis of Hurricane Place all contributed substantial sums to support the bishop. To continue the diocese's support of the bishop, some of these individuals as well as others put up bonds that paid on average between $12 and $60 in interest each year to the "Bishop's Fund."[36]

Missionary efforts to African Americans continued after the Civil War, complete with the paternalism of the pre-war years. While urging the diocese to minister to the freedmen, Bishop Green described them as "men in growth, but children in understanding," and asked Episcopalians to work to prevent "that unhappy class from relapsing into the native barbarism and crime of the land from which their fathers came," even though "the tender and affecting relationship in which they once stood to us has been rudely broken." While the church continued to try and attract black members, the number of black Episcopalians plummeted as the freed people left the Episcopal Church for the Baptist and Methodist denominations, often in churches led by black ministers. To combat this flight, the Rev. George Harris of the Chapel of the Cross suggested ordaining blacks to the deaconate in an effort to attract freedmen to the church.

What then does all of this mean? Certainly, the convention journals suggest in places that Christian slaves made better slaves, but mixed with this attitude seems to be the statement from the 15 December issue of *The Church Herald*: "To preach Christ and to worship God, is her commission from God, and her mission among men." The bishops of the diocese seem to have believed this, and so too the records suggest did many priests and lay people. I suspect also, that in the case of Bishop Green and some of the clergy, there was the belief that the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer was a superior form of worship, a form that should be offered to as many people as possible, black and white, slave and free. To read the Diocese of Mississippi's

antebellum convention journals is to read sources about preaching Christ, administering the sacraments, and worshipping God. Unlike the convention journals of some other dioceses, and Virginia comes immediately to mind, those of Mississippi are nearly silent on the theological debates then roiling the church. There was, of course, a brief allusion to Bishop Levi Silliman Ives of North Carolina and his perversion to Roman Catholicism, a brief mention of an evangelical association within the church and its harmful effects, and a short approving discussion of ritualism, but none of these dominated Mississippi's conventions. What then does all of this mean? I suspect that mixed with racism, paternalism, the acceptance of slavery as an institution, the suspicion that becoming Christian made slaves better slaves, and the advance of Christianity as the defeat of heathenism, that many Mississippi Episcopalians believed that spreading Christianity among the state's slave population was also what God had commissioned them to do.

NOTES

1. *The Church Herald*, 15 December 1854. (236)

2. Alvin W. Skardon, *Church Leader in the Cities: William Augustus Muhlenberg* (Philadelphia, 1986), 242-43.

3. *Journal of the Proceedings of a Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Mississippi, Held in the City of Natchez, On the 17th and 18th Days of May, A.D. 1826* (Natchez, 1826), 9.

4. *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Mississippi. Held in St. Andrew's Church, Jackson, April 22d, 23d, 24th, and 25th, 1858* (Natchez, 1858), 15.

5. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Mississippi, Held on Wednesday the 7th day of May, 1828. In Christ Church, Jefferson County* (Natchez, 1828), 4.

6. Ibid., 5.

7. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi, Held in St. Paul's Church, Woodville. On the 6th and 7th of May, 1829* (Natchez, 1829), 6.

8. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of Mississippi, Held at Christ Church, Jefferson County, Thursday, April 7th, 1842* (Nashville, 1843), 36.

9. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of Mississippi, Held at the City of Vicksburg, Thursday, March 30th, 1843* (Nashville, 1843), 19-20.

10. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of Mississippi; Held at the City of Jackson, Thursday, May 2d, 1844* (Jackson, 1844), 14.

11. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi, Held at Raymond, Wednesday, May 5th, 1841* (Natchez, 1841), 14-15.

12. *Journal of the Convention, 1843*, 16.

13. *Journal of the Convention, 1850*, 11, 17.

14. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, of the Diocese of Mississippi, Held at Christ's Church, Jefferson County, Wednesday, May 10, 1848* (New York, 1848), 31, 37-38.

15. *Journal of the Proceedings of a Special Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of Mississippi; Held at the City of Vicksburg, Thursday, May 7, 1846* (Jackson, 1846), 37.

16. *Journal of the Convention, 1846*, 38-39.

17. *Journal of the Twenty-Eighth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi. Held in St. Andrew's Church, Jackson, May 31, June 1, 2, and 3, 1854* (Natchez, 1854), 75-76; *Journal of the Twenty-ninth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi. Held in Christ Church, Vicksburg, May 18th, 19th and 21st, 1855* (Natchez, 1855), 29; *Journal of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Mississippi. Held in Christ Church, Vicksburg, April 26, 27 and 28, 1860* (Natchez, 1860), 32, 68-69.

18. *Journal of the Convention, 1846*, 13.

19. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Mississippi. Held at Trinity Church, Pass Christian, June 16, 17, 18 and 19; and at St. Andrew's Church, Jackson, July 22, 23 and 24, 1852* (Natchez, 1852), 107-8, 114.

20. *Journal of the Convention, 1855*, 86-87.

21. *Journal of the Convention, 1855*, 86; *Journal of the Thirtieth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi. Held in Christ Church, Vicksburg, April 25th, 26th and 28th, 1856* (Natchez, 1856), 73-74; *Journal of the Thirty-first Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Mississippi. Held in Grace Church, Canton, April 24th, 25th, and 27th, 1857* (Natchez, 1857), 61-62; *Journal of the Convention, 1858*, 73; *Journal of the Thirty-third Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Mississippi. Held in Trinity Church, Natchez, April 28, 29, 30, and May 1, 1859* (Natchez, 1859), 58-59.

22. J. Carleton Hayden, "Conversion and Control: Dilemma of Episcopalians in Providing for the Religious Instruction of Slaves, Charleston, South Carolina, 1845-1860," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 40 (1971): 146.

23. *Journal of the Convention, 1855*, 33.

24. *Journal of the Convention, 1858*, 46.

25. *Journal of the Convention, 1859*, 41.

26. *Journal of the Convention, 1851*, 11, 48.

27. *Journal of the Convention, 1859*, 41.

28. *Journal of the Convention, 1856*, 12.

29. *Journal of the Convention, 1856*, 30-31.

30. *Journal of the Convention, 1855*, 29-30.

31. *Journal of the Thirty-fifth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Mississippi. Held in Christ Church, Holly Springs, April 25, 26 and 27, 1861* (Jackson, 1860), 40.

32. See, for example, *Journal of the Convention, 1855*, 14; *Journal of the Convention, 1860*, 42; and *Journal of the Convention, 1851*, 46-47.

33. *Journal of the Convention, 1856*, 16.

34. *Journal of the Convention, 1856*, 14, 29.

35. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-first Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of Mississippi; Held at The City of Jackson, Wednesday, January 27, 1847* (Jackson, 1847), 27-28; *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-third Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, of the Diocese of Mississippi, Held at Trinity Church, Natchez, May, 17th, 18th, 19th, 1849* (New York, 1849), 19.

36. *Journal of the Convention, 1852*, 57-59; *Journal of the Convention, 1855*, 47-48; *Journal of the Convention, 1856*, 39-40; *Journal of the Convention, 1857*, 16.