



Our History

Racism in the Anglican and Episcopal Church of Maryland

By Mary Klein, diocesan archivist and Kingsley Smith, historiographer.

The Anglican Church in colonial Maryland and the Episcopal Church in the State have been deeply embedded in racism from the beginning, and have been in denial about the Church's role in slavery and its racist aftermath—tolerating and then accepting it, depending on it and even blessing it (Much of the material which tell us the story is found in our diocesan archives, named to honor the late F. Garner Ranney.)

For all its ironies and ambiguities, the Proprietary Colony granted to the Calvert family in the 17th Century really did establish an unusual system of religious toleration, proclaiming, though not always obeying, the radical notion that Christian disagreements about doctrine and practice should not literally be death or life matters. But this glimmer of decent respect for others did not prevent the colonial system from exploiting labor, at first as indentured servants, and by 1638 as chattel slaves. Soon the law was that all slaves were Africans, and all Africans were legally slaves unless they had solid evidence of manumission.

In 1692, to guard against papist plots and the threats of dissenters, the process of establishing the Church of England began, so that by 1702 only Anglicans could hold public office, the several vestries were in effect the local governments, and all free men (and all slaves, male and female) were taxed at 40 pounds of tobacco per annum to build the churches and pay the parsons—tobacco that was raised largely by slave labor.

The Rev. Thomas Bray came to Annapolis in 1700 as commissary for the Bishop of London in order to get the colonial parishes organized. He gave instructions that, in the spirit of his Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, there be missionary concern for "the red and the black" in the colony, but the Native Americans were largely ignored, and the Church's work among the Africans was never effective—as we will soon see.

Independence meant disestablishment of the Church, whose economic welfare and social status remained deeply embedded in slavery. After Maryland abolished slavery in November, 1864 (by a 51% vote!), black Marylanders were still suppressed, through sharecropping, unfair wages and legalized discrimination, especially separate schools. Parishes and diocesan institutions were almost entirely segregated.

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts sent a questionnaire to all clergy in the Colonies in 1724, and both the questions and answers are very telling. Charged with converting the natives, catechizing the slaves, as well as ministering to the settlers in America, Colonial clergy, under the auspices of the Bishop of London, were overseen by a Commissary from the Bishop.

Question number 7 read, "Are there any infidels, bond or free, within your parish; and what means are used for their conversion?" Of the 23 responses from Maryland clergy, none made any effort to convert

the Indians. Some said the Indians “are averse to Christianity”, one reported that he did not understand their language, and another said there were a few Indians in his parish, but nothing was done for them.

But efforts to minister to slaves varied greatly. Only 3 reported, in answer to the 1724 questionnaire, that there was no instruction or baptism of slaves, and the remaining 20 reported slave baptisms, several slave communicants, and one parish noted it had a free black family of communicants. Robert Scot of All Faith Parish in St. Mary’s County answered that “most slaves attend church with their masters”, but William Tibbs at Old St. Paul’s in Baltimore said that “most Negroes refuse instruction”. Clergy were frustrated in their attempts to catechize the slaves, because many masters feared the consequences of education. Some thought that once a slave was baptized, he or she would have to be freed.

The Rev. Thomas Bacon, of Talbot County, published a series of sermons he had addressed to “Masters and Servants” in 1743. He told the slaves that the clergy were “under a particular temporal tie, as we are supported by a poll tax, in which every slave, above sixteen years of age, is rated as high, and pay as much, as the master he or she belongs to, and have an equal right to instruction with their owners.” He advised them that whatever good they did on earth would be rewarded by The Just Master in Heaven who “will pay you good wages and will make no difference between you and the richest freeman upon the face of the earth.” At the same time, he advised them that their position in the earthly life was ordained by God, and that if “Wicked Overseers” mistreated them, they must bear it, trusting that their masters would receive their just rewards in heaven. The only exception to obeying their masters’ every wish would be if they were commanded to do something sinful such as “steal, murder, set a neighbor’s house on fire, to do harm to anybody’s goods, or cattle or to get drunk, curse and swear, or to work on Sundays.”

To the masters, Bacon insisted that the color of one’s skin had nothing to do with having a human soul, and that Negroes were capable of salvation, and should not be treated as brutes or beasts of burden. He insisted that masters should bring them for baptism, and suggested they employ a schoolmaster to teach their slaves the Creed, Lord’s Prayer and Ten Commandments. He said that “Next to our children and brethren by blood, our servants, and especially our slaves, are certainly in the nearest relation to us. They are an immediate and necessary part of our households, by whose labours and assistance we are enabled to enjoy the gifts of Providence in ease and plenty, and surely we owe them a return of what is just and equal for the drudgery and hardships they go through in our Service”. Masters should set good examples; pray for the conversion of their slaves; establish the use of daily Family Prayer, to which the servants should be invited; read the Bible to their children and slaves; insist the slaves attend church on Sundays, then ask them what they had learned; and to be careful in the choice of Overseer.

Bacon also proposed and established a Charity Working School for the “maintenance and education of orphans and other poor children and Negroes” in 1750 in Talbot County; and for Frederick County in 1761, after he became rector of All Saints’ church there. His plan was this: “Their souls are to be taken care for, by training them up in the Way they should go; their bodies are to be fed, lodged, clothed and supplied with medicines when they are sick, and they are to be trained up to Industry.” He thought that 50 pounds could be spent in buying two slaves to train as school servants.

The first American census of 1790 showed that the overwhelming majority of clergy and Lay Delegates to the Convention of the Diocese of Maryland owned slaves. Our beloved Thomas John Claggett, who, only two years later was to be consecrated the first Bishop of Maryland and the first bishop consecrated on American soil, was listed as owning 7 slaves, while serving as the rector of St. James’ Parish in Ann Arundel County. The Lay Delegate from the parish, Richard Harwood, Esquire, owned 35, and Mr. Richard Cromwell, the Lay Delegate from neighboring St. Margaret’s Parish, owned 21.

The Rev. Joseph Jackson of Queen Anne parish in Prince George’s County, and a slave-owner himself

wrote to Bp. Claggett in 1796 asking, for a parishioner of his, if the Bishop were interested in buying a certain slave. The slave's name was Ned, and he was the property of one Major Burgess. Here is how Ned was described by Mr. Jackson, "I observe him to have borne the character of an honest, industrious, good-tempered slave...His age is not certainly known, but Mrs. B. says it exceeds not 25 or 26. The terms for this man and a son of his, about 5 or 6 years of age, 125 pounds upon 6 months' credit, or 120 pounds ready money. Should the boy be parted from his father (which it is desired he should not be), a deduction of about 25 pounds will be made...If I might add my opinion, it should be that, as slaves are now commonly sold, he would be very cheap."

How matter-of-fact and business-like the decision to break up a family seems. We do not have Bishop Claggett's reply, but in his 1816 will, there were no slaves mentioned.

The registrar of the Vestry of St. Peter's parish in Talbot County responded to questions sent by Bp. Claggett in 1797, with a tirade against Quakers and Methodists who were stirring up trouble by preaching abolition. He also proposed that "manumitted slaves and those descendants be not permitted to run about from County to County or to leave that in which their manumitter resided unless to quit the state entirely and not to possess their manumissions or any copy thereof, so as to be able to furnish runaway slaves therewith, who assume their names..."

In Charles County, both the clergy, John Compton and Hatch Dent, were slave owners; indeed, of the 19 clergy listed in the 1791 Journal who could be located in the 1790 census, all owned slaves except for the Rev. George Bower out in Washington County in Western Maryland, and The Rev. James Kemp, who would become Maryland's second bishop.



James Kemp was born in Scotland in 1764, and came to Maryland in 1787, a year after graduating from Marischal College in Aberdeen. He was consecrated America's first bishop Suffragan in 1814. (And that is another fascinating and controversial event in the life of the Diocese of Maryland.) In answering questions posed to him by a Mr. William Helmsley in an 1809 letter, Kemp wrote that "slavery is unquestionably contrary to the spirit and genius of the Christian dispensation." He also wrote that a timetable for eventual abolition would be the best way to end that evil, admitting that "considerable time would be required". He said that "the most correct line of conduct for a Christian to pursue would be to exert his influence on the public opinion to produce a legal plan of gradual emancipation." He went on, "I was taught at an early period to abhor slavery. And when a few slaves came into my possession, I immediately formed a plan for their gradual emancipation, which I am carrying swiftly into effect."

The report on the State of the Church, as sent to the Convention Journal of 1816, reminded members of the church of their obligations "to make every possible provision for the religious instruction of the people of colour; a duty now so generally, and most criminally ignored. They would take the liberty to

recommend to all, and more especially to the proprietors of slaves, the excellent sermons of the Rev. Thomas Bacon..." And Bishop Kemp admonished, "Nor let me omit to call your attention to the people of colour. This is part of our Lord's vineyard, in which there is need of great exertions. And you will, in all probability, experience most success, by addressing them by themselves and in a familiar and easy way." By 1818, the Convention had Bacon's sermons printed and ready for distribution.

A letter written to Bp. Kemp in 1824 by the Rev. Henry L. Davis of Annapolis is in some contrast to the letter to Bp. Claggett concerning a slave. Mr. Davis had just lost his job as President of St. John's College, and wrote Bp. Kemp on a very personal and delicate matter on December 9. "This note will be handed to you by my man Sandy, who is sent to your city for the purpose of being hired as a waiter in a tavern, boarding house or private family. I have become so poor that I can no longer afford to keep so valuable a servant about my house. His grandfather, whom I have brought over from Cecil, will answer all my purposes in the house and the garden. Sandy was raised by my mother, and regularly trained to house work. He is a tolerable cook and gardener and an excellent waiter, brisk, intelligent and honest. ... I beg that you will have the goodness to inquire among your friends for a home for Sandy. If you find a place, have the further goodness to stipulate that his wages shall be paid, at the end of every quarter, to Mr. Edward J. Coale."

This letter seems to show that Mr. Davis held affection, esteem and concern for Sandy. He trusted him enough to go to Baltimore alone from Annapolis, and deliver a letter to the bishop. However, Davis' poverty, and perhaps other considerations in 1824, prevented him from freeing Sandy. He wanted to find a "home" for Sandy, not an "owner", but Sandy's wages were to be sent to a third party, presumably to pay a debt. He also assumed that the Bishop's friends were also slave-holders, even in the city of Baltimore.

The people who were the Ante-bellum church in Maryland, like the church in Maryland at every time and on every question, held varied views on slavery, worship and instruction for slaves, and whether owning slaves was compatible with Christianity.

St. Paul's Church in Baltimore did organize The Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroes and Others Unlawfully Held in Bondage in 1789. Although it was the 4th anti-slavery society to be organized in America, it never drew in many supporters, either in Baltimore or anywhere else in the state.

By 1820, the problem of what to do with freed slaves became so worrisome that [The Maryland State Colonization Society](#) was begun. Backed by such Episcopalians as Francis Scott Key and Chief Justice Roger Taney of Washington, and John Eager Howard of Baltimore, the goal of the Society was to secure an African colony as a new home for freed slaves. Sure that people of color could never be fully accepted as equals in America, where they were obvious by their skin color, these Colonizationists were by no means Abolitionists. In a scathing 1843 letter to Mr. John Brackenridge, Francis Scott Key's daughter Anna wrote that her father was "altogether averse to being classed with the abolitionists" and he had only freed "3 or 4 selected individuals who were trained with a view to sending them to [Liberia](#), but who preferred to remain in this country and were permitted to do so." She said she was not worried that anything "will ever associate the memory of my Father with Northern abolitionists in the minds of Southern men."

Tuesday, October 31st, 1843.
 Trinity Parish, Carroll & Baltimore Count
 In the Parish Church

William M. Canfield.

Twenty first Sunday after Trinity, November 1st,
 St James (First African) Church, Baltimore

Abdugo Carter
 Ann Carter
 Mosby Carter
 Eva Carpenter
 Peggy Denny
 Jane Dyke
 Harriet Buchanan
 Julia Buchanan
 Sarah Ann Young

All late of Trinity Parish, Charles Co.
 but about to sail for the Maryland
 Colony, Africa; being manumitted
 servants of the Rev. Henry G. Goodwin
 by whom they have been prepared
 and are recommended for confirm-

Confirmations at St. James' as recorded by Bishop Whittingham in 1843.

(Click here for a larger image)

On November 1, 1843, Bishop Whittingham entered the following note into his confirmation book: "At. St. James' First African Church, Baltimore. Nine persons all late of Trinity Parish, Charles County, but about to sail for the Maryland Colony, Africa; being manumitted servants of the Rev. Henry Goodwin by whom they have been prepared and are recommended for confirmation."

Several clergy wrote to Bp. Kemp saying they could not take a parish in Maryland because it was a slave-holding state. And at least one wrote saying he did not want any parish outside a slave state. The Rev. John Scott, writing from the Eastern Shore of Maryland, deplored the state of slavery, but distrusted Abolitionists. He said, "The colored population seems to fare well enough so far as their bodies are concerned, but do thy not 'perish' in the most important sense, 'for lack of knowledge?' A determined slaveholder can, with a very bad grace, condescend to impart religious instruction to 'those in bondage' for he is afraid of entrusting them with that message which teaches reciprocal duties throughout the whole circle of human connexions ..."

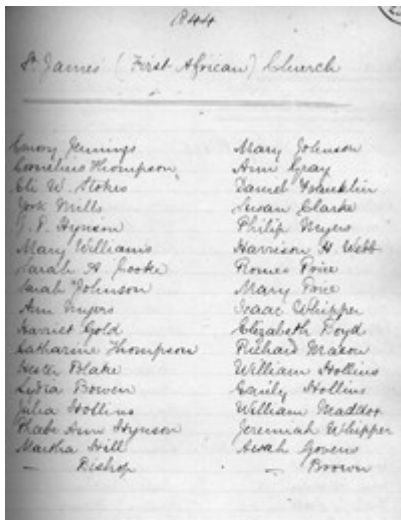


St. James' Lafayette Sq., c.1949
(Click here for a larger image)

St. James' First African Church in Baltimore City, the first Episcopal Church specifically for Blacks south of the Mason-Dixon Line, was founded in 1824 by the Rev. William Leavinton as a place "where both bond and free of African descent might worship the common Father of all." However almost immediately, the free black members wanted to exclude slaves from membership. Leavinton's answer was to quote scripture, "the Apostle says, whether bond or free, ye are all one in Christ Jesus", and to quote Bishop Kemp who said the object of building such a church

was that “both bond and free might serve God; and that above all people in the world, we ought to be the most united in the world.”

The Rt. Rev. William Rollinson Whittingham became bishop of Maryland in 1840, and served until his death in 1879. He was a New Yorker, a Unionist, and a man who worked for toleration in every quarter. He was also a meticulous record-keeper. During his first year in office, he began to list everyone he confirmed, and keep those lists in a book. He divided his lists by always noting “colored” confirmations in a separate column. His accounting of how many “colored” people were confirmed, where they were confirmed, and what their names were provide a fascinating glimpse into the makeup and practices of the diocese on the eve of the Civil War.



*Communicants at St. James’
Lafayette Square as recorded by
Bishop Whittingham in 1844
(Click here for a larger image)*

The new bishop took a survey of communicants in 1840, asking rectors to send him a list of names. More parishes in St. Mary’s County supplied names of “colored communicants” than any other county. (The southernmost county on Maryland’s western shore, St. Mary’s County numbered about 5,900 slaves among their total population of 13,700, by no means the county with the largest slave population; but by percentage, 42% of the population were slaves. Actually Charles County had a slave population of almost 60% slaves.) The parishes in St. Mary’s County reporting “colored” communicants included All Faith Parish listing 53 communicants, including 4 “colored persons”, all with only first names. King & Queen Parish reported 72 communicants, including 12 “colored” communicants, (with first names only) but noted that “almost 11 others, whose names are not known at present” should also be included. St. Andrew’s Parish listed 56 communicants, including 9 colored persons, all with both first and last names. Trinity Church located in William & Mary Parish enumerated 20 communicants, including 5 “colored”, 4 of whom had the surname of Briscoe.

Upon quick examination, it would seem that those “colored” confirmands with first names only were slaves; and those with first and surnames were free. But we cannot be certain. In the 1870 census, five years after the end of the Civil War, in Maryland there were hundreds of black inhabitants listed with no surname at all. Also the practice of euphemistically calling slaves “servants” in Maryland clouds the facts.

Bishop Whittingham had a narrow line to walk during the Civil War in order to hold the Diocese together. Although he was a vocal anti-slavery man and Unionist, in writing to a friend in June of 1861

he said, "My difficulty is that two-thirds of the most intelligent of the laity of my diocese, and fully 1/5 of the soundest, most earnest and devoted and (strangely enough!) most learned of my clergy ... insist that they do true allegiance in contending for 'States' rights'." And in another letter to an Eastern Shore clergyman, "Most unhappily the men (and women) so beguiled by subserviency to the Southern movement are mostly in the Church, and throughout the diocese are among its leading members, both clerical and lay."



Only one parish in Maryland has any discernable tie to the Underground Railroad, [Emmanuel Church in Cumberland](#). If you look at the map of Maryland, the state becomes very narrow in Western Maryland, in some places only a couple of miles away from the Pennsylvania border. Cumberland had become a major trading center by 1805 when it was chosen as the starting point of the National Road as it crossed through western Pennsylvania to the Ohio River. The National Road Stage Company began operating a line through Cumberland in 1842; and the B&O Railroad finished a line to Cumberland in 1853. With so many travel possibilities, fugitives could walk, be hidden in wagons, stages or trains, and come very close to freedom in Cumberland. According to the oral history of Emmanuel Church, runaways were hidden in the church basement, and the black sexton, Samuel Desno, rang the church bell when it was safe to enter the church.

The Church in Maryland seemed puzzled over what to do with the number of freed slaves living in its diocese following the Civil War. A Committee on Freedmen had been appointed in 1866, and in 1867 reported "no plan, except that every possible effort be made upon the part of the clergy to extend their ministry to them. If we would not incur the guilt of turning them away into the darkness of Romish superstitions, or to the agrarian creeds of fanaticism, or to sectarian forms and preaching, we must provide churches and schools, teachers and minister for them." In a further statement, the committee said, "Things are tending more and more to make this People as separate and distinct a nation as possible. If they are to be reached through the church, it can only be done by following the example of antiquity in giving to each distinct nationality churches and pastors of their own." They also suggested that local pastors "direct and mold their (his black congregants) intellectual life...until they can be prepared to regulate their ecclesiastical affairs in communion with our Branch of the Church Catholic."

Being in temperament and custom Southern, even the most liberal of Marylanders thought that it would be impractical for black and whites to worship together. Blacks would tend to be relegated to the far corners of the church, would never be elected to the vestry, never sing in the choir, nor serve at the altar, much less be part of Diocesan gatherings. Strangely, a lone dissenting voice was heard on the Eastern Shore. The Rev. Robert Scott in Snow Hill urged "worshipping together to dissipate prejudices."

Every bishop throughout the rest of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries pushed for funding for separate "Colored Missions", and attempted to secure African-American clergymen to fill those missions. The Rev. Alexander Crummell worked tirelessly in Washington, D.C. and the Rev. Calbraith B. Perry in Baltimore. Bp. William Paret in the 1890's championed a National Commission for Church Work Among Colored People, schools for colored children, and stated in his 1889 Convention Address, "Of the whole number of persons confirmed, only 85 were colored people... The population of the diocese is 967,000, with some 250,000 colored people. Are we doing our duty? Are we doing as much as we would do, if they were heathen in some distant land? The clergy cannot all

preach to the Negroes, nor do I think it is everyone's duty. Their race instinct insists on their separate gatherings. But let every congregation give one annual offering for the Commission on Church Work Among the Colored People." Bp. Paret was also a trustee of King Theological Hall, a seminary for African-Americans in Washington, D.C.

It seems the best the Diocese of Maryland could do was push for separate churches and institutions for African-Americans, well into the 20th century. Not a voice of prophecy, but very much a church OF the culture, it did not advocate anything radical, but was held captive by the majority views of the region.

The Diocese of Easton (the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay) was separated in 1867, and Washington (the District and four southern counties) in 1896; this closing part refers to the continuing Diocese of Maryland.



After the Civil War the Church identified itself with the Jim Crow system of separate (and quite unequal) facilities, programs and clergy. St. James' and 5 other "colored churches" were erected in Baltimore City, and a few more elsewhere. Of these, five in the City and one in Annapolis are primarily African-American congregations. There are fewer than 1,000 blacks out of about 9,000 Episcopalians in Baltimore, whose population of 630,000 is two-thirds black. Still, among Episcopalian black church leaders from Baltimore have been Supreme Court Justice [Thurgood Marshall](#), the [Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray](#), Representative [Parren Mitchell](#), and Bishop Michael Curry. In fact in 1935 Justice Marshall, then a young lawyer, had won the case of [Murray vs. Pearson](#) in which the Court of Appeals of Maryland removed the color barrier for admission of blacks to the University of Maryland Law School.

The systemic disparities continued to be taken for granted well into the 20th Century. In the 1948 the editor of the newspaper [The Afro-American](#), himself a member of St. James', challenged Bishop Noble Powell and the trustees of the diocesan Church Home and Hospital to admit Negroes. This was politely, firmly and categorically denied. The board president replied curtly, "It is impossible for us to consider this matter at this time." There was a clear threat that "a change in policy... would result in withdrawal of the present staff... [and] the closing of the institution." In 1956, a Board committee recommended "working toward the admission of Negro patients, nurses and staff... insofar as it is feasible," but not yet, since "desegregation... would bring such a number of Negro patients that our already over-crowded facilities would become ineffective."

In the 1950s, when the Diocese opened a swimming pool at the [Bishop Claggett Diocesan Center](#), the issue of allowing black and white children to swim together was raised—this time accepted, thereby

opening a new era: Claggett became the first diocesan institution to show people how integration works.

However, in the '50s and '60s many congregations in racially changing neighborhoods in Baltimore chose to close down and move to the suburbs. This "white flight" went largely unchallenged, but beginning in 1963 Bishop Harry Lee Doll began working heroically to support the civil rights movement and to align the Episcopal Church of Maryland on the side of racial justice and harmony. In his first Convention address as diocesan, he said, about race relations, "Each one of us was baptized into the death of Jesus Christ. Every soul so baptized is a member of that Body... be their skin black or yellow or red or white." In 1968, just after the assassination of Martin Luther King and the racial turmoil in the streets of Baltimore, he said "The time has passed when we can be neutral in this fight,." and wrote in a pastoral letter "Those of us who are white Christians must confess to complacency and a clinging to the known and familiar in regard to civil rights." He endorsed the Poor People's March and the General Convention Special Program, spoke out publicly for integration in the Church, and was frequently the object of anger and insult by his flock.

But this was the turning point. Instead of looking for polite ways to keep black Episcopalians out of their churches, now the majority white churchpeople are searching for gracious and effective ways of welcoming all races and affirming diversity. In this decade Bishop Robert Ihloff has challenged the church to wrestle vigorously with overcoming our sad history by studying reparations for specific programs to end racial, economic and social inequality. Our Suffragan, John Rabb, has been a national leader as chair of the General Convention Commission on racism. In 2007 our diocesan Convention, after long study and warm debate, strongly (though not unanimously!) [adopted a formal apology](#) for the Church's acceptance of racism, and pledged to move now into effective action.

Presented at "400 Years of Anglican Episcopal History", the Tri-History Conference (National Episcopal Historians and Archivists; the Historical Society of the Episcopal Church; Episcopal Women's History Project), June 24-27 2007, in Williamsburg, VA

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
4 E. University Parkway
Baltimore, MD 21218
(410) 467-1399
(800) 443-1399
(410) 554-6387 Fax

© 2012 The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
This page last modified February 13, 2008