

6 Vignettes from the Racial History of the Diocese of North Carolina

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September 12, 2019

1. & 2. Slave evangelization: George Freeman, Levi Silliman Ives, and Lunsford Lane
A racialized gospel; paternalism, power, and social control
3. Reconstruction and the failure of the Episcopal Church to attract black members:
Anna Julia Haywood Cooper calls out patronizing attitudes
4. The theology of an Apostolic and Catholic Church and the realities of Jim Crow:
Odell Greenleaf Harris confronts Bishop Penick
5. The perceived threat of the Black Power Movement:
White backlash and belated embrace of integration;
Black witness to the history of racial separatism in the Church
6. The Dream of God:
Pauli Murray's "full circle" and the promise of racial healing and reconciliation

These six 500-word vignettes are intended to illustrate important aspects of our racial history here in North Carolina from the Antebellum period, through Reconstruction and Jim Crow, to Civil Rights and Black Power. The first and second vignettes are a composite picture of slave evangelization, with overlapping themes, and so they are grouped together.

Vignettes 1 and 2: Slave Evangelization

On the eve of the Civil War, the Episcopal Church represented a small fraction of the overall population of North Carolina. There were about 2,800 communicants of our church in the entire state; there were about 5 times that many Presbyterians and about 50 times as many Baptists. But if we look at the religious affiliation of those persons owning 70 or more slaves, our percentage soars to an astounding 57.5% (compared to 16% for the Baptists and 9% for the Presbyterians). That provides some idea of how enmeshed our church was in the economics of slavery.

This investment dictated the terms and conditions for the Church's work with the enslaved population. All three of North Carolina's antebellum bishops—Ravenscroft, Ives, and Atkinson—were strong and vocal supporters of slave evangelization and commended the clergy and laity who undertook this work. 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

From Freeman's perspective, the call to evangelize slaves was the fulfillment of a solemn duty which Christian masters had towards human beings whom providence had placed in their care. Freeman placed particular emphasis upon the obligations of parents for children, arguing that by extension, masters have equal-if not greater-obligations. For children at adulthood become their own masters, he observed, "but **as for our slaves, their state of pupilage never ceases; 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!**" Thus, argued Freeman, the obligation to bring one's own children to Christian faith was equally applicable to one's slaves. Should the slaveholder own too many to instruct personally, he should underwrite the expense of a chaplain or minister to fulfill the work.

This way of framing the church's response to slavery reached its apotheosis in Bishop Ives' account to the 1846 diocesan convention of spending Holy Week and Easter at Somerset Place, the Eastern North Carolina plantation of Josiah Collins III. Ives reported:

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 multitude thronging the house of prayer to pay their homage to a crucified 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 [critics of slavery] been present, they would have been induced to change the note of **their wailing over imaginary suffering** into the heartfelt exclamation, 'Happy are the people that are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God.'¹

A benign view of slavery in the South not only served to bolster slave evangelization in the eyes of the white audience but it also permeated the religious instruction of the enslaved population. During the time George Freeman served at Christ Church, 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 ultimately purchase his own freedom and that of his

¹ Within months of publication, Bishop Ives' account was subject to a withering critique from northern abolitionist William Jay. Jay noted that Ives had conveniently overlooked the fact that the enslaved had no choice in the matter of their attendance or instruction. He 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.'"

family. After leaving North Carolina in 1842, Lane wrote an account of his early life in which he describes the content of slave evangelization. “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.”**

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.

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?’”

Vignette 3: The Failure of the Church during Reconstruction

In 1868 a precocious 10-year-old named Anna Julia Haywood, a Raleigh native born into slavery, was awarded the chance to attend the brand-new St. Augustine’s School. As she progressed in her studies, she insisted on taking a Greek class intended for male theology students studying for the ministry and subsequently married the instructor, George Cooper, who was himself only the 2nd African American ordained in North Carolina. Their marriage took place in 1877, when she was 19 years old; she was a widow by the age of 21. Mrs. Cooper then left St. Augustine’s for further training at Oberlin and returned to St. Augustine’s as a college-level teacher in 1885. She went on to become a prominent educator in Washington, DC and eventually to earn her doctorate from the Sorbonne at age 65.

Dr. Cooper’s great contribution to African American literature came in 1892, with the publication of a collection of essays entitled *A Voice from the South: by a Black Woman of the*

South. Here she spoke pointedly to the inability of the Episcopal Church to draw black support. In her estimation, the problems were not intrinsic to the character of the Church itself.

Thinking colored men almost uniformly admit that the Protestant Episcopal Church with its quiet, chaste dignity, its instructive and elevating ritual, its bright chanting and joyous hymning, is eminently fitted to correct the peculiar faults of worship—the rank exuberance and often ludicrous demonstrativeness of their people. Yet, strange to say, the Church, claiming to be missionary and Catholic, urging that schism is sin and denominationalism inexcusable, has made in all these years almost no inroads.

Now where is the trouble? Something must be wrong. What is it?

A *Black woman of the South* would beg to point out possible oversights in this southern work. One is *not calculating for the Black man's personality*; not having respect, if I may so express it, to his manhood or deferring at all to his conceptions of the needs of his people.

A conference of earnest Christian men have met at regular intervals for some years past to discuss the best methods of promoting the welfare and development of colored people in this country. Yet, **strange as it may seem, they have never invited a colored man or even intimated that one would be welcome to take part in their deliberations.** Their remedial contrivances are purely theoretical or empirical, therefore, and the whole machinery devoid of soul.

A colored priest of my acquaintance recently related to me, with tears in his eyes, how his reverend Father in God, the Bishop who had ordained him, had met him on the train on his way to the diocesan convention and warned him, not unkindly, not to take a seat in the body of the convention with the white clergy. To avoid disturbance of their godly placidity he would of course please sit back and somewhat apart. I do not imagine that the clergyman had very much heart for the Christly (!) deliberations of that convention.

Vignette 4 Confronting Jim Crow

The Ven. Odell Greenleaf Harris (1903-1983) was born in Warren County, NC. As a young child, he moved with his family to Littleton, NC to attend the black Episcopal parochial school there. He went on to St. Augustine's College in Raleigh and then to the Bishop Payne Divinity School in Petersburg, Virginia. In 1933 he was ordained to the diaconate and assigned to the cure of three black congregations: St. Luke's, Warren County, where he'd been baptized; St. Anna's, Littleton, where he'd attended parochial school, and All Saints', Warrenton.

Odell Harris would leave North Carolina in 1937 to return to Bishop Payne Divinity School as a warden and professor of Old Testament. He would subsequently serve the Diocese of Southern Virginia as Archdeacon for Negro Work before going to the Diocese of Atlanta to hold a similar

position there. While in Georgia, he served on the Board of Examining Chaplains and tutored seminarians in Greek.

In the 1960s he purchased the St. Luke's, Warren County property from the diocese; he is buried in the churchyard there, along with his parents and other family members. Before his death, he wrote his autobiography, which was published posthumously by Virginia Theological Seminary, which had granted him an honorary doctorate in 1974.

In his autobiography, entitled *It Can Be Done: The Autobiography of a Black Priest of the Protestant Episcopal Church who started under the bottom and moved up to the top*, Harris describes his first diocesan convention in North Carolina [note: the portions in capital letters were capitalized by Harris]:

I attended my first Diocesan Convention in 1934 in Christ Church, Raleigh, North Carolina. I was just a deacon, fresh out of seminary. I had been thoroughly drilled at Bishop Payne in the fact that the Episcopal Church was the one HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH. I swallowed it whole and really believed it. To my dismay and utter surprise, however, the ushers at Christ Church directed all blacks to the balcony. At the opening service, all blacks were in the balcony and all whites in the nave of the church.

At the close of the convention I went to Bishop Penick and said, "I was really shocked and surprised that you would permit the Negro priests to be sent to the balcony while the white priests and laymen occupied seats in the nave of the church. **This is contrary to all that we were taught at seminary about the ONE HOLY APOSTOLIC CHURCH.**" He looked at me with as pious an expression as that bishop could muster and said, "Well, no one else has raised any objection." (I am sure he was right on that point, for the black priests were of the "old school"—whatever that may have meant.) I said to him, "If this is the way it will be in the future, I don't every intend to come to another convention." He looked at me as if I were crazy. I meant, however, what I said. **I did attend three more Diocesan Conventions in the Diocese of North Carolina, but I never again went to the balcony. At my first convention, I decided never to accept segregation in any church affairs.** I have lived up to that decision up until now.

Vignette 5 Black Power and White Backlash

In September 1967 General Convention, under the leadership of Presiding Bishop John Hines, focused its attention on the unrest sweeping America's cities and created the General Convention Special Program (GCSP) fund: a nine-million-dollar grant program over three years to fund projects targeting black empowerment in the poorest neighborhoods.

Here in North Carolina, the GCSP was initially well-received, and the Diocese made the "urban crisis" its top mission priority for 1968. But in 1969 the GCSP made grants totaling \$45,000.00 to the Malcolm X Liberation University (MXLU) in Durham, an educational enterprise with a

curriculum, faculty and student body that would center in and serve the black community exclusively. Spearheading this effort was Howard Fuller, a local community organizer, who had previously helped black students at Duke University pressure the administration and faculty into creating a robust program of African studies. This unsuccessful effort included a temporary takeover of the Allen Building, which housed the senior administration offices of the University.

When the MXLU grant was publicly announced and word got out, the firestorm of criticism within the diocese was swift and severe. Angry white communicants saw the grant as the “last straw”—clinging proof that the church had gone off the rails. Many who wrote Bishop Fraser to complain accompanied their denunciations with declarations that the diocese and national church would get no more of their money. Other white Episcopalians upheld an integrationist vision for church and society; expressed loyalty to the church and applauded efforts to address racial matters, but objected to this particular action on grounds that Fuller was a troublemaker and a black separatist. A small number of whites endorsed the grant, applauding the church for taking risks on behalf of the black community.

By contrast, black Episcopalians noted with bitterness the new-found white antipathy to separatism and embrace of integration. The North Carolina chapter of the Union of Black Clergy and Laity wrote:

Having been born and nurtured by a separatist policy for 300 years in the Episcopal Church – never withdrawing or threatening to withdraw from our beloved Church “throughout all the chaotic eras of emancipation from slavery,” we now find ourselves in a position of deep concern for our brethren, who, despite the pass of the centuries, cling doggedly to the “rhetoric” of other ages. Throughout the history of the Church the financial contributions of blacks have never been refused, nor have we refused to contribute to a Diocese which supported institutions which we could not attend or facilities to which we could not gain access. **It is ironic at this time that the majority group finds itself frustrated by “discussion of separatism,” when in fact throughout the ages the minority group has not only supported white separatism but found it necessary, even though galling, to tolerate it while being loyal to the Church.**

When the diocese gathered in January for the 1970 convention, delegates faced a \$165,000.00 budget shortfall, the cumulative impact of congregations and individuals who made good on their threat to withheld funds in protest of the MXLU grant.

Vignette 6 The Dream of God

The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray was the first African-American priest ordained in the Episcopal Church. By the time of her ordination in January 1977, Dr. Murray was already a distinguished jurist, writer, and poet. Indeed, her ground-breaking work in the law led both to the legal strategy employed by Thurgood Marshall in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision,

and in the application of the Reconstruction Amendments to issues of gender equality—the basis for Title IX.

Pauli Murray was raised in Durham by her aunts and her grandmother, all of them devout Episcopalians. Pauli Murray’s grandmother, Cornelia, had been baptized at the Chapel of the Cross in 1854 while her mother, Harriet, was still enslaved and considered to be the property of Mary Ruffin Smith. Pauli Murray told that story in her family history, *Proud Shoes*. Aware of her background and legacy, the rector of the Chapel of the Cross at the time, Peter Lee (later Bishop of Virginia and an Assisting Bishop in this diocese), invited Pauli Murray to Chapel Hill to celebrate the Eucharist for the first time as a priest. She accepted the invitation.

For Pauli Murray to celebrate her first Eucharist at the Chapel of the Cross was an act of “reconciliation and triumph,” as Charles Kuralt of CBS television noted at the time. She was joined by an interracial congregation that crowded the chapel to overflowing, with many standing outside and waiting until they could kneel at the altar rail and receive communion.

Pauli Murray was profoundly aware of the significance of the occasion, for herself, for her family, and for her church. She chose it for the culmination of her posthumously-published autobiography, *Song in a Weary Throat: An American Pilgrimage*. She wrote:

Whatever future ministry I might have as a priest, it was given to me that day to be a symbol of healing. All the strands of my life had come together. Descendant of slave and of slave owner, I had already been called poet, lawyer, teacher, and friend. Now I was empowered to minister the sacrament of One in whom there is no north or south, no black or white, no male or female—only the spirit of love and reconciliation drawing us all toward the goal of human wholeness.

Thirty years later, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori came to stand where Pauli Murray once stood. Addressing a similar overflowing and interracial congregation, she invoked the life and witness of “Mother Murray” declaring, “I know that I stand here today only because she stood here before me. Her proud shoes have carried many others down the road to freedom.”

Pauli Murray had once written that “Freedom is a dream.” Bishop Katharine declared, “That dream of freedom has not yet been realized, in any community in this land or across the globe. As long as any of us is restrained by custom, law, prejudice, or bigotry, we all remain in chains. We have dreams to dream, proud shoes to put on, and work to do. May we befriend this world and lay down our lives for our six billion brothers and sisters. Our brother Jesus offered his life in that service, and our sister Pauli did as well. You and I are also God’s beloved friends—can we do any less than lay down our lives for that dream of freedom?”