

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN NORTH CAROLINA 1587-2015

Historical Overview

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The story of the Episcopal Church in North Carolina can be traced back to the very first English efforts at colonization during the reign of Elizabeth I. In August 1587, at what is now called “the Lost Colony” on Roanoke Island, the Native American Manteo and the English infant Virginia Dare were baptized. Permanent English settlement did not occur until the mid-17th century, however, and it wasn’t until 1701 that the colonial assembly passed its first Vestry Act, thereby making the Church of England the officially sanctioned faith in North Carolina. This act provided for the creation of precincts – or parishes – administered by local vestries, and the precincts of Chowan, Pasquotank, Perquimans, and Currituck along Albemarle Sound and Pamlico precinct in Bath County date to this time. Principally through levying taxes and fines, colonial vestries in each parish were called upon to make provision for church buildings and ministers, oversee the parish poor, and serve other delegated political functions.¹ Thus, the Church of England enjoyed a privileged status and legal advantages not enjoyed by other religious groups in 18th century North Carolina.

But these legal provisions by no means guaranteed a strong and vibrant Church, and the history of Colonial Anglicanism in North Carolina is largely a study in frustration. From the outset, many inhabitants were at best indifferent—and often opposed—to the establishment of the Church of England. Already in the late 17th century, the region around Albemarle Sound had become a haven for Quakers, who launched a campaign to have the vestry act repealed.² And in

¹ Robert J. Cain, introduction to *The Church of England in North Carolina: Documents, 1699-1741*, edited by Robert J. Cain. The Colonial Records of North Carolina, Second Series Volume X (Raleigh, 1999), xxiv.

² Cain, introduction to *The Church of England in North Carolina: Documents, 1699-1741*, xxv.

the subsequent course of the 18th century, piedmont North Carolina would become home to sizable numbers of Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists who shared Quaker antipathy to Anglican establishment.

Also daunting were the organizational challenges of erecting houses of worship. Colonial parishes were geographically large, sparsely settled, and difficult to traverse. For example, Chowan precinct ran from the present Virginia State line south through present-day Chowan County to include Washington and Tyrell Counties on the south side of Albemarle Sound and west to include present-day Bertie County. This led the vestry to give greater priority to the construction of simple wooden chapels throughout the parish than upon the erection of a substantial parish church. In Chowan Precinct at least six such chapels are known to have been built in the early 1700s. Here services could be held on Sundays, and if no ordained minister were present, a local lay reader could be paid a small stipend to read the service instead.³ By contrast, St. Paul's, Edenton, the parish church, was not completed until 1760. Many parishes, when faced with the difficulty of raising funds for church construction, simply did without substantial church buildings altogether.⁴

But the greatest barrier to the growth and development of the Church was the chronic shortage of qualified ministers. One complicating factor was the nature of ministry in the Church of England, which required all clergy to receive ordination at the hands of a bishop. But there was no resident bishop in any of the colonies, so all clergy had to be ordained in England and then authorized to serve abroad by the Bishop of London. Moreover, North Carolina quickly

³ Anne Rouse Edwards, *A Celebration of Faith: 300 Years in the Life of St. Paul's* (Edenton, 2003), 24.

⁴ Hugh Talmage Lefler, "The Anglican Church in North Carolina: The Royal Period," in *The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1959*, ed. Lawrence Foushee London and Sarah McCulloh Lemmon (Raleigh, 1987), 24.

developed a reputation for being a highly undesirable and inhospitable place to serve. Disease was rampant, especially along the coastal plain. Parish size meant arduous travel. Factor in poor wages and living conditions, along with an unreceptive populace, and one can readily understand why most colonial parishes in North Carolina had trouble attracting and retaining ministers.⁵

The established church in North Carolina might well have continued to languish had it not been for the efforts of Governor William Tryon, who was determined to make the Anglican Church a living reality in the colony. As Tryon saw it, the key to vitalizing the established church was to attract and retain good clergy to supply North Carolina parishes and thereby to create an effective ecclesiastical presence. To that end, Tryon began an active campaign to solicit clergy through the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.), the quasi-official missionary arm of the Church of England. Founded in 1701, the S.P.G. was a voluntary society formed to supply Anglican clergy for colonial service and to counter the growing influence of dissenting religious groups. In some instances, the S.P.G. recruited and paid for clergy to work as missionaries where the church was not established, but in places like North Carolina, they customarily provided salary supplements to make colonial service more attractive. Governor Tryon was himself a member of the S.P.G., and soon after his arrival in North Carolina in 1765, he began a vigorous letter-writing campaign to lobby the Society on behalf of North Carolina.⁶ Although the Society had been active in North Carolina from the outset, they generally limited their support to one or two ministers at a time. But through Tryon's personal efforts, there were

⁵ Cain, introduction to *The Church of England in North Carolina: Documents, 1699-1741*, xiv.

⁶ In a letter to the S.P.G. in August of 1765, the Governor reported that Presbyterians and a "Sect who call themselves New Lights" were the largest religious groups in the colony, followed by the Church of England, but the Governor expressed his conviction that: "when a sufficient Number of Clergy as exemplary in their Lives, as orthodox in their Doctrine, can persuade themselves to come into This Country, I doubt not but the larger Number of every Sect would come over to the Established Religion." William S. Powell, ed., *The Correspondence of William Tryon, Volume I, 1758-1767* (Raleigh, 1980): 144.

thirteen Anglican ministers in North Carolina by 1767 and eighteen by the time of his departure for New York in 1771.⁷

Tryon's efforts on behalf of the established Church went hand in hand with his efforts to strengthen and extend Royal Government through the County Court system into the North Carolina Backcountry. By the late 1760s, growing unhappiness with the policies and practices of the Government led to armed clashes with local militias called Regulators. The Regulator uprisings were quickly suppressed, but the triumph of Tryon's forces did nothing to endear the established Church to the populace. Instead, it merely reinforced the association of Anglicanism with the imposition of English rule.⁸

To be sure, there were highly commendable clergy among those who served in the colonial period, men who dedicated themselves to serving their parishes and to providing ministrations regardless of Anglican affinity. Particularly noteworthy were Clement Hall in Edenton, Alexander Stewart in Bath, and James Reed in New Bern, all of whose missionary and pastoral efforts embraced enslaved and native American populations, along with attending to far-flung English settlers.⁹ But Tryon's expectation that exemplary and orthodox clergy would win over the adherents of other groups was at best wishful thinking, and such strength as the colonial Church of England did achieve was concentrated in a handful of coastal parishes.

In any event, Royal Government ended with the American Revolution, and the citizens of North Carolina acted quickly to terminate the religious establishment. Article 34 of the 1776

⁷ Paul Conkin, "The Church Establishment in North Carolina, 1765-1776," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 32 (1955): 9,10.

⁸ Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina* (Chapel Hill and London, 2002), 108, 109, 184.

⁹ Lefler, "The Royal Period," 34-43.

constitution declared that no one church should be established nor any person compelled to support a church or minister.¹⁰ Although ordinances provided for existing buildings and property to remain in denominational hands, legislatures and local governments were not zealous to enforce these provisions, and former Anglicans did not press their claims vigorously. The fate of the parish church in Hillsborough, St. Matthew's, is emblematic: during the war it was commandeered for housing troops and suffered extensive damage; afterwards, it was briefly used for a school, then pulled down entirely some time before 1800. The lot stood empty until the Presbyterians used it to erect a new church building in 1816.¹¹

The coming of the American Revolution also placed Anglican ministers in a precarious position, morally and financially. Clergy with loyalist convictions had to decide whether to flee the colony altogether or reach some accommodation with patriotic vestries. The vestry in New Bern suspended James Reed and withheld his salary for a year over his failure to pray at the behest of the Continental Congress. He was allowed to resume his ministrations, but forced to endure the sound of boys drumming and shouting every time he offered the customary prayers for the king.¹² Even clergy with patriotic sympathies still had to wrestle with matters of conscience over their solemn ordination oaths to uphold royal supremacy and liturgical uniformity. And once the war was over and independence won, the S.P.G. terminated all financial support in the former American colonies.

¹⁰ Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, "The Decline of the Church, 1776-1816," in *The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1959*, ed. Lawrence Foushee London and Sarah McCulloh Lemmon (Raleigh, 1987), 61.

¹¹ Joseph Blount Cheshire, *An Historical Address Delivered in St. Matthew's Church, Hillsboro, N.C. on Sunday, August 24, 1924: Being the One Hundreth Anniversary of the Parish*, (Durham, 1925), 18-20.

¹² Lemmon, "The Decline of the Church, 1776-1816," 63.

But the institutional crisis which imperiled the very life of the church in the new American nation was the two-fold lack of any organizational structure beyond the parish and any bishops to ordain new clergy. By 1782 it was evident that the patriots had won the war for independence and colonial ties to the English crown and church were irrevocably severed. But what would replace them? The rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia, William White, provided one possible answer in his treatise *The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered*. White encouraged his readers to accept the fact that henceforth the only bonds available for uniting the former members of the Church of England in the United States would be “voluntary associations for union and good government.”¹³ To forge those bonds, White proposed that the churches on this continent develop a system of representative government, beginning at the local level and proceeding to state and regional bodies. These representative bodies would be formed equally of clergy and laity and would exist to make only such decisions as are “judged necessary for their continuing one religious communion,” namely, to set forth the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the church. White also brought a moderate, pragmatic bent to the subject of episcopacy. Although he desired to retain a church with bishops (as reflected in his employing the name ‘Episcopalian’), he regarded it impracticable to count on having bishops in apostolic succession any time soon, since English bishops were bound by the terms of their own ordinal to require loyalty to the King and Church of England from those they ordained and consecrated. And so White proceeded to advocate for a provisional authority to ordain ministers and organize the church until such time as the episcopacy could be secured.¹⁴

¹³ William White, “The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered, 1782,” in ed. Don A. Armentrout and Robert B. Slocum, *Documents of Witness: A History of the Episcopal Church 1782-1985* (New York, 1994), 4.

¹⁴ White, “The Case of the Episcopal Churches Considered,” 13.

White's assessment of the needs and prospects for the new Episcopal Church was not universally shared. His willingness to organize the church without first securing bishops, coupled with his willingness to grant powers of church governance to laity and clergy alike, put him at odds with the clergy in Connecticut, predominantly composed of former S.P.G. missionaries who were unprepared to accept even a temporary suspension of Episcopal government and disinclined to allow laity to sit in the councils of the church. In March of 1783, the Connecticut clergy met to identify suitable candidates for bishop, and one of those candidates, Samuel Seabury, went to England seeking consecration. When rebuffed by English bishops, Seabury had recourse to consecration at the hands of bishops of the nonjuring Episcopal Church of Scotland. On his return to Connecticut in 1785, Seabury quickly began to fulfill his role as bishop. Within six months he had presided over two convocations of clergy, made parochial visitations, issued a pastoral charge, and ordained twelve priests.¹⁵

At the same time, a call had gone out to Episcopalians in every state to send delegates to an organizing convention in Philadelphia along the lines set forth in White's 1782 proposal. When the convention did meet in Philadelphia in September, 1785, there were sixteen clergy and twenty-six laymen representing seven states—but not the state of Connecticut. The two groups continued to walk apart until 1789, by which time England had made special provision for consecrating three bishops for the American church (including White himself), and White's original proposal had been modified along lines agreeable to Bishop Seabury.¹⁶ The hybrid body drew strength from both sources. Thanks to William White, the Episcopal Church met directly

¹⁵ Frederick V. Mills, Sr., *Bishops by Ballot: An Eighteenth-Century Ecclesiastical Revolution* (New York, 1978), 233-234.

¹⁶ Mills, *Bishops by Ballot*, 240-281.

the need to adapt itself to the character of its new national context. Without recourse to establishment, the church had no realistic alternative but to embrace denominationalism and voluntarism. That is, the Episcopal Church could expect no privileged position vis-à-vis other religious groups, and it would have to rely on the voluntary support of its members for its continued existence. White took these new realities as his starting point and offered Episcopal churches a way of organizing and making decisions consistent with the prevailing sentiments of post-Revolutionary America. Thanks to Samuel Seabury, the Episcopal Church safeguarded its distinctive and traditional forms of doctrine, discipline, and worship. The result was a solid basis for a national church of sufficient breadth and adaptability to last to the present day.

But the 1789 Protestant Episcopal Church was a national church in name only. Although the two competing versions of the church were now unified, the Carolinas and Georgia remained moribund as far as participation was concerned. Bishop White sent letters to North Carolina, urging the clergy to organize and send delegates to General Convention. Charles Pettigrew of Edenton, one of the few remaining clergymen in the state, did call for a meeting in Tarboro in May, 1790, at which four persons attended. They agreed to accept the 1789 constitution of the Church and called for another meeting in Tarboro later in the year. This second meeting was better attended and took the first steps toward a formal statewide organization. Even more promising was the convention of May, 1794, when sixteen persons met in Tarboro to adopt a state constitution and elect a bishop. Charles Pettigrew was chosen, and papers to that effect were sent to Bishop White in anticipation of Pettigrew's consecration at the General Convention of 1795. But that is where all organizing efforts in North Carolina ceased for the next twenty years. Bishop-elect Pettigrew set out for Philadelphia, but turned back at the news of a yellow fever epidemic in Norfolk, Virginia, and he never again made the attempt. Nor did he take steps

to hold another statewide meeting after 1794. The most straightforward explanation for his behavior is discouragement. Pettigrew had been ordained in England before the War of Independence; he had endured the revolution and disestablishment; he had seen the Church he served in ruin and held out little prospect for its revival. He therefore contented himself in old age with preaching at a chapel of his own construction near his plantation home in Scuppernong.¹⁷

New life for the Episcopal Church, in North Carolina and elsewhere, would instead come from a post-Revolutionary generation of leaders, who brought fresh energy and commitment to the task of reviving the Church. One path for a renewed and revitalized Church followed the High Church vision set forth by Bishop John Henry Hobart of New York. Hobart, who served from 1811 to 1830, sought to forge a distinctive place for Episcopal Church within American Protestantism as the one true visible church within Reformed Christianity—that is to say, the only church of the Reformation to retain apostolic succession, adherence to faith and practices of the primitive church, and to have a valid sacramental life. He insisted that Episcopalians walk apart from other Protestant denominations; he refused to lend support to the nascent American Bible Society (formed in 1816) or other pan-denominational efforts to join forces to reform American life and make it more overtly reflective of Christian values.

At the same time Hobart was launching his effort to define the Episcopal Church over against other Protestants, an alternative vision for the Episcopal Church was being put forth in the Diocese of Massachusetts by their new Bishop, Alexander Griswold, who also took office in

¹⁷ An account of the Tarboro conventions of the 1790s and their aftermath appears in Lemmon, “The Decline of the Church, 1776-1816,” 78-86.

1811. Unlike Hobart, Griswold wanted to renew the Episcopal Church principally through effective evangelical preaching. Episcopalians might worship in the distinctive voice of the Book of Common Prayer, but their message would contribute to the overall harmony of American evangelical Protestantism. These two views define the High Church/Low Church split in the Episcopal Church in the second and third decades of the 19th century.¹⁸

The pivotal action leading to the revival of the Church in North Carolina also occurred in 1811: the calling of a 25-year-old New Yorker, Adam Empie, to serve the parish of St. James' Wilmington. Soon the parish began to flourish. Empie initiated correspondence with other Episcopalians in the state in hopes that an organization could be formed, but his efforts were put on hold in 1814, when he left Wilmington to become the first chaplain at West Point. Empie returned to Wilmington in late 1816, and soon thereafter resumed his statewide organizing efforts. Prospects for taking a definitive step were by then considerably improved. During Empie's absence, the congregation in Wilmington had called another priest, Bethel Judd, but Judd was now preparing to take charge of a newly-forming congregation in Fayetteville. Moreover, in January, 1817, New Bern called a young minister, Jehu Curtis Clay, as rector and schoolmaster. These three clergymen—Empie, Judd, and Clay—along with lay representatives from their three congregations and St. Paul's, Edenton (nine people in all) gathered on April 24, 1817 in New Bern and proceeded to create a statewide organization that has continued to the present.¹⁹

¹⁸ Robert Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, revised edition (New York and Harrisburg: 1999), 118-123. On Hobart, see R. Bruce Mullin, *Episcopal Vision/American Reality: High Church Theology and Social thought in Evangelical America* (New Haven, 1986).

¹⁹ Henry S. Lewis, "The Formation of the Diocese of North Carolina, 1817-1830," in *The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1959*, ed. Lawrence Foushee London and Sarah McCulloh Lemmon (Raleigh, 1987), 95-97.

But organizing was just the first step. Of these four founding congregations of the Diocese of North Carolina, only St. James' Wilmington had substantial communicant strength and a full-time rector. The diocesan journal of 1819 provides the first solid evidence for gauging the relative communicant strength of the organizing churches: Wilmington 151 communicants; Fayetteville 56 (up 28 from the year before); New Bern 32, and Edenton 11.²⁰ Where, then, was new growth to come from? Who was expected to come forth to bring the Church in North Carolina to life? And what path would the new diocese follow?

One principal strategy adopted in these early days of the diocese was to identify families and individuals with some demonstrable connection to the church and to try and elicit their help. Once again, this was principally the work of Adam Empie, who used the occasion of the founding of the diocese as reason to write letters to prominent men across the state who he thought might be enlisted in this cause. Empie's letter-writing campaign bears witness to something Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire, then Historiographer of the Diocese of North Carolina, noted in an 1890 essay about the revival of the church in this early period, namely, that it drew on the work of colonial-era clergy who continued their ministrations after the American Revolution, but who often functioned more like private family chaplains than public ministers.²¹ Cheshire's point was that even with a paucity of active congregations by 1817, there was still scattered personal and familial affinity upon which to build. One place where Empie's letter writing campaign evidently bore fruit was in Orange County, where Duncan Cameron, after receiving Empie's letter, took the lead in reopening the colonial-era St. Mary's Chapel and

²⁰ *Journal of the Third Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of North Carolina* (1819): 6. Hereinafter abbreviated *NCDJ*.

²¹ Joseph Blount Cheshire, Jr., editor. *Sketches of Church History in North Carolina: Addresses and Papers by Clergymen and Laymen of the Dioceses of North and East Carolina* (Wilmington, 1892), 269.

securing the services of a lay reader.²² St. Mary's subsequently entered into union with convention in 1819.

The new diocese also sought Episcopal oversight, and to that end, appealed to Bishop Richard Channing Moore of Virginia to serve as Bishop of North Carolina as well. Moore agreed, and for four years—from 1819 to 1822—he presided over the North Carolina Annual Convention, conducting parish visitations and ordinations on his way to and from the state. Before coming to Virginia as Bishop in 1814, Moore had repeatedly demonstrated success in reviving parishes in New York, and he quickly brought new energy and increased visibility for the church throughout Virginia. He made diocesan conventions a multi-day affair, with services open to the public at large and evangelical preaching, that scholars have characterized as “the Episcopal answer to the camp meeting.”²³

Moore brought the same kind of effort to his work in North Carolina, if on a more modest scale. With his enthusiastic support, North Carolina held its 1820 and 1821 conventions in the fledgling state capital of Raleigh, even though the Episcopalians did not yet have a church building there and had to hold their convention in the Supreme Court Room. But this provided the occasion on Sunday morning to join with the Methodists in their church building, where the Bishop administered Communion to over an hundred persons, including both the Presbyterian and Methodist ministers. At the conclusion of the 1821 Convention, Bishop Moore could say: “the

²² Adam Empie to Duncan Cameron, 5 February 1818. Cameron Family Papers, Wilson Library, Chapel Hill.

²³ Edward L. Bond and Joan R. Gundersen, “The Episcopal Church in Virginia, 1607-2007,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 115 (2007): 222-224.

different societies of Christians have received us with open arms, and have wished us success in the name of the Lord.”²⁴

Also in 1821, there arose an intriguing prospect for ecumenical cooperation: a proposal to enter into a close working relationship with the Lutherans of North Carolina. Behind this proposal was the remarkable ministry of Robert Johnston Miller—a Methodist turned Episcopalian—who sought ordination from the Lutherans in western North Carolina back in the 1790s when it became clear that North Carolina wasn’t going to be able to follow through on procuring a bishop. In 1821, Miller finally got his long-deferred ordination at the hands of Bishop Moore—becoming both deacon and priest while attending the convention in Raleigh. And he brought with him an invitation from the Lutheran Synod to establish mutual recognition, including seat and voice at each other’s conventions.

Bishop Moore was suitably enthusiastic in his response to this initiative, declaring, “the proposition which has been made to this Convention, by a portion of the Lutheran Church in this State, is calculated to excite our warmest gratitude to God: it proclaims in language which cannot be misunderstood, the confidence they place in our integrity, and the preference they give to our religious institutions.” Moore could foresee a complete union of the two churches, gathered around the same altar.²⁵

Moore’s genial approach to interdenominational cooperation was shared by his gifted nephew, the Rev. Gregory T. Bedell, who had come to North Carolina in late 1818 to succeed Bethel Judd as Rector of St. John’s, Fayetteville. In less than six months, Bedell had doubled the

²⁴ *NCDJ*, 5th (1821): 21.

²⁵ *NCDJ*, 5th (1821): 22. In the 1990s, an agreement between the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) would bring about the very thing Moore envisioned.

communicant strength of the parish. Bedell also fostered interdenominational cooperation, bringing Episcopalians and Presbyterians into a close working relationship. One tribute to Bedell's ministry in Fayetteville reads as follows:

Mr. Bedell drew many worldlings and careless lives to his Church by the animated and impressive style of his oratory, and made them regular attendants by the earnest appeals to the heart, by his own obvious piety, and by the forbearance and Christian charity, and the manner with which he treated the peculiar doctrines of his Church, which was inoffensive to the casual hearers of a different persuasion.²⁶

To outward appearances, then, one might have assumed that North Carolina was well on the way to emulating Virginia and adopting an Evangelical (Low Church) mission strategy, one in which Episcopalians would make common cause with other Protestants. The Church in Fayetteville was flourishing under G. T. Bedell's leadership; Bishop Moore clearly welcomed the approbation of other Protestants and saw it as a mark of progress and growing respect for the Episcopal Church.

But North Carolina was instead about to make a decisive shift in sensibility and strategy. In April 1823 the Diocesan Convention met in Salisbury, without Bishop Moore present, and proceeded to elect a bishop of its own. The man chosen unanimously to head the young diocese was John Stark Ravenscroft, a 50-year-old Virginia planter turned priest. Ravenscroft was already in his forties before his personal study of scripture and tradition led him to embrace the Episcopal Church "for that deposit of apostolic succession, in which alone verifiable power to

²⁶ Stephen H. Tyng, *Memoirs of the Rev. G.T. Bedell, D.D.* (London, 1835), 39.

minister in sacred things was to be found in these United States."²⁷ He then presented himself for ordination to Bishop Moore, who received him as a candidate for Holy Orders in 1816, and ordained him a priest the following year.

For Ravenscroft, belonging to the Episcopal Church was not to be likened to membership in another Protestant denomination. He made his views unmistakable in May of 1824 at his first convention after becoming Bishop. He lamented the long absence of the ministrations of the Church in North Carolina following the American Revolution, which had allowed the pernicious notion of "equal safety in all religious denominations" to take root, and he proposed to counter it by calling the clergy to "a steadfast and uniform adherence to the liturgy and offices of the Church, as set forth in the book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments"²⁸ and by calling the laity both to restore family use of the Prayer Book and to reserve their financial support exclusively "for the wants of our own communion." The Bishop anticipated that his views would arouse resistance: "Much will be said against this my advice to you, my brethren, and I doubt not it will be called illiberal, uncharitable, perhaps unchristian." But Ravenscroft was resolute in his conviction that only "as the distinctive character of the Church is understood in its principles, applied in its use, and regarded in the hearts of its members, will it be cherished and will flourish."²⁹

Ravenscroft was also prepared to proclaim his position publicly in the state at large. He did so in December of the same year, when he was invited to address the annual gathering of the North

²⁷ Walker Anderson, "Memoir" prefaced to John Stark Ravenscroft, *The Works of the Right Reverend John Stark Ravenscroft, D.D.*, vol. I (New York, 1830), 19.

²⁸ John Stark Ravenscroft, "A Sermon on the Church: delivered before the Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of North-Carolina," in *The Works of the Right Reverend John Stark Ravenscroft*, vol. I, 110.

²⁹ Ravenscroft, "A Sermon on the Church," in *Works* vol. 1, 116.

Carolina Bible Society. Once again, the Bishop did not mince words as he attacked the very premises upon which the Bible Society was based. By his lights, promoting bible reading without at the same time providing the ministrations of the Church was to suggest that individuals could come to salvation without authoritative guidance. So Ravenscroft announced that he could not in good conscience approve of this enterprise which otherwise enjoyed broad-based interdenominational support. Needless to say, his position was an affront to Bible Society members, and a number of prominent Presbyterian ministers rushed to offer rejoinders in print.³⁰

Here as elsewhere, Ravenscroft was following in the footsteps of John Henry Hobart, who had launched a similar critique of the Bible Society in New York, with similar results. Ravenscroft said as much in a candid letter to Hobart written at the height of the Bible Society controversy, in which he justified his actions:

The situation of this southern country, surrendered for the last forty or fifty years to the exclusive influence of the Dissenters, left me no alternative, but to increase that influence by adopting half-way measures, or, by a decided course, to call into action what was left of predilection for the Church to rally her real friends around her standard, and to strike fear into her enemies by the unqualified assertion of her distinctive character; and I have cause of thankfulness beyond expression, that it has pleased God to give success so far to the little I have been enabled to do. . . . [B]ut I did not anticipate that the wily

³⁰ Ravenscroft, "A Sermon preached before the Bible Society of North-Carolina, on Sunday, December 12, 1824," in *Works* vol. I, 163-178. On the controversy, see Lewis, "The Formation of the Diocese," 130-133.

Presbyterians would have swallowed the bait so readily. . . . Their opposition has done more for the cause in a year, than without it could have been done in ten.³¹

Ravenscroft had made a calculated determination that the most pressing need in North Carolina was to gain the exclusive loyalty of Episcopalians to their own church. Other strategies might add numerical growth or produce quicker results, but the Bishop noted that “the numerical is not always the real strength, either of the Church or of an army.”³² What was paramount, in Ravenscroft’s estimation, was exclusive and faithful commitment to the Episcopal Church. And in his view, if the Presbyterians were offended by this attitude, so much the better. Predictably, Ravenscroft also put an end to the proposal to unite with the Lutherans, reporting to the convention in 1825, that “in the immediate neighborhood of the Rev. Mr. Miller they have commenced retracing their steps, and will in time, I trust, recover from the paralyzing effect of the attempt to amalgamate with the Lutheran body”³³

To implement his mission strategy, Ravenscroft required clergy who would enthusiastically embrace his views. This, he understood, was critically important in the North Carolina Piedmont, where Presbyterians and Baptists had long predominated, and where mission work was already underway. The crisis came in Fayetteville, where the Church was experiencing growth by following the very different path of interdenominational cooperation. In 1823 Bedell had been succeeded by an equally Evangelical minister, William Hooper. Hooper, the step-son of UNC President and Presbyterian Joseph Caldwell, could not countenance Ravenscroft’s

³¹ Bishop Ravenscroft to Bishop Hobart 18 March, 1826, in John Henry Hobart, *The Posthumous Works of the Late Right Reverend John Hobart, D.D., Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York, with a Memoir of His Life*, vol. I (New York, 1833), 365, 366.

³² *NCDJ* 9th (1825): 22.

³³ *NCDJ* 9th (1825): 10.

insistence upon Episcopalian exclusivity and abandoned the ministry of the Episcopal Church entirely rather than serve under the bishop.³⁴

By contrast, two young Wilmington natives serving in the Piedmont, Thomas Wright and William Mercer Green, eagerly embraced Ravenscroft's agenda and made it their own.

Ravenscroft's approbation of these two acolytes is clear from his 1825 address to convention, where he said of the Church in Wadesboro, that "under the direction of the Rev. Mr. Wright, it is second to none in soundness in the Faith and exemplary holiness." The Bishop likewise noted that the Church in Hillsborough is organized "under the most flattering prospects and the Rev. Mr. Green called to take charge there."³⁵ In ensuing years, James Hervey Otey, George Washington Freeman, and Francis Lister Hawks all entered the ordained ministry of the Episcopal Church under the stamp of Ravenscroft's churchmanship and helped to extend it through much of the Old South: Otey as Bishop of Tennessee, Green as Bishop of Mississippi, and Freeman as Bishop of Arkansas and Texas.

Ravenscroft died in 1830, after only seven years in office. During his tenure, the Church in North Carolina had grown to a communicant strength of about 800 members, with ten clergy serving twenty-one active congregations. As a percentage increase, the Episcopal Church had more than doubled in size; as a statewide body, however, it remained quite small and still regionally concentrated in the eastern part of the State. Where new congregations had been added, they were largely in communities adjacent to an already-established church; almost all clergy served more than one congregation, and some three or four. But Ravenscroft's impact

³⁴ Lewis, "The Formation of the Diocese," 127-130.

³⁵ *NCDJ* 9th (1825): 10,11.

cannot be measured in statistics. More than numerical strength, Ravenscroft had set out to bolster conviction. In the words of one historian, “Bishop Ravenscroft welded his North Carolina flock into an intimate Christian minority fervently devoted to the Episcopal Church.”³⁶ And North Carolina was now the leading High Church diocese in the South.

In searching for Ravenscroft’s successor the diocese turned to someone of the same mold: John Henry Hobart’s own son-in-law, Levi Silliman Ives, then serving as a priest in New York City. Ives’s personal religious pilgrimage was very similar to that of Hobart and Ravenscroft. He was raised in a Protestant household in Connecticut and became convinced of the truth of High Church claims to retain continuity with apostolic Christianity in faith and practice. He gravitated to New York and received tutelage and support from Hobart, eventually marrying the Bishop’s daughter.

As Bishop of North Carolina, Ives initially set out to continue the work begun by Ravenscroft. His first major initiative was to push for the creation of an Episcopal Boys’ School in Raleigh, built on the premise that Episcopalians in North Carolina needed an alternative to schools run by other Protestants. That particular enterprise ultimately floundered in the late 1830s, but it led to the creation of a far more successful girls’ school, St. Mary’s in Raleigh, which continues to this day.³⁷

Also successful was the effort to create a separate house of worship for Episcopalians at the University of North Carolina, the Chapel of the Cross. Up until 1838, there were no churches in Chapel Hill and compulsory worship for all students was held on campus. But when William

³⁶ Lewis, “The Formation of the Diocese,” 169.

³⁷ Blackwell P. Robinson, “The Episcopate of Levi Silliman Ives,” in *The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1959*, ed. Lawrence Foushee London and Sarah McCulloh Lemmon (Raleigh, 1987), 178-185.

Mercer Green became University Chaplain in 1838, he began to lobby for an Episcopal alternative. He was joined in that effort by Bishop Ives, who asked the diocese to support Green's initiative because the sons of churchmen "are comparatively without the means of instruction in the Gospel as held by their fathers; all distinctive views being sedulously precluded from the teachings of the [University] Chapel."³⁸

But Ives was not simply championing causes that would have warmed the heart of Bishop Ravenscroft. By the 1840s, he was also moving with the leading edge of High Church thought and practice. One outward sign of this transformation was the embrace of Gothic Revival architecture. The push for building Episcopal Churches on a medieval model began in England in the late 1830s, but it soon made its way across the Atlantic. Ives became an early advocate and encouraged the building of Gothic Revival churches in Wilmington, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill.³⁹

More significantly, Ives looked favorably on the series of Tracts published by leaders of the Oxford Movement, starting in 1833. Initially the Oxford Movement was simply a call to remind England that the Church had divine origins and was not reducible to a department of state. Thus, initial efforts were little different from what Hobart and his followers had been teaching for several decades. But Oxford Movement leaders pushed further, to a fundamental rethinking of relationship between the Church of England and the English Reformation. By the beginning of the 1840s, John Henry Newman and a few other Oxford theologians began to look at the English Reformation itself as a mistake and urged the Church of England to reclaim its medieval roots and reform its doctrine and practice in ways that would bring it into closer conformity with

³⁸ Robinson, "The Episcopate of Levi Silliman Ives," 194.

³⁹ Robinson, "The Episcopate of Levi Silliman Ives," 194, 196; George E. DeMille, *The Catholic Movement in the American Episcopal Church*, 2nd edition (Philadelphia, 1950), 83.

medieval (if not modern) Roman Catholicism. A firestorm erupted over Newman's Tract 90 in 1841, which argued for a thorough-going Catholic reading of the Church of England's doctrinal standards: the 39 Articles of Religion to which all English clergy must subscribe. Newman, embittered by the depth of criticism, including from some of his fellow Oxford Movement leaders, left for Roman Catholicism in 1845.⁴⁰

Ives was following something of the same path. In 1847, he established at Valle Crucis, a remote mission outpost in the mountains, a semi-monastic community he called the Order of the Holy Cross, and there he instituted an advanced program in Catholic worship, doctrine, and devotion, including systematic private confession and the Reservation of the Sacrament.

Predictably, it opened him to concern from those in the diocese who thought it too Roman. What ensued was a five-year period of turmoil that put bishop and diocese increasingly at odds—but was compounded by Ives's unhappy tendency to change his own position and to threaten his own clergy with deposition. Perhaps he genuinely didn't know his own mind; perhaps he was ill and unable to withstand the buffeting. In any case, he made himself a solitary figure and lost the respect of clergy and laity alike—who viewed him as at best weak and at worst devious and untrustworthy. The result was a measure of relief at his ultimate departure for Rome—literally and spiritually—in December of 1852.⁴¹

The controversy which embroiled the diocese during the final years of Ives's episcopate should not obscure the signal achievements of his twenty-one year tenure. Under Ives's leadership, the diocese extended its mission work into the western section of the state, establishing

⁴⁰ DeMille, *The Catholic Movement*, 40-73.

⁴¹ Robinson, "The Episcopate of Levi Silliman Ives," 199-219.

congregations in Charlotte, Lincolnton, Morganton, and Asheville, along with continued development in the east. In total, the number of clergy in the diocese increased from fifteen in 1832 to forty in 1852 and the number of communicants increased from 800 to over 2,000.⁴² Ives encouraged the founding of Episcopal Schools, and he made a point of promoting the church's ministrations to the enslaved population of the state.⁴³

The diocese gathered in convention in the spring of 1853 to elect Ives's successor. Clearly the choice would be of great interest and importance in setting the direction of the diocese with respect to party affiliation. Some have assumed that the diocese wanted nothing more to do with High Church attitudes after Ives' departure and would now follow the course of neighboring Virginia.⁴⁴ This is a plausible conjecture, but mistaken. A.F. Olmsted, Rector of St.

Bartholomew's, Pittsboro, spoke for the clergy of the diocese in a sermon delivered at the 1853 Convention, immediately preceding the voting for a new bishop. Olmsted spoke in positive terms about the benefits that had flowed into the church from the Oxford Movement—in worship, in devotional tone, in attention to building and Christian art, in scholarship, and in missionary activity. He also carefully distinguished between the “excesses” of some individuals running to Rome (read Newman and Ives) and the legitimate fruit of the Oxford Movement as based on “our Church principles,” noting that one of the unhappy consequences of defections to Rome being the “false view that high views of the Church, of her ministry and Sacraments have a natural affinity with, and almost inevitable tendency to Romanism.” Olmsted closed with these

⁴² Matthias M. Marshall, “The Church in North Carolina: Its Present Condition and Prospects,” in ed. Joseph Blount Cheshire, Jr., *Sketches of Church History in North Carolina: Addresses and Papers by Clergymen and Laymen of the Dioceses of North and East Carolina* (Wilmington, 1892), 342.

⁴³ Robinson, “The Episcopate of Levi Silliman Ives,” 189-193.

⁴⁴ Richard Rankin, *Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen: The Religion of the Episcopal Elite in North Carolina, 1800-1860* (Columbia SC, 1993), 166, 167.

words: “Let us not then lose our hold upon those principles which, as Churchmen, we have hitherto cherished. This Diocese has occupied heretofore, in the American Church, an elevated position for true, sound, and high-toned Churchmanship. . . . Let us hope that the impress stamped upon it by its first Bishop, the lamented Ravenscroft, will remain ineffaceable. Ever blessed be the memory of that true-hearted man and noble Bishop! And may God raise up to sit in his See, one worthy to be his successor; one who shall be to us ‘the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in.’”⁴⁵

This they did in the person of Thomas Atkinson, a native Virginian, who served several Baltimore parishes in the 1840s and early 1850s. Atkinson’s commitment to what Olmsted called “church principles” was clearly on display in his 1855 Charge to the Diocese. He spoke of the blessings of a Church that is at once comprehensive, creedal, sacramental, dignified, scriptural, and ancient.⁴⁶

But Atkinson was not a carbon-copy of Ravenscroft. Rather, he mirrored the outlook and agenda of William Augustus Muhlenberg, founding Rector of the Church of the Holy Communion in New York City, and a man who has been called the most influential priest in the 19th-century Episcopal Church. Muhlenberg was deeply concerned for what he saw as the elite cultural captivity of the Episcopal Church. And to counter the notion that the Episcopal Church only catered to the wealthy, Muhlenberg became an outspoken critic of the practice of paying for churches through pew rents. Indeed, the rationale for founding the Church of the Holy Communion was to have a church that would from its beginning have only free pews.

⁴⁵ *NCDJ 37th*, (1853): 69-79.

⁴⁶ Thomas Atkinson, *Primary Charge of the Rt. Rev. Thomas Atkinson, Bishop of North Carolina, to the Clergy. Delivered at the Convention at Warrenton May, 1855* (Fayetteville, 1855), 3-5.

Muhlenberg wanted to cultivate clergy from all classes and he wanted to add flexibility to Sunday morning liturgy. Muhlenberg was also interested in many of the Oxford Movement reforms: gothic architecture, better music, better liturgy, better ornaments and furnishings. He had the first vested boys' choir in America. And he also took the lead in introducing women's orders in the Episcopal Church. Muhlenberg adopted the label "Evangelical Catholic" to describe his somewhat eclectic form of churchmanship, as he sought both to heighten and broaden the church. He also broke from the High Church exclusivity characteristic of Hobart to embrace broad-based social outreach, and devoted the last decades of his life—and his own financial resources—to the building of St. Luke's Hospital in New York.⁴⁷

Atkinson pursued much the same line as Muhlenberg. In his 1855 charge to the clergy, Atkinson pivoted from his praise for the Church to a call for reform. Like Muhlenberg, he lamented the identification of the Church with ruling elites. To be truly Catholic, he contended, meant to embrace all sorts and conditions of society. True to Muhlenberg's agenda, Atkinson called for the abolition of pew rents, for flexibility in the use of the prayer book, and for drawing clergy from all ranks of society and not making a shibboleth of an "educated clergy."⁴⁸ When Atkinson, who resided in Wilmington, couldn't convince the local parish, St. James', to forsake pew rents, he followed Muhlenberg's lead and formed a new congregation there in 1858 on a "free church" basis, St. Paul's, which became a model for biracial cooperation in the city.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ David Hein and Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr. *The Episcopalians* (Westport CT, 2004), 255-257.

⁴⁸ Atkinson, *Primary Charge*, 9-14.

⁴⁹ Daniel Morrelle, "Extract from the History of St. Mark's Church, Wilmington, N.C." incorporated in *The Parish Register of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Wilmington, North Carolina 1872-1912*: 7, 8. Special Collections Library of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

From 1860 to 1865, the Civil War consumed the state and dominated the concerns of the church. Atkinson distinguished himself for the calm and principled way he dealt with the creation of the Confederacy and its implications for the Church. He took the position that he remained a bishop of the Episcopal Church until such time as a separate Episcopal Church of the Confederacy came into existence, a position which put him at variance with his fellow Southern bishops and in tension with the prevailing southern sentiment.⁵⁰ But the value of Atkinson's position was clearly evident when he led the way to the reunification of the Church North and South within months of the end of the war.⁵¹

But the Episcopal Church reunited after the Civil War only to nearly divide itself in two over matters of ritual. The period from 1866-1874 marked the height of controversy in the Episcopal Church over ritual, and Atkinson's position within that controversy is worth noting. Atkinson initially took a moderate stance; in 1866 he refused to join 28 of his fellow bishops in condemning certain contested practices such as the use of altar candles, reverences to the altar, and Eucharistic vestments.⁵² But as the controversy wore on, Atkinson made clear his anti-Roman bias and took a firm stance against adopting private confession to a priest as anything more than an occasional practice.⁵³ Thus, in surveying the roughly fifty-year period from 1823-1874, one sees how the diocese of North Carolina was strongly identified with the High Church

⁵⁰ *NCDJ*, 46th (1862): 19-23.

⁵¹ The subject of the reunification of the Episcopal Church in the aftermath of the Civil War has received extensive scholarly treatment. Journal articles devoted to the subject include: Mark Mohler, "The Episcopal Church and National Reconciliation, 1865," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 4, (Dec., 1926), 567-595; Henry T. Shanks, "The Reunion of the Episcopal Church, 1865," *Church History*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (June, 1940), 120-140; Lockert B. Mason, "Separation and Reunion of the Episcopal Church 1861-1865: The Role of Bishop Thomas Atkinson," *Anglican and Episcopal History* Vol. LIX, No. 3, (September, 1990), 345-365.

⁵² DeMille, *The Catholic Movement*, 113.

⁵³ Atkinson, "Bishop's Charge," published as "Appendix C" and separately paginated, *NCDJ* 58th (1874): 1-11.

movement of the first half of the 19th century, but as the measure of High Church shifted to mean increasing openness to beliefs and practices previously considered “Roman” (often termed Anglo-Catholicism), Atkinson remained wedded to an earlier stage of High Church development which continued to value the Reformation and draw a contrast between Rome and Canterbury.

Where Atkinson chiefly distinguished himself was in drawing out the moral and social implications of his High Church leanings. The Bishop spoke unambiguously about the need for the Church to remain Catholic, by which he meant that the Church could never permit itself to rest content with embracing only one segment or class of society. And this in turn became the bedrock of his insistence that the Church seek to minister to and incorporate African-Americans. Atkinson, like his predecessors Ravenscroft and Ives, had been a strong proponent of slave evangelization in the years before the war and frequently made a special point of ministering to blacks when he made his visitations. In the aftermath of the war, however, Atkinson called on North Carolina Episcopalians to help establish black churches and schools and to cultivate black leadership. Atkinson also helped to found the Freedman’s Commission of the national Episcopal Church in 1865 and was quick to utilize its resources to start schools for the newly emancipated in New Bern and Wilmington.⁵⁴

At the 1867 Convention, Bishop Atkinson reiterated his conviction that the Church must take steps to educate the black population and admit black men into ordained ministry. He went on to elaborate the underlying principle for that conviction:

⁵⁴ *NCDJ, 49th (1865): 22-24; Protestant Episcopal Freedman’s Commission: Occasional Paper, January, 1866.* (Boston, 1866) Transcribed by Wayne Kempton and posted to Project Canterbury, 2010. 1, 2.

A man who regards our Church from the point of view in which some of its enemies affect to look at it, that is, as a voluntary society of decided aristocratic spirit and sympathies, may very consistently think that its ministers, and indeed its members, should be confined to a certain class in society, and a certain race among the people; but it is difficult to understand how he reasons who sets out with affirming that our Church is Catholic and Apostolic, and concludes with maintaining that it ought not to receive ministers, and by necessary consequence members, of a different race from his own, although that race may be, as with us, one-third, or with others, half of the entire population.⁵⁵

The signal achievement of Atkinson's commitment to the inclusion of black congregations and clergy was the 1867 founding of St. Augustine's Normal School in Raleigh, which became the signal achievement of the Church's Freedman's Commission as well. Although St. Augustine's was not officially a diocesan institution, its incorporators were Bishop Atkinson and ten other North Carolina Episcopalians, along with the school's first principal, the Rev. Brinton Smith. Also worth noting is the fact that North Carolina, alone among southern dioceses in the 19th century, recognized black clergy and congregations as fully participating members of diocesan convention. This, too, can be traced to Atkinson's principled insistence upon the catholicity of the Church.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *NCDJ*, 51st (1867): 24.

⁵⁶ *The Spirit of Missions*, vol. 32 (1867), 817,818. See also Thelma Johnson Roundtree, *Strengthening Ties that Bind: A History of Saint Augustine's College*, (Raleigh, 2002), 3-8. George Freeman Bragg numbered Bishop Atkinson among the "militant minority" of white men and women who "lost no opportunity to work for the best interest of all, black and white, and such have co-operated in preserving to the Church 'an open door' to the colored race." Of Atkinson, he wrote: "Bishop Atkinson . . . ere the smoke of Civil War had cleared came bravely forward in North Carolina, battling in the face of hard, bitter and unrelenting prejudice, established St. Augustine's College for the education of the colored race, organized colored parishes and had them admitted into union with his diocesan

Besides extending the Church's ministry to the newly-emancipated, Atkinson and the diocese also faced the on-going challenge of how to minister effectively across the state as a whole. In part, the challenge was geographic: as the church extended its reach into western North Carolina, the physical and practical challenge of arranging for the visitations of the Bishop became increasingly daunting. Moreover, at age sixty Atkinson felt that he no longer had the stamina to maintain the requisite schedule of visits. So for reasons of personal health and practicality, Atkinson proposed the division of the state into two dioceses. But the Episcopal Church, for all the strides it had taken between 1817 and 1860, still represented a small fraction of the overall population of North Carolina. There were about three thousand communicants of the church in the entire state. There were, for comparative purposes, about five times that many Presbyterians and about twenty times as many Baptists and Methodists.⁵⁷ Indeed, there were an insufficient number of self-supporting congregations in the state to meet the Episcopal Church's own criteria for creating a new diocese. So Atkinson recommended as the "next expedient" the appointment of an assistant bishop.⁵⁸

But a special 1867 committee on diocesan missions put the matter in a different light. The committee believed that the Episcopal Church in North Carolina was suffering from a lack of attention to the distinctive needs and challenges for missionary activity in different parts of the state. Therefore, the committee saw the division of the diocese as an important step in effective

convention. And when the Standing Committee refused to pass the papers of a colored candidate for holy orders, invited two 'Yankee' Negro priests from the North to come into his diocese and admitted them to full privileges in his convention. Other Southern Bishops labored earnestly to do the same thing, but could not." George Freeman Bragg, Jr. "The Episcopal Church and the Negro Race," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. IV, No. 1, (March, 1935), 50, 51. A favorable comparison of the Episcopal Church in North Carolina with the efforts of Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists is made by Roberta Sue Alexander, *North Carolina Faces the Freedmen: Race Relations During Presidential Reconstruction, 1865-1867* (Durham, 1985), 67-75.

⁵⁷ William S. Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill & London, 1989), 326.

⁵⁸ *NCDJ*, 51st (1867): 24, 25.

missionary strategy, and they placed the following resolution before Convention: “Resolved, that for a full performance of the Church’s work, as a Missionary Church in the State of North Carolina, a division of the Diocese is absolutely essential.”⁵⁹ The Committee, however, recognized the same constitutional impediments as the Bishop, and so they made a further resolve: to create six regional convocations for missionary purposes. At the convention of 1869, this led to a joint proposal from the Bishop and the committee that each of the six convocations “take into serious consideration the importance and necessity of itinerant missionary labor, and to provide for the same within their bounds, as may seem to them, under the direction of the Bishop, to be wisest and best.”⁶⁰

What followed in the 1870s was the adoption of a number of steps designed to meet this mission imperative. One was the establishment of the Ravenscroft School in Asheville to provide clergy training for young men unable to attend seminary out of state. Another was the election of Theodore Lyman as Assistant Bishop in 1873.⁶¹ At the time of his election, Lyman was serving in San Francisco, but he and Atkinson had previously worked together in Maryland and shared a common outlook. They forged a strong working relationship, and when Atkinson died in January, 1881, Lyman retained his predecessor’s mission principles and priorities.

Equally, if not more important, was the cultivation of a cohort of young, energetic clergy who, coming of age after the Civil War, were inspired by Bishop Atkinson’s vision for the church and committed to extending the ministrations of the church into hitherto unserved (or underserved) areas. In 1877, three of these young men—Francis Murdoch, Charles Curtis, and William Shipp

⁵⁹ *NCDJ*, 51st (1867): 34.

⁶⁰ *NCDJ*, 53rd (1869): 38, 39.

⁶¹ James W. Patton, “The Diocese of North Carolina, 1861-1883,” in *The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1959*, ed. Lawrence Foushee London and Sarah McCulloh Lemmon (Raleigh, 1987), 258; 264-167

Bynum—banded together as the Evangelical Brotherhood, and with Atkinson’s blessing, undertook to conduct protracted preaching missions throughout the Piedmont, asking no compensation and taking no collection. They pledged to preach extemporaneously, keep their references to other denominations positive, and encourage their listeners to repent and return to the Lord.⁶² Along with their friend and colleague Joseph Blount Cheshire, Jr., these men were responsible for establishing or expanding congregations from Durham to Charlotte, founding a new diocesan newspaper, and embracing innovative strategies to extend the church’s ministries. One such strategy was the forming of Associate Missions, where the church would deploy a team of ministers in a central location to serve outlying towns and communities. This was tried with some success in both Asheville and Greensboro. The Greensboro Mission was intentionally designed to utilize the railroad lines linking Greensboro with Winston, Burlington, and High Point.⁶³

Another innovation was the creation of the position of diocesan evangelist. Edward Wootten, a priest in Bertie County, proposed this action in the pages of the diocesan newspaper, *The Church Messenger*, in November 1880, having noted that none of the six convocations had yet carried through with the call for itinerant missionaries in 1869, though the need was as urgent as ever.

⁶² This notice appeared in advance of a preaching mission in Winston: “A Mission begins (D.V.) in St. Paul’s Church [Winston] on Sunday, June 20th. The clergy conducting it will be members of the Evangelical Brotherhood—a Society whose constitution, rules, and books are submitted to and sanctioned by Bishop Atkinson. Rev. Frank J. Murdoch of Salisbury is Warden of this Society, and will therefore direct details of the proposed Mission.” *The Church Messenger* 2, no. 5 (June 15, 1880). Following the event, there was another piece in the *Messenger*, describing the Evangelical Brothers as a society formed at St. Barnabas, Greensboro, several years ago whose preaching is extemporaneous, the teaching positive, and the practical appeal for repentance. “Together with the Rev. Charles J. Curtis, Mr. Murdoch has held not a few missions and in no instance have they failed to leave permanent impressions for good upon the life and work of Parishes at various points in Central and Northwestern North Carolina. . . . The order to which these faithful Priests belong accepts no compensation for what it does. The missions are held literally ‘without money and without price.’ St. Paul’s Parish has had a great refreshment and felt as if an answer were indeed made to the Prophet’s prayer: ‘Revive thy work O Lord!’ ” *Church Messenger* 2, no. 8 (July 9, 1880).

⁶³ *NCDJ* 63rd (1879): 196, 197.

R.S. Bronson, Rector in Wilson and Rocky Mount, seconded the proposal two months later.⁶⁴

By the time of the 1881 convention, there was a groundswell of support, and when Wootten introduced it, it passed.⁶⁵

Atkinson had died earlier that year, and Lyman had taken his place. Lyman appointed two men: William Shipp Bynum and a Virginian, George Dame. Both began work in late 1881, but within a matter of months, Dame determined to accept a call to parochial ministry. Bynum continued, and reported to the 1882 convention on his missionary strategy and preliminary results, explaining that it was his practice to preach two or three times a day, sometimes at points ten, twenty, or thirty miles apart. Lyman was effusive in his praise of Bynum and declared his hope that the new missionary spirit would pervade all parishes.⁶⁶

But the Bishop's call to diocesan-wide mission consciousness was not the centerpiece of convention action in 1882. Rather, it was the convention's determination to proceed in principle to effect a division of the diocese. The ensuing year became one of the most fascinating and critical in the life of the Church in North Carolina. Lyman and Bynum outdid themselves in holding missions and visitations throughout the state. Bynum traveled to 45 counties, from Cherokee to Currituck. He logged over 4,000 miles on railway and steamship lines and nearly 1,500 by horse and on foot. Lyman did more visitations than ever before—getting to nearly every parish and missionary station in the state and visiting twenty of them twice.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Church Messenger* 2 no. 25 (November 11, 1880) and 2 no. 35 (January 20, 1881).

⁶⁵ *NCDJ* 65th (1881):38, 44.

⁶⁶ *NCDJ* 66th (1882): 168-170; 96.

⁶⁷ For the Bishop's Address, see *NCDJ* 67th (1883): 45-79; for the Evangelist's Report, see *NCDJ* 67th (1883): 151-157.

Why all this effort? In part it was to justify continuation of the current arrangement. Lyman contended that division was premature: the diocese was still numerically and financially weak, and evangelists were a greater priority than another bishop. With the extension of rail lines, one didn't need another bishop to do visitations because travel had become so much easier. Thus he reasoned: "If you can only have two or more active and efficient Evangelists, occasional visits from them, with continued services for two or three days, in each missionary station which is visited, will accomplish far more for the Church than simply an annual visit from the Bishop."⁶⁸

But the funding for the current arrangement of bishop and evangelist was contingent upon keeping the diocese united, since both positions were paid for from the Permanent Episcopal Fund. Bynum himself saw the problem immediately and offered to resign his position, effective diocesan convention 1883.⁶⁹ Some viewed the loss of the evangelist position with relative equanimity.⁷⁰ Others were less sanguine, contending: "This Evangelist scheme has never yet been fully put to work. At one Convention it was started, one most competent Evangelist secured, and the next Convention virtually knocks the whole scheme in the head. . . . We [the writer] stand to-day where the convention apparently stood two years ago, in the full conviction that two or three Evangelists can achieve a work in this Diocese which no one Bishop can do."⁷¹ It would be a decided understatement to say the letters to the editor in the *Church Messenger* become quite heated. Editor Edmund Joyner felt it necessary to remind his letter-writers that they all followed a gentle savior.⁷²

⁶⁸ *NCDJ* 66th (1882): 99.

⁶⁹ *Church Messenger* 4, no. 2 (May 25, 1882).

⁷⁰ *Church Messenger* 4, no. 46 (April 19, 1883).

⁷¹ *Church Messenger* 4, no. 47 (April 26, 1883).

⁷² *Church Messenger* 4, no. 48 (May 3, 1883).

With all this passion flowing through diocesan veins, the 1883 convention was destined to be memorable and momentous. The delegates proceeded with the division of the diocese over the Bishop's dispassionate dissent, albeit not his veto. And however much delegates appreciated Bynum's work, the inevitable elimination of his position proceeded. The thornier issue was precisely where to draw the line. Several proposals were put forward, including one which would have drawn an east-west line through the middle of the state, creating an upper and lower diocese. Ultimately, the line favored by the majority of delegates followed the eastern border of Northampton County and proceeded southwest to the eastern border of Scotland County. Because Bishop Lyman chose to remain in Raleigh, the portion of the state for which he retained jurisdiction was called the Diocese of North Carolina. The newly-created diocese was given the name the Diocese of East Carolina, and in December of 1883, it held its first convention and proceeded to elect the Rev. Alfred A. Watson, Rector of St. James', Wilmington, as its first bishop.⁷³

At the time of division, there was a rough parity between the two dioceses in terms of communicant strength and financial resources, but not in terms of geographical extent. This reflected the fact that historically the Episcopal Church in North Carolina was strongest along the coastal plain and weakest in the mountains.⁷⁴ Indeed, even with the division of the diocese, it was still challenging to give the western part of the state the kind of focused attention that it merited. As a result, a further division of the diocese was effected in 1895, with the creation of the Missionary District of Asheville along the eastern boundary of the counties of Alleghany,

⁷³ Patton, "The Diocese of North Carolina, 1861-1883," 269; Lawrence Fay Brewster, "The Diocese of East Carolina, 1883-1963," in *The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1959*, ed. Lawrence Foushee London and Sarah McCulloh Lemmon (Raleigh, 1987), 426-428.

⁷⁴ Patton, "The Diocese of North Carolina, 1861-1883," 269, 270.

Wilkes, Alexander, Catawba, Lincoln, and Gaston. The designation of the western region as a Missionary District meant that it would be entitled to have its own bishop but that it was not yet ready to support itself financially as a diocese. Junius Moore Horner of Oxford, North Carolina was chosen bishop in 1898, but it would not be until 1922 that the General Convention of the Episcopal Church approved the creation of the Diocese of Western North Carolina.⁷⁵

The tripartite division of the state into three separate dioceses would remain a source of contention and controversy into the 1940s. In 1898, East Carolina lobbied to have the Missionary District abolished and the diocesan boundary redrawn to give more territory to East Carolina. This proposal was rejected by both the Diocese of North Carolina and the newly-former Missionary District. By the 1930s, it was the Diocese of Western Carolina initiating the requests. Bishop Horner died in the spring of 1933, and in anticipation of calling his successor, Western North Carolina reached out to the other two dioceses, inviting them to send representatives to a conference in the summer of 1933 to consider the question of whether the current tripartite division should stand. The conference once again rejected all consideration of a new bipartite division, but it did call on the Diocese of North Carolina to consider ceding portions of its territory to the other two. When the Diocese of North Carolina failed to act on that broad recommendation, Western North Carolina made a targeted request that the counties surrounding Winston-Salem be ceded. This overture met with inaction, as did a 1948 campaign

⁷⁵ Elizabeth N. Thomson, "The Episcopal Church in Western North Carolina, 1894-1948," in *The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1959*, ed. Lawrence Foushee London and Sarah McCulloh Lemmon (Raleigh, 1987), 465-467; 492-496.

for realignment spearheaded by East Carolina. The boundaries set in the 1880s and 1890s have remained fixed.⁷⁶

This has resulted in the Diocese of North Carolina being much the largest and most urban of the three—roughly twice the size of the others—and embracing the two great population centers of Raleigh and Charlotte—and all the metropolitan areas in the piedmont crescent. Because dioceses are autonomous governing units, once the division was made there was no longer any way to impel cooperative ventures. But shared heritage and common outlook brought the dioceses together to support a number of institutions and initiatives. One of these was St. Mary’s School in Raleigh, which by the 1890s was deeply in debt and in danger of closing. The Diocese of North Carolina arranged purchase and transfer of ownership into the Church’s hands and was joined in this highly successful effort by East Carolina.⁷⁷ St. Augustine’s School in Raleigh and the Thompson Orphanage in Charlotte have also enjoyed support from Episcopalians across the state (and beyond).

Helping to forge these bonds across diocesan boundaries into the early decades of the 20th century were the common background and shared experiences of the leaders of both dioceses. A.A. Watson had served in North Carolina for almost forty years before becoming the first bishop of East Carolina, so he had long and deep associations across the state, even though his ministry had been spent in churches along the coast: Plymouth, Washington, New Bern, and Wilmington. Lyman had been Assistant Bishop of the entire state for a decade before the

⁷⁶ Thomson, “The Episcopal Church in Western North Carolina,” 469; 509, 510; 513; Brewster, “The Diocese of East Carolina,” 452, 453.

⁷⁷ H.G. Jones with David Southern, *Miss Mary’s Money: Fortune and Misfortune in a North Carolina Plantation Family, 1760-1924*, (Jefferson, 2015), 163-167. Jones notes that the Mary Ruffin Smith bequest to the Diocese of North Carolina became a source of protracted litigation between the two dioceses, and that the shared effort to contribute to the saving of St. Mary’s School facilitated rapprochement.

division, and when Lyman died in 1893, he was succeeded by Tarboro native Joseph Blount Cheshire, Jr., then serving as Rector of St. Peter's, Charlotte. All these men had imbibed Atkinson's convictions about mission and ministry, and collectively they oversaw a period of unprecedented growth and expansion for the Church. In the 1880s and 1890s alone, 58 new church buildings were erected, a testimony to enterprising and devoted parish clergy who extended their ministrations beyond the membership of their own congregation. Cheshire himself was one of those, greatly expanding the reach of the Church in Charlotte through new congregations and institutions during his decade as Rector of St. Peter's from 1882 to 1893.⁷⁸

Of invaluable assistance to Cheshire in several of these outreach efforts was Jane Wilkes, who also was one of the early leaders of the North Carolina Branch of the Woman's Auxiliary of the Board of Missions. The role of women as supporters of parish projects was long-established, and informal networks of women existed throughout the Church. Many clergy, in their parochial reports, would credit "the Ladies" for their assistance as teachers and fundraisers. But the Woman's Auxiliary, organized in North Carolina in 1882, formalized and extended this work and directed it wholly towards mission and social outreach. In Charlotte, Mrs. Wilkes is best-remembered for her contributions to the establishment of two church-supported hospitals: St. Peter's and Good Samaritan. She was also executive secretary and "permanent president" in the Woman's Auxiliary, serving from the early 1880s until 1909. Because women were not allowed to take positions of leadership within the Convention until the 1960s and 1970s, the Auxiliary became a parallel institution, whose governance and organization mirrored that of the Diocese.

⁷⁸ James S. Brawley, "The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1883-1900," in *The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1959*, ed. Lawrence Foushee London and Sarah McCulloh Lemmon (Raleigh, 1987), 296, 297; Lawrence Foushee London, *Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire*, (Chapel Hill, 1941), 27-45.

Besides hospitals, ministries in mill villages (then called “industrial work”) and among the deaf were two areas where women were critical to staffing and financial support of mission initiatives.⁷⁹

Prevailing racial attitudes also led to the creation of a parallel organization for African-Americans in the Church. In the aftermath of the Civil War, Atkinson had called for the creation of black congregations and schools and for the cultivation of black leadership as ministers and teachers. But in keeping with his “catholic principles” he had also insisted upon having these congregations and clergy as full members of diocesan convention. Starting in 1891, however, all the black congregations of the Diocese of North Carolina were placed within a separate “colored convocation” under the administrative leadership of an Archdeacon for Work among the Colored People. The first Archdeacon was a white priest, William Walker, but in 1898 Bishop Cheshire replaced him with a black priest from South Carolina named John H.M. Pollard. And when Pollard died in 1908, Cheshire appointed another black priest, Henry B. Delany, to the post. At the time, Delany was serving as a teacher and Vice-Principal of St. Augustine’s School, where he had first entered as a student. After ten years as Archdeacon, Delany’s field of service expanded as he became a Suffragan, or Assistant Bishop, working exclusively with the African-American congregations throughout the Carolinas, though officially attached to the Diocese of North Carolina. Delany served as bishop for ten years and died in office in 1928. At the same time, the diocese decided to abolish its convocation system and reorganize all mission work through

⁷⁹ London, *Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire*, 42,43; Eva Burbank Murphy, “Wilkes, Jane Renwick Smedberg,” in ed. William S. Powell, *The North Carolina Dictionary of Biography*, 6 volumes (Chapel Hill, 1979-1996); Lawrence Foushee London, “The Diocese in the First Decades of the Twentieth Century, 1901-1922,” in *The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1959*, ed. Lawrence Foushee London and Sarah McCulloh Lemmon (Raleigh, 1987), 330-334.

diocesan departments, and so the separate convocation for black congregations likewise disbanded and Delany's position was discontinued.⁸⁰

In addition to broadly-shared missions, each of the three dioceses developed their own institutions and specialized ministries which reflected the specific context in which they found themselves. The Diocese of North Carolina, for example, became strongly committed to college work, a reflection of the large number of prominent colleges and universities in the Piedmont. The Diocese of Western North Carolina encouraged craft and parochial schools, and the Diocese of East Carolina strongly supported ministry to the members of the Armed Forces stationed there.⁸¹

The 1950s saw the Episcopal Church throughout the state expand into the suburbs and start new congregations in large metropolitan areas, a trend that was broadly shared with other religious bodies. Between 1953 and 1963, communicant membership in the Diocese of North Carolina grew from 25,000 to 35,000 members and thirteen new parishes were formed.⁸² Soon, however, pressing social issues came to the forefront, bringing controversy and dissension in their wake. First and foremost was the call in church and society for an end to racial segregation. One ardent segregationist, James Dees, rector of Trinity Church, Statesville was so disturbed by the church's

⁸⁰ *NCDJ 75th* (1891): 140-141. Annual reports continued to appear in the Journal of Convention through 1928. See also London, "The Diocese in the First Decades of the Twentieth Century, 1901-1922," 309; 317-328, and George H. Esser, "Rapid Growth and Financial Crisis, 1923-1941," in *The Episcopal Church in North Carolina, 1701-1959*, ed. Lawrence Foushee London and Sarah McCulloh Lemmon (Raleigh, 1987), 364-366.

⁸¹ For the significance of college work, see the Address of Bishop Thomas A. Fraser, *NCDJ 146th* (1962): 83; on Penland and other Appalachian schools, see Thomson, "The Episcopal Church in Western North Carolina," 472-485; on ministry to the Armed Forces, see Brewster, "The Diocese of East Carolina," 452.

⁸² *NCDJ 149th*, (1965): 69.

support for civil rights that in 1963 he renounced his priesthood and organized a new body, the Anglican Orthodox Church, but his was not a widely-shared response.⁸³

More broadly divisive were the Episcopal Church's efforts to respond to the urban rioting that began in 1965. Deeply shaken by what he saw in American cities, Presiding Bishop for the national church, John Hines, asked the 1967 General Convention to authorize an ambitious \$9 million fund (the General Convention Special Program or GCSP) to address social inequities through awarding grants to organizations and programs outside the customary channels.

Whatever misgivings North Carolina Episcopalians might have had about this initiative were fanned into active dissent when fund administrators in New York awarded two grants totaling \$45,000.00 to the Malcolm X Liberation University in Durham in 1969. At the diocesan convention in 1970, North Carolina Bishop Thomas Fraser announced that 38 congregations had withheld contributions from the diocese and national church totaling almost \$164,000.00. North Carolina weathered the controversy, and by 1973 the Episcopal Church had retreated from the agenda of the GCSP.⁸⁴

But the 1970s did not provide respite from controversial and contentious issues in the church. One was the issue of the ordination of women; the other, the issue of revising the liturgy of the church as expressed in the Book of Common Prayer. Both changes were enacted at the General Convention of 1976, after which some traditionalists left the church.⁸⁵ But the ordination of women also led to a remarkable event early in 1977 at the Chapel of the Cross in Chapel Hill, when the first African-American woman ordained to the priesthood of the Episcopal Church, the

⁸³ Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *Episcopalians & Race: Civil War to Civil Rights*, (Lexington, KY, 2000), 118.

⁸⁴ *NCDJ 154th*, (1970), 73-77; Shattuck, *Episcopalians & Race*, 199, 200; Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, 261-264.

⁸⁵ Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, 251-257.

Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray, celebrated Holy Communion for the first time in the very building where her grandmother, Cornelia Fitzgerald, had worshipped in the 1850s as an enslaved child.⁸⁶

Women's ordination was gradually embraced throughout the Church in North Carolina, and by the second decade of the 21st century, the clergy of the church were as likely to be women as men. Indeed, North Carolina elected its first woman bishop in 2013, the Rt. Rev. Anne E. Hodges-Copple.⁸⁷

North Carolina was home to another landmark event in the life of the Episcopal Church in 2000, when the Diocese of North Carolina elected the Rt. Rev. Michael B. Curry as the first African-American Bishop to lead a southern diocese. In his first convention address after becoming bishop, Curry recalled the diocese to its missionary vocation.⁸⁸ His leadership was sorely tested in 2003, however, after he and the other bishops of North Carolina voted with the majority of their colleagues to confirm the election of the Rt. Rev. V. Gene Robinson, an openly gay priest living in a non-celibate relationship, as Bishop of New Hampshire. Some of those unhappy with Robinson's consecration left the Episcopal Church and formed new congregations under a new national organization called the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA; established in 2009) that sees itself as a more traditional alternative to the Episcopal Church within the world-wide Anglican Communion. As of 2015, ACNA reported on its website 34 congregations across North Carolina.

Bishop Curry, however, retained the enthusiastic support of the vast majority of Episcopalians in his diocese. He continued to make mission work a priority and called on the church to broaden

⁸⁶ Pauli Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat: An American Pilgrimage*, (New York, 1987), 432-435.

⁸⁷ *NCDJ 197th*, (2013): 1, 112-114.

⁸⁸ *NCDJ 185th* (2001): 116-124.

and deepen its appeal, even invoking the “Primary Charge” of his 19th-century predecessor, Thomas Atkinson.⁸⁹ In any event, North Carolina was one of only four dioceses of the Episcopal Church to report an increase in membership between 2003 and 2013. And on November 1, 2015, Bishop Curry was installed as the 27th Presiding Bishop for the national Episcopal Church, the first North Carolina bishop and the first African-American bishop to hold the position.⁹⁰

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⁸⁹ NCDJ 192nd, (2008): 123-131.

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