

“Bend our Pride to thy Control”
The Need of the Church to Repent for the Sin of Slavery and its Aftermath

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Let us pray:

*Races and peoples, lo, we stand divided,
And, sharing not our griefs, no joy can share;
By wars and tumults love is mocked, derided;
His saving cross no nation yet will bear:
Thy kingdom come, O Lord, thy will be done.*

Laurence Housman, *The Hymnal 1982*, 573.

Resolution A123: Some Initial Reactions

In this year of grace, Two Thousand and Eight, we have come today to this great parish, founded by Absalom Jones, the first African American priest in the Episcopal Church, himself a slave who bought his own freedom and that of his wife, to recognize and celebrate the fact that The Episcopal Church has, in General Convention, declared slavery a sin. Moreover, the church's highest tribunal has acknowledged the said church's complicity in the perpetuation of slavery; professed "profound regret" that TEC has provided theological and Biblical justification for its existence; and has repented that it has long derived considerable economic benefit from this most nefarious of institutions. Now we veterans of General Conventions (you know you are old when General Convention cities repeat themselves: by next year I shall have attended two Denvers, two Minneapolis and two Anaheims!) know that no resolution worth its salt is complete without the appointment of a committee, commission or task force, with the expectation that the body in question will issue a report on the fruits of its labors to be shared with the wider church. Resolution A123 is no exception. In order that the church's membership might be furnished with a "full, faithful and informed accounting of our history," the Committee on Anti-Racism has been charged with the responsibility of recommending ways in which the church might act as a "repairer of the breach," and bring about healing and reconciliation.

What is the proper response of people of faith to this bold announcement, to this resounding, and dare we say, uncharacteristic *mea culpa*? One reaction is to say, that coming as it does some four centuries after the first Africans were brought in fetters to these shores, and nearly a century and a half after the Emancipation Proclamation, it is too little, too late. But we should not be surprised. The Episcopal Church, long a "non-prophet organization," has never been a church renowned for timeliness and celerity.

Indeed, our penchant has ever been to jump on the bandwagon long after issues have been resolved. Lest we forget, the Episcopal Church rushed to desegregate its elite private schools after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision was handed down. We have, admittedly, more often been a church marching not “with the Cross of Jesus going on before,” but rather “with the Cross of Jesus bringing up the rear.” As I point out in my book on the history of black Episcopalians,

The Episcopal Church, in addressing matters concerning its black constituency, has been given more to reaction than action, more to response than initiative, more to acquiescence than advocacy. Such acts, born solely of a sense of obligation, have been carried out with reticence, reluctance and reserve.¹

Another reaction, at this kairotic moment in history as the Republic may well be poised to elect its first African American President, would be to say “not a moment too soon.” We live in a society in which American youth, both black and white, shrug their shoulders and ask, “*Quest-ce que c'est* slavery?” It is understood as an unfortunate period of history, long gone and forgotten, bearing no resemblance to and having absolutely no effect on life in the 21st century. Young blacks believe that the bondage experienced by their ancestors has not had even a remote effect on their lives. As a youngster growing up in St. Philip’s, Brooklyn, I was certainly blissfully unaware of the legacy of slavery. My first clue that something was amiss was when, during an interview at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, the professor asked me if it had occurred to me that the Episcopal Church didn’t particularly like me! This, in turn, prepared me for an event three years later, when the Bishop of Long Island released me because there were no positions for Negro ordinands in his Diocese.

To young whites, the idea that their ancestors bore some responsibility for the institution of slavery, or that they themselves are today direct or indirect beneficiaries of it, is nothing short of laughable. Clearly neither group listened to Senator Obama’s speech on race, entitled “A More Perfect Union,” delivered in this city last March:

We need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist between the African American community and the larger American community today can be traced directly to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow.²

I say that this General Convention resolution may be seen as coming “not a moment too soon” because if Barack Obama is elected, thereby obtaining the highest office in the land, and concomitantly the most powerful office in the free world, newly harmonized choruses of “What more do you people want?” will drown out any attempts made to explain that the masses of African Americans are oppressed.

¹ Harold T. Lewis. *Yet With a Steady Beat: The African American Struggle for Recognition in the Episcopal Church*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996, 162.

² Barack Obama, “A More Perfect Union,” delivered at the Constitution Center, Philadelphia 18 March 2008. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/php?storyId=88478467>.

A third, admittedly parenthetical but, I believe, not unimportant reaction to A123 has to do with venue. In a sacramental church in which outward and visible signs are of great consequence, it is unfortunate that we are not gathered today in the Washington National Cathedral, as mandated by the Resolution. To have assembled in the Cathedral Church of SS. Peter & Paul, that house of prayer for all people, perched high atop “the other hill” in Washington, the seat of the Presiding Bishop and Primate, a place where the church has demonstrated its commitment to interfaith dialogue, where it has mourned the victims of 9-11 and other national tragedies, and from which we have buried our Presidents, we would have sent a message to church and society which would have added immeasurably to a “full, faithful and informed accounting of our history” that *all* Episcopalians truly atone for the sin of slavery and the racism it has spawned. I am sure that the drafters of the resolution believed that having this event in the National Cathedral, which is our Westminster Abbey, would demonstrate that slavery is a national and church wide problem; unfortunately, by convening in this historic black congregation, we run the risk of sending the message that slavery is the black man’s problem, a kind of social disease which he has introduced into the American bloodstream, and whose miraculous cure he is expected to somehow bring about.

Slavery and Anglicanism: Not So Strange Bedfellows

In 1892, this parish celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of its founding. The preacher at that centennial celebration was Henry Codman Potter, bishop of New York. He heaped fulsome praise on the men and women of St. Thomas’ with these words:

I do not think it would have been very strange if the colored race, after it had been freed, should have refused to follow the white people’s God. It shows a higher order of intelligence and an acute discernment in the African race to have distinguished the good from the evil, in a religion that taught all men were brothers, and practiced the opposite.³

We shall ignore for the moment what Bishop Potter’s homiletical flattery says about the theological insightfulness of black Episcopalians of the late nineteenth century, and concentrate instead on what he meant by a religion “that taught all men were brothers, and practiced the opposite.” It is axiomatic that Anglicanism was the religion of the slave-holding plantocracy. Virginia was, after all, not only the cradle of American colonialism and the font of American Anglicanism; it was also that place where the first African slaves came ashore. In 1619, the same year of the arrival of the first slaves, the Colonial Assembly made the Church of England the established religion of the Virginia Colony. But such an arrangement was more than an amicable relationship between church and state which would ensure that an Anglican cleric would be present to pray at the Assembly. Rather, such establishment was rooted in a specific economic relationship.

³ Bishop Henry C. Potter, cited in George Freeman Bragg, *History of the Afro-American Group in the Episcopal Church*. Baltimore: Church Advocate Press, 1922.

Clergy received grants of land, called glebes, and the income from those lands constituted part of their remuneration. Moreover, a tax called the tithe was imposed on crops belonging to all planters and collected for church expenses. Through this unique symbiotic relationship, the Church became Caesar's friend, and since Caesar's crops, on which the well being of the ecclesiastical enterprise depended, were planted, cultivated and harvested by slave labor, church leaders were loath to object to the institution, even if they had a mind to. They were even silent when the General Assembly reversed English common law by making the legal status of a child born to a female slave and a male planter depend not on the father but on the mother.

Even in the days before the Internet, the behavior of Virginia's Anglican planters attracted an international audience. Samuel Wilberforce, bishop of Oxford and a member of a family passionate about the abolition of the slave trade, wrote:

How has [the church] fulfilled her vocation? She raises no voice against the predominant evil; she palliates it in theory; and in practice she shares in it. The mildest and most conscientious of the bishops of the south are slave-holders themselves. . . It is the first duty of the Church to reprove the sins of others, not to adopt them into her own practice. . . But she is silent here; and to her greater shame it must be added, that there are sects [e.g., Quakers] which do maintain the witness she has feared to bear.⁴

From time to time, some clergy experienced pangs of conscience arising from a situation, in the words of DeTocqueville, in which "they scarcely acknowledge the common features of humanity in this stranger whom slavery has brought among them."⁵ In 1680, the Reverend Morgan Godwyn published a tract entitled *The Negro's and Indian's Advocate, Suing for their Admission to the Church*. While not advocating manumission, he did argue for slaves' pastoral care, beginning with the sacrament of Baptism. With the arrival of missionaries sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) a few decades later, whose dual task, according to Carleton Hayden, was to serve as a chaplaincy for Englishmen overseas and to evangelize African slaves and indigenous people,⁶ the baptisms of slaves became widespread.

The problem with the administration of the sacrament hinged on one word in the Baptismal rite, namely "freedom." There began to arise a belief that somehow manumission was conferred through Baptism. Just as English common law had been revised to conform to the practice of slavery, which even the SPG described as "a vital factor in British prosperity," so did the church's theology undergo considerable tweaking in order to ensure that slave-holding was deemed compatible with the practice of religion.

⁴ Samuel Wilberforce, Lord Bishop of Oxford. *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America*, 2nd ed. London: Rivington, 1846, 426ff.

⁵ Alexis DeTocqueville, cited in Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black, White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*. New York: Scribner's, 1992, 18.

⁶ J. Carleton Hayden. "Afro-Anglican Linkages 1701-1900: Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch out her arms unto God," *Journal of Religious Thought* 44, no. 1 (1987) 25.

The matter was settled in a letter to the Virginia planters from the bishop of London in 1727, in which he wrote that Christianity "continues persons just in the same state as it found them. . . . As to their outward condition, whatever that was before, whether bond or free, their being baptized makes no manner of change in it." Lest there be any misunderstanding, Bishop Gibson added that baptism "lays them under stronger obligation to perform those duties with the greatest diligence and fidelity,"⁷ --- that is, in the case of slaves to be better slaves than they were before!

One SPG missionary even took the liberty of adding a caveat to the baptismal service, which read: "You do not ask for Baptism out of any design to free yourself from the Duty and Obedience you owe to your master while you live, but *merely* for the good of your Souls, and to partake of the graces and blessings promised to the members of the Church of Jesus Christ."⁸

These vignettes give us some insight into the clause of Resolution A123 which reads: "That The Episcopal Church acknowledge its history of participation in this sin and the deep and lasting injury which the institution of slavery and its aftermath have inflicted on society and the Church." As reprehensible as were the practices of owning human beings and preventing them from entering fully into the life of the church, which I describe as the "conditional Anglicanization" of slaves,⁹ the root problem of slavery was an even greater sin --- and that, of course, was the sin of racism. Racism, which has been defined by The Episcopal Church, as "the abuse of power by a racial group which uses power to its advantage to exclude, demean, damage, or destroy a less powerful racial group"¹⁰ was the underpinning that provided slavery with a philosophical and ideological (and for the church, theological) justification. The practice of religion took place within such racist parameters. "It is," in the words of a prominent historian of the Episcopal Church, "a little difficult to take a benevolent interest in a man's future blessedness when you are energetically endeavoring to make him exist wholly for your benefit in this present life."¹¹ This meant, as Kortright Davis has observed, that

slaves were treated as chattel and subhuman property. Plantation society thrived on a system that ensured to white propertied classes the permanence of a black laboring class; and every effort was made through the legal and social systems to guarantee that the structures of racism would remain in place.¹²

⁷ Edmund Gibson, bishop of London, "To the Masters and Mistresses of Families in the English Plantations Abroad," 1727, cited in Forrest Wood, *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Faith in America from the Colonial Period to the Twentieth Century*. New York: Knopf, 1990.

⁸ The Rev. Francis LeJau, St. James' Church, Goose Creek, SC, in a letter to the Secretary of the SPG, 13 June 1710, cited in Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford U. Press, 1978, 103, Italics mine.

⁹ *Yet With a Steady Beat*, chapter 1.

¹⁰ *Racial Audit of the Episcopal Church*, 1991. New York: Domestic & Foreign Missionary Society, 1993.

¹¹ William Manross, *A History of the American Episcopal Church*. New York: Morehouse Goreham, 1950, 146.

¹² H.D. Kortright Davis, *Emancipation Still Comin'*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990. 24. Although Dr.

The significance of the nature of the practice of slavery cannot be overemphasized. What this means is that the contempt for blacks; the belief in their inherent inferiority, both moral and intellectual; the belief that God had ordained that they were placed on earth in order to be of service to white people; the belief in the "gross bestiality and rudeness of their manners, and the weakness and shallowness of their minds,"¹³ --- such characteristics attributable to blacks were embedded in the minds of the slaveholding class, and, it should be noted, in the minds of the slaves themselves, and proved to be virtually ineradicable when slavery was abolished, and for generations afterwards. As brutal and inhumane as slavery was, it pales, ultimately, when compared to the legacy of slavery.

The legacy of slavery manifests itself, according to the litany recited in Senator Obama's masterful speech on racism, in several ways. Segregated schools has led to the "pervasive achievement gap between today's black and white students." Legalized discrimination, under which blacks were prevented, often through violence, from owning property or from joining unions, or denied FHA mortgages, helped to create what Obama calls "concentrated pockets of poverty." A lack of economic opportunity and the lack of basic services in many urban neighborhoods helped to create what the Democratic presidential nominee calls "a cycle of violence, blight and neglect that continues to haunt us." Such conditions have been the legacy of the institution of slavery, which have constituted the lasting injury not only to African Americans and other minorities, but to members of the majority culture as well whose quality of life is ultimately diminished when so many suffer in their midst. This is why The Episcopal Church has seen fit, at long last, to repent for its complicity in slavery --- because the ramifications of that practice have endured long after the ink dried on the Emancipation Proclamation. It is the long lasting effects of slavery for which the church in general, and The Episcopal Church in particular, must do penance.

"Qualis patria, talis ecclesia"

One of the key phrases in Resolution A123 is this admission: "After slavery was formally abolished, The Episcopal Church continued for at least a century to support de jure and de facto segregation and discrimination." While slavery was the law of the land, The Episcopal Church made virtually no effort to oppose it, and, as we have shown, derived considerable material benefit from the system. Southern Episcopalians believed,

Davis' is writing here regarding slavery in the West Indies, his observations bear no less relevance to slavery in the United States.

¹³ Letter from the Virginia House of Burgesses to Col. Francis Nicholson, governor of Virginia, 1699, cited in Edgar Pennington, *Thomas Bray's Associates and their Work Among Negroes*, Worcester, MA, American Antiquarian Society, 1939, 38-39.

as stated in resolutions passed by the Confederate Episcopal Church, that blacks had been "committed to our sympathy and care by the national institution of slavery," which in turn they regarded as an "institution which God had created, and which "man cannot, consistently with Christianity, annul."¹⁴ While most northern Episcopalians did not feel as passionately, they were more than willing to condone slavery, purportedly out of an affection for their Southern cousins.¹⁵

At a time when Southern planters owned vast numbers of slaves (in some states the slave population outnumbered that of free whites) , the church practiced a brand of evangelization which, as Hayden observes, was used as a tool for the "defense of the peculiar institution of slavery."¹⁶ When slavery was abolished, the chameleon-like Episcopal Church, urged on by Southern planters who could not conceive of a social system devoid of blacks as "hewers of wood and drawers of water," developed a new evangelism which, while purporting to minister to freed blacks, was characterized by a paternalism designed to ensure that blacks would be second-class citizens at best. Indeed, as the nation embarked on a campaign to limit the advancement of blacks and to prevent them from claiming the fruits of their newfound freedom (efforts which would be enforced by a series of decisions of the Supreme Court in the last two decades of the nineteenth century) The Episcopal Church launched its own version of Jim Crow. This phenomenon is summed up in the Latin adage, *Qualis patria, talis ecclesia* ("As the nation goes, so goes the church"). The Episcopal Church, founded, it is alleged only partly in jest, by the same people who had drawn up the Constitution across the street earlier in the day, has had a unique relationship with the Republic, with which it has, for most of their respective histories, walked in lockstep. The Church, then, instead of setting a moral example for the nation to follow, has more often than not taken its lead from the mores of the nation.

One of the most egregious examples of the Church's mirroring of the nation's policies with respect to blacks can be seen in a conference held at the University of the South at Sewanee in 1883. It was convened to devise a plan through which the church could minister to former slaves, while, as Gardiner Shattuck points out, keeping such

¹⁴ Joseph Blount Cheshire, *The Church in the Confederate States*. New York: Longmans, Green, 1912, 114 *et passim*.

¹⁵ This brings us to examine the myth that the Episcopal Church, unlike other denominations like Methodists and Presbyterians, never split over the slavery issue. In point of fact, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States was organized, and its bishops and delegates absented themselves from the 1862 General Convention. When the roll was called, Episcopal Church officialdom, refusing to recognize their secession, marked them absent. After the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War, the bishops and delegates returned, contrite, to the 1865 General Convention, and answered "present" when the roll was called! See Lewis, *Yet With a Steady Beat*, 36, 44.

¹⁶ J. Carleton Hayden, "Conversion and Control: Dilemma of Episcopalians in Providing for the Religious Instructions of Slaves, Charleston, South Carolina, 1845-1860," *Historical Magazine of the Episcopal Church* (1972) 144.

persons accountable to the authority of white clergy.¹⁷ Among the recommendations that had been bandied about were a suffragan bishopric for the colored race (which would finally be implemented in 1918 with the consecrations of Edward Thomas Demby and Henry Beard Delaney),¹⁸ and a separate missionary district for the race, under white leadership, a scheme which the Methodists had recently adopted. By the time the group had convened, under the chairmanship of Bishop William Green of Mississippi, it passed a resolution, which they recommended be enacted as a canon at the 34th General Convention, which would convene in Philadelphia a few months later. Citing "the peculiarity of the relations of the races, one to another," and the need to appoint "a special agency . . . of those wandering sheep of the flock of Christ," the resolution read: "In any Diocese containing a large number of persons of colour, it shall be lawful for the Bishop and Convention of the same to constitute such population into a special Missionary Organization under the charge of the Bishop."¹⁹

The proposed canon was never enacted, thanks to the genius of bicameral legislature. The resolution passed overwhelmingly in the House of Bishops, but was defeated by the House of Deputies, who declared that such legislation would "draw lines of distinction between the followers of our common Lord."²⁰ But for those committed to racial equality, the defeat of the resolution proved to be a pyrrhic victory at best. Prevented from carrying out a national plan of disenfranchisement of blacks, the bishops opted to achieve the same end at a local diocesan level, through the establishment of "colored convocations." Under such a system (the last such convocation took place in the Diocese of South Carolina in 1954) blacks were unable to sit in diocesan conventions, thereby removing them entirely from having a voice in church governance. At subsequent General Conventions, some sympathetic whites tried to challenge the creation of colored convocations, but repeatedly, the Church, in its characteristic fence-sitting posture, decided that this "was a question over which the national denomination had no say."²¹

African Americans and their Catholic Witness in TEC

It must be noted that the defeat of the so-called "Sewanee Canon" did not happen through osmosis, or even primarily because of sympathetic white clergy and laity in the House of Deputies. As Shattuck observes, it was Alexander Crummell, the senior black Episcopal priest and the rector of St. Luke's, Washington (recently added to the Episcopal

¹⁷ Gardiner Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race, Civil War to Civil Rights*. Lexington: U. of Kentucky Press, 2000, 13.

¹⁸ See Lewis, *Yet With a Steady Beat*, 78ff.; Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 25ff., and Michael Beary, *Black Bishop: Edward T. Demby and the Struggle for Racial Equality in the Episcopal Church*. Urbana: U. of Illinois Press, 2001.

¹⁹ Proposed canon, "Of missionary organizations within constituted Episcopal jurisdictions," *Journal of the General Convention* (183) 597.

²⁰ *Journal of the General Convention* (1883) 595ff.

²¹ Gardiner Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 17.

Church's calendar through *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*) who, angered at the decision reached at the Sewanee Conference, convened a group of his fellow African American clergy and urged them to make a concerted effort to oppose the plan.²² Since, clearly, there were no black people in either House, this meant that Crummell and his friends would have to rely on like-minded whites at General Convention. One such person who proved to be an ally to the black clergy was Bishop Richard Hooker Wilmer of Alabama (whose great-grandson and namesake was my first dean at the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale) the only person at the Sewanee Conference who objected to the proposed canon. He did so on the grounds that it was "inconsistent with true catholicity" and "contrary to the mind of Christ," sentiments which would have well resonated with Crummell's theology.

Emboldened by the success with respect to the outcome of the vote at the 1883 General Convention, Crummell and his fellows founded an organization called the Conference of Church Workers Among Colored People, which would later become the Union of Black Episcopalians. Although the CCWACP fought for the inclusion of blacks at every level of the church's life, and although their adversaries in the struggle were white Episcopalians, the major differences between the two groups were not primarily racial, but ideological and theological. Early in the 20th century, the Church Workers issued what could be called a mission statement:

It must be apparent that in the Church of God; in a society founded upon justice, liberty and brotherly kindness, the yearning of Christ's soul cannot be realized if all who are included in that society are not accorded the freedom, the justice, the equity which He declares to be the right of all.²³

As I point out in *Yet With a Steady Beat*,²⁴ the major point of divergence between white and black Episcopalians after the end of the Civil War and arguably until the Civil Rights era a century later, centered around the two groups' understanding of the nature of the Church's catholicity. White Episcopalians believed, by and large, that the church should be a reflection of the stratification which was normative in society. "The rich man," according to such a watered-down view of catholicity, would always be "in his castle, the poor man at his gate" (in the words of the suppressed verse of a popular Victorian hymn).²⁵ Indeed, the Catechism at the time, admonishing the faithful "to do our duty in that state of life in which it shall please God to call us," justified such an theology. Black Episcopalians, on the other hand, interpreted catholicity quite differently. They believed that the catholic religion, by definition (the word comes from the Greek *kath'*

²² Gardiner Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 14. See also Lewis *Yet With a Steady Beat*, 68ff., and Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 244-445

²³ Conference of Church Workers Among Colored People, "Address to the Church at Large," 1906, 3. (Episcopal Church Archives, Austin, TX)

²⁴ Harold T. Lewis, *Yet With a Steady Beat*, 45ff.

²⁵ Cecil Frances Alexander, "All Things bright and beautiful," *The Hymnal 1940*, 311. The suppressed verse reads: *The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate
God made them high or lowly, and ordered their estate.*

olon, "according to the whole") embraced all of humankind. They believed that a catholic church must be guided by St. Paul's admonition to the Romans that it not conform itself to the pattern of the present world, but rather that it should be about the business of being an agent responsible for its transformation.

Until the 1960s, when, in the words of historiographer John Booty, The Episcopal Church was "jolted out of its complacency" and "forced to recognize the existence of deep-rooted racial prejudice in its midst,"²⁶ the Church had its own version of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. And like that 1896 Supreme Court decision which declared that minorities should be considered well served if "separate but equal" accommodations were provided for them, but in fact were provided, more often than not separate but *unequal* lodgings, schools, restaurants, and railroad carriages, so did the church deem that its minority constituents be content with inferior parish facilities, colored convocations and clergy deployment carried out solely along racial lines.

For the better part of a century, the CCWACP spoke out against these and other inequities, and spoke up for its constituency with respect to their fitness for service at every level of the church's life. When, for example, the Conference determined that the only avenue to the episcopacy was through the missionary route, --- that is, suffragan bishoprics for colored work, Frazier Miller, rector of St. Augustine's, Brooklyn, reminding the church of her discriminatory practices, declared at a 1903 meeting of the CCWACP:

If you exclude us from diocesan conventions with all the rights and privileges inherent in their membership, then give us jurisdictions of our own wherein we may exercise the function of legislation and not be limited to spheres of petition . . . That we should acquiesce in disfranchisement, and resign ourselves to the estate of pariahs and serfs in the Commonwealth of God, or in the civil privileges of our national life, we say never, so long as the Omnipotent One shall imbue our souls with the spirit of understanding, and enlarge our mouths with the power of protest.²⁷

While agencies established by the Episcopal Church to minister to former slaves and their descendants, such as the American Church Institute for Negroes, railed on about "the immorality and inconsistency into which the emotional nature of the Negro has led him,"²⁸ Anna Julia Cooper, a black educator, writing at the turn of the 20th century, observed that although Southern Negroes, unlike the members of other missionary field, were "aliens neither in language and customs, nor in associations and sympathies . . . Yet

²⁶ John Booty, *The Episcopal Church in Crisis*, Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1988, 57.

²⁷ George Frazier Miller, "Missionary Episcopate as a Method of Evangelism," in ed. John Melville Burgess, *Black Gospel/White Church*, New York: Seabury Press, 1982, 33-34.

²⁸ Records of ACIN, Episcopal Church Archives, Austin, RG61.1.3.

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 upon" the race.²⁹

When, in the early 20th century, the lynching of blacks throughout the South and in parts of the North, was a commonplace occurrence, the CCWACP petitioned the General Convention, asking for "Social Justice for colored people and the securing of Christian treatment for them as full citizens of the Republic."³⁰ the Convention flatly denied their request. Fifteen years later, a similar entreaty was made by the CCWACP, and the Convention again refused to take action, arguing that "as the grievances recited in the appeal are for a correction of governmental administration, your Committee feels no definite recommendation should be made to the House in this matter."³¹ When matters of racial discrimination within the bosom of the church, the Convention typically deemed such issues to be "sectional," that is peculiar to the former slave states. In 1934, the Convention declared that it was not wise "to pass general laws to apply only to special and sectional conditions."³²

In its relationships with the descendants of slaves, The Episcopal Church, well into the 20th century, continued to maintain that the Negro's status in society was none of its business, and that its only sphere of interest was the status of the Negro in the church. But as regards that status, it only considered resolutions which continued to confine African Americans to discrete roles in a parallel universe populated only by men and women of color. Despite such a posture, the Committee on the Status of the Negro could arrive at the remarkable conclusion that "with limited exception, [the Negro] possesses the same status as white people." And giving new definition to blaming the victim, the report went on to challenge "our Negro brethren among clergy and laity to demonstrate" their leadership qualities and thus receive recognition.³³

While time does not permit an adequate assessment of race relations in the Episcopal Church during the heady civil rights era, suffice it to say that it was for our branch of Christendom a period of fits and starts, beginning with the demise of the CCWACP and the birth of the short-lived and interracial (but white-governed) Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity (ESCRU). When that group divided into black and white caucuses, it died, and the Union of Black Clergy and Laity (UBCL) later the Union of Black Episcopalians was formed, its catalyst being the summary dismissal of Dr. Tollie Caution, the Secretary for Negro Work on the national church staff.

²⁹ Anna Julia Cooper, "Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race," in Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, New York: Oxford U. Press, 1988.

³⁰ *Journal of the General Convention* (1919) 228.

³¹ *Journal of the General Convention* (1934) 348.

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*, 477.

John Hines, prophetic primate of the church, launched the General Convention Special Program, declaring that the church should support grass-roots and minority organizations in our nation's cities. Unfortunately, he made the egregious error of making \$200,000 (a prodigious sum in 1969) to the Black Economic Development Conference, and not to the Episcopal Group, the Committee of Black Churchmen. This repudiation of the church's black clerical leadership sent the unmistakable message that the authentic voice in the black community was in the secular arena. Men whose parishes were on the front lines of the inner city, were deemed unworthy to spearhead programs initiated and funded by the church to which they had committed their lives. Black Episcopalians were relegated, yet again, to an ecclesiastical and societal limbo. It was a hard pill to swallow. What little progress had been made in the past hundred years seemed to become undone when Canon Junius Carter of Pittsburgh went to the microphone at the Special Convention held in South Bend and announced to the church that he loved: "I'm sick of you. You don't trust me, you don't trust black priests."

Resolution A123 in Retrospect

I have tried to suggest that slavery itself was not as detrimental to our common life as Americans and as Christians as was its aftermath. That odious institution has been a virulent cancer that has metastasized through the bloodstream of our society to such an extent so that all of us, regardless of our race, have been left debilitated. The church early on could have assumed the role of physician, placing herself in a position to "heal the sick soul" of the society to which she ministered, assuring its people that there is indeed a balm in Gilead. Instead, she allowed herself to be infected along with her patient, rendering herself unable to be of any assistance.

The language of the Resolution, strong and unambiguous, is rare for statements issued by official bodies of The Episcopal Church. Its words of contrition are well chosen and theologically sound. It *acknowledges* the church's sinful activity; it *profoundly regrets* that it misused Scripture to justify that behavior; and by *admitting* that the church continued to support slavery after its abolition, it also *admits* to greed and a lust for power. It *asks for God's forgiveness*, and then as penance, *pledges* to do what is necessary to bring about spiritual healing and new life in Christ.

My prayer is that we may we all be given the grace to do our part to "repair the breach."

Let us pray:

*How can we love thee, holy hidden Being,
If we love not the world which thou hast made?
Bind us in thine own love for better seeing
Thy Word made flesh, and in a manger laid:
Thy Kingdom come, O Lord, thy will be done.*