The Altar and the Rail: “Catholicity” and African American Inclusion in the 19th Century Episcopal Church

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Abstract: Examining the denominational history of The Episcopal Church from the point of view of mission shifts the view of the church’s nature and its most important figures. These become those people who struggled to overcome boundaries of race, culture, and geography in extending the church’s reach and incorporating new people into it, and puts issues of racial relationships at the forefront of the church’s story, rather than as an aside. White Episcopalians from the 1830s forward were focused heavily on the meaning of “catholicity” in terms of liturgical and sacramental practice, clerical privilege, and the centrality of the figure of the Bishop to the validity of the church, in increasingly tense and conflicted debates that have been traced by multiple scholars. However, the development of catholicity as a strategic marker of missional thinking, particularly in the context of a racially diverse church, has not been examined. The paper investigates the ways in which Black Episcopalians and their white allies used the theological ideal of catholicity creatively and strategically in the nineteenth century, both responding to a particular missional history and contending that missional success depended upon true catholicity.

Keywords: Episcopal Church; African American; catholicity; mission; race; Pennsylvania; North Carolina; Sewanee Canon; Alexander Crummell

1. Introduction

In 1889, a group of Black Episcopalians and their supporters, known as the Conference of Church Workers among Colored People, sent a memorial to the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. They did not present it personally. A white clergyman renowned for his interest in the mission and unity of the church, Rev. Dr. William Reed Huntington, rector of Grace Church in Manhattan, offered the memorial plea recorded in the Journal of General Convention:

We would respectfully, yet most earnestly, represent to your honorable bodies that we, as Clergy and Laity engaged in the work of the Church among Colored People, have been trained in the Protestant Episcopal Church, or have entered that Communion with the understanding,

• First, That it was a valid branch of God’s Holy Catholic Church, bringing to us all the verities of Christ’s religion, and animated by His Spirit.

• Second, That as such the Church knew no difference of race or condition.

• Third, That it is the doctrine of this Church, that its Priesthood is one, and that it is not her intention to discriminate in her legislative capacity against any of her Ministers on the sole ground of color; yet action has been taken in various parts of the Church which has either already deprived Colored Clergy of rights which we supposed they possessed by virtue of their Apostolic ordination, or which is likely to result in such deprivation, as, for example, the movement which has been made in more than one Diocese looking toward a Separate Organization for Colored People. In consequence of these facts and others which we shall not now mention, we believe that the confidence of many among us, and of most intelligent Colored People generally, has been greatly shaken respecting the reality of the Church’s Catholicity, and of her
profession of interest . . . [there is] one great question, which we believe must have a satisfactory answer before the work of converting the Colored People can proceed with any prospect of success.

In the mid-19th century, the idea of “catholicity” became enmeshed with the challenges of missional vision and practice in the Episcopal Church, connected with a vision of a church that includes “all people”, of all kinds and races. In a culturally and racially diverse nation, a national church that truly included all people seemed like a glorious vision for the Episcopal Church—and one that it was quite obviously failing to accomplish, as noted by Huntington, William Augustus Muhlenberg, and other missionally oriented white Episcopalians. In general systematic theological terms, “catholicity” refers to the universal nature of the church and is one of the marks of the true church taken from the early creeds, along with “one”, “holy”, and “apostolic”. White American Episcopalians in the 19th century were eager to demonstrate that their denomination was the true church, as opposed to a “sect”, via the marks of apostolicity and catholicity. Thus many histories of The Episcopal Church have focused on “catholicity” in the context of a church-shaping, multi-decade theological debate in the nineteenth century over the nature of the church, its sacraments and polity, and its relationship to the Roman Catholic Church and other Protestant churches. In the context of mission, instead “catholicity” is foregrounded as a theological symbol actively used and re-interpreted in the service of mission. It is a reason and impetus to the mission of the church, and in a missional context of racial and social domination, it can be used both to resist racial oppression and discrimination, and to cover over paternalistic and segregationist racism in the church’s life.

The situation of the 19th century Episcopal Church provides a window onto the challenges experienced by all denominations based in Euro-American Christianity of developing a church structure that can fully incorporate a racial or cultural group that is politically dominated by another. In the missional situation where the dominant group does not desire to fully incorporate the other, the existing structure is easily available to aid in domination, rather than incorporation, simply by leaving everything as it is. In the “mission field” as traced through world Christian history, one can easily see how missionaries from the United States, England, or Germany struggled to make their church relevant to those of different race and culture in Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America, and an ongoing struggle through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has centered around developing a “nativepastorate” and accepting the “euthanasia of the mission” in favor of an indigenous, contextualized church. The history of missions traces as well the complexities of colonialism, imperialism, and the relationship of missions and churches to the postcolonial process.

In a context such as the nineteenth century United States, this missional process was even more deeply contested, because the “indigenous pastorate” and the “missionized community” were part of the same community as the “missionaries”. The ways in which theological concepts were used to challenge political and social subordination—or to strengthen it—here can be seen distinct from issues of simple political imperialism and colonialism. Unlike many other 19th century missional conflicts, in this case “home church” and “mission field” were not functionally or geographically distinct, and the struggles over “contextualization” and self-governance were played out within a single unified church structure.

Examining the denominational history of The Episcopal Church from the point of view of missions, in turn, shifts the view of the church’s nature and its most important

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1. (Episcopal Church General Convention 1889, p. 265).
2. In tracing the contested nature of catholicity in the context of white Episcopalian nineteenth century church party debates, see (Chorley 1946; Mullin 1986; Prichard 1997; Bass 1995).
3. Lewis (1996) places catholicity at the center of his ground-breaking study of Black Episcopalians, and my analysis in this paper owes much to his identification of the crucial issues and events in the post-Civil War era.
4. There is a very large literature on issues of self-governance and inculturation/contxtualization in the study of missions in the 19th and 20th centuries. Among many others, see (Williams 2008; Hanciles 2002; Bosch 2011).
figures. These become those people who struggled to overcome boundaries of race, culture, and geography in extending the church’s reach and incorporating new people into it, and puts issues of racial relationships at the forefront of the church’s story, rather than as an aside.

The 1889 Memorial to General Convention arose out of and reflects both a missional commitment, expanding the nineteenth-century Episcopal Church beyond its traditional core elite white English-speaking demographic, and a contested ideal of what “catholicity” meant to the church. For theologians, “catholicity” traditionally has been seen as a mark of the true church, found in the early creeds and historically connected to the unity of the church, through doctrine that is taught always, everywhere, for everyone. For some Christian groups, including many Episcopalians, catholicity is also connected to polity (guaranteed by the apostolic or historic succession of bishops). White Episcopalians from the 1830s forward were focused heavily on the meaning of “catholicity” in terms of liturgical and sacramental practice, clerical privilege, and the centrality of the figure of the Bishop to the validity of the church, in increasingly tense and conflicted debates that have been traced by multiple scholars. However, the development of catholicity as a strategic marker of missional thinking, particularly in the context of a racially diverse church, has not been examined.

In this paper, I will investigate the ways in which Black Episcopalians and their white allies used the theological ideal of catholicity creatively and strategically in the nineteenth century, during their struggle against an ever more fully developed exclusion from the spiritual governance of the church, both responding to a particular missional history and contending that missional success depended upon true catholicity. “Catholicity” became a way in which African American Episcopalians, a disenfranchised minority in the Episcopal Church, could challenge white church leaders on the basis of something that deeply mattered to the white church: the essential and unique spiritual validity of their polity and governance structure. In doing so, Black Episcopalians prefigured the mid-twentieth century postcolonial missional shift to inclusion in church governance globally, and the re-definition of catholicity, connected to justice, as a mark of the true church.

2. Antebellum: The “Peculiar Circumstances” of Free Black Congregations

The first African American congregation in the Episcopal Church, St Thomas’ African Church in Philadelphia, was established in 1794 under a “peculiar circumstance” that, while being an Episcopal church under the authority of the diocesan bishop, it would not be permitted to send delegates to diocesan convention. Diocesan convention is the self-governing mode of the Episcopal Church, a crucial aspect of the church’s identity as a disestablished denomination as it transformed from the Church of England after the Revolutionary War. Every congregation sent clergy and lay delegates to their annual diocesan convention, and every diocese sent clergy and lay delegates to General Convention, the national governing body, every three years. St Thomas’ African Church shared the identity of an Episcopalian congregation, but from the beginning was thus refused participation in this central aspect of Episcopalian life and identity.

Why was St Thomas forbidden to participate in diocesan convention? Absalom Jones, the first Black man ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church, was largely self-educated—he had been born into slavery and had bought himself and his family free. He therefore did not have the required biblical languages to be ordained a priest according to the standards of Episcopalians; this tradeoff in terms of diocesan participation, it has been argued, was because he was technically not eligible for clergy status. In fact, however, this could not have been the true reason for denying St Thomas inclusion in convention. Other clergy in the early years of the denomination also did not have the expected classical education; there was even a canonical process for providing dispensation from the educational requirements,

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5 On the connection of liberation theology to catholicity, see (Kater 1994). On the mid-twentieth century postcolonial missional shift, see, among others, (Briggs et al. 1968–2000; Laing 2012; Bosch 2011).
and white clergy who were dispensed were not placed under exclusion from convention, nor were their congregations⁶.

In terms of primary source documentation, the true reasoning behind St Thomas’ exclusion is opaque. The records show that Bishop William White, credited with the major role in organizing the post-Revolutionary church, and who strongly valued the role of self-governance as central to the identity of the church in America, met with the Council, or Standing Committee, about St Thomas’ petition to become an Episcopalian congregation. He then gave to the vestry of St Thomas the requirements of the standing committee, to which (according to Bishop White) they agreed. The Council and the Bishop could not themselves receive St Thomas without the approval of their diocesan convention, but their recorded interactions with St Thomas leading up to the convention’s decision do not indicate any possible specific requirements or exclusions in St Thomas’ joining the diocese. George Bragg traces the history, quoting from the records of the Standing Committee in 1794:

The Bishop laid before the Council the Constitution of the African Church of Philadelphia, a congregation of the people of color, who having erected a building for the public worship of God, do now in consequence of free and mature deliberation, propose and request to be associated with the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States; and in particular to commit all their ecclesiastical affairs to the rule and authority of the Bishop and Church in this State of Pennsylvania. The Bishop and Council are pleased with the application made as above, and are willing to accept the terms . . . . they shall be entitled to all the privileges of the other congregations of the Protestant Episcopal Church⁷.

Later in 1794, the congregation petitioned for Absalom Jones to be ordained as their minister, and the Council and Bishop were “heartily disposed to favor the address . . . and entirely satisfied as far as to them doth appear, of the moral and religious character of the person recommended.”. The Council noted that the biblical language requirement could be dispensed with by the Convention voting in two-thirds approval. There was no mention of excluding Jones or St Thomas from convention.

It was not until the congregation and Jones’ ordination was officially accepted by Convention in 1795, and the language requirement formally dispensed, that the exclusion from convention is recorded as a condition of acceptance: “Resolved that the same be granted, provided, it is not to be understood to entitle the African Church to send a clergyman or deputies to the Convention or to interfere with the general government of the Episcopal Church; this condition being made in consideration of their peculiar circumstances at present”. Strictly canonically, this new condition makes no sense, for even if Jones’ lack of biblical language skills somehow disqualified him from a clergy vote, why should the entire congregation be disqualified from sending lay deputies? The gap in the records permits the pretense that the exclusion was about Absalom Jones’ educational attainments, but it is unlikely that the true “peculiar circumstance” of the congregation was the inability of its clergyperson to read Greek⁸. All concerned undoubtedly understood that this was about the race of St Thomas’ parishioners and rector, and this appeared in the vote from the floor of Convention rather than in the recorded decisions and deliberations of the Bishop and Council, a pattern that would continue and indicates that the antipathy to bringing Black Episcopalians into church governance was held by a significant portion of white lay Episcopalians in the Diocese. Forbidding Convention to St Thomas ensured that the white Episcopalian delegates from the rest of the state would not ever have to engage with Black Episcopalians as governing equals on the floor, or indeed to engage with them at all.

⁶ (Lammers 1982).
⁷ (Bragg 1922).
⁸ (Bragg 1922, p. 62.)
St Thomas’ incorporating constitution stated that all voting power would be held by people of African descent, so that even if they had to call a white clergyperson in the future, they would still hold the power of governance in their own congregation. For the free black people in the post-Revolutionary United States who came together to create the congregation in response to their experience of racism in white churches, the ability to guarantee self-governance in their congregation by those of their own race was central to their identity and mission. This made the church distinct from all other congregations in the Episcopal Church at the time, even those which might include African Americans. For all other congregations, the default mode of governance was by white people, and the Episcopal church was, and remained, comfortable with the model of white leadership for African American and other racial groups. The vote in diocesan convention also supported this pattern – even though there was a Black Episcopalian congregation connected to the diocese, it was not fully self-governing since it was subject to the white bishop and the choices made by a diocesan convention that would never have Black delegates or congregations holding voting privileges in it.

In white-led congregations that might include free or enslaved African Americans along with white Episcopalians, Black people were also excluded from church governance by the pew-rent system as well as the preferences of white leadership. Until the 1850s (and for many congregations, even later than that), Episcopal congregations were financially sustained by a system of annual rental of pews by the wealthiest members of the community. Only those who paid pew-rent would be eligible for participating in congregational governance on the vestry or attending Convention as lay delegates. Black Episcopalians were almost never in a position to pay pew-rent in a white congregation, and if they were, they would not have been elected as representatives to Convention by the white majority.

This pattern of exclusion from governance, and thus of the privileges of self-determination and diocesan relationships central to Episcopalian polity and identity, continued to strengthen over the 19th century. The second African American congregation in the Episcopal Church, St Philip’s in New York City, founded in 1809/1819, also was excluded from its diocesan convention, its only connection to the diocese through the shared authority of the white Bishop, supposedly modelling this after the decision of Pennsylvania in accepting St Thomas with exclusion. Even after Absalom Jones’ death, St Thomas and other Black-led congregations thus continued to exist in this strange state of being Episcopalian, but “other”, not part of the life of the church as a whole.

The new Bishop of Pennsylvania, Henry Onderdonk, ordained another Black man, William Douglass, as the second rector of St Thomas in 1836. Onderdonk was comfortable with ordaining Douglass, who apparently did not initially protest about his exclusion from Diocesan Convention; the Bishop praised Douglass’s “respectable intellect, and most amiable qualities...which entirely relieved my mind, in his case, from anxieties I had long felt in reference to this department of Episcopal duty”. When in 1842 a young deacon from St Philip’s in New York arrived in Philadelphia to request permission to begin a new Black congregation there, Bishop Onderdonk told him that he was welcome, so long as he agreed that he would never attend diocesan convention, nor would his future congregation ever have representation in it. Alexander Crummell’s refusal to accept the same restrictions as William Douglass meant that Bishop Onderdonk, by 1843, requested and received a new canon from diocesan convention declaring that “no church in this Diocese, in like peculiar circumstances with the African Church of St Thomas, shall be entitled to send a Clergyman or Deputies to the Convention, or to interfere with the general government

9 Townsend (2005) traces the history of St Philip’s, which began gathering as a congregation sponsored by Trinity Church in 1809, and consecrated their own building in 1819; Skardon (1971, pp. 112–15) discusses the importance of pew rents in excluding non-renters from church governance. A Black Episcopalian able and permitted to pay pew-rent in a white congregation was enough of an important event for Bragg to record two known instances of it prior to the Civil War: (Bragg 1922, p. 137).

10 Townsend (2005).

11 Thomas 2012, p. 96).
of the Church. As it happened, however, the “peculiar circumstances” would now be opened for true debate: unlike Absalom Jones, William Douglass had a classical education and read the required biblical languages.

In 1845, Pennsylvania welcomed a new Bishop, Alonzo Potter. Brought up as a Quaker, and previously a college professor as well as a well-known priest in upstate New York and Boston, Potter had a history of interest in foreign and domestic missions, in the expansion of the church beyond its traditional white elite members, and in the rights of African Americans in the church and society. Almost immediately, Potter began work behind the scenes to challenge the diocesan convention, encouraging a “free mission” for African Americans in a very impoverished part of Philadelphia, started by white evangelical Episcopalians, to incorporate as a parish with a white vestry—and to thus be included in diocesan convention. In 1848, the white delegates from the Church of the Crucifixion were refused seating in the convention due to the realization that congregation was almost entirely African American, and was refused seating again in 1849, 1850, and 1851. A fact-finding committee in 1852 reported that the parish was a mission, more like a “charity” than anything else—and missions could not have privileges in diocesan convention. The committee could thus avoid saying that they were excluding the Church of the Crucifixion from seats in convention because of the fact that it was a congregation of African Americans. The matter came to a vote, and Bishop Potter, for the first and only time in his career, spoke from the Bishop’s Chair on his own opinion of the vote. He also took the opportunity to vote publicly before the other members of convention so that his own vote in favor of inclusion was highly visible. Both Bragg, who calls Potter “that great bishop and ever-loving friend of the black race”, and Potter’s biographer, note that his speech at this time was deeply moving and challenging to the members of Convention to move forward into a new phase of life for the church. Nonetheless, the vote went against him and the Church of the Crucifixion.

This precipitated a two-decade effort to gain inclusion in Diocesan Convention by St Thomas, and in New York, by St Philip’s. In 1849 St Thomas petitioned the Diocesan Convention to set aside the 1843 canon about “peculiar circumstances” and accept St Thomas, and any future African American congregation, as members of convention, entitled to fully participate in church governance as a privilege of their being a “branch” of the church. They note, as well, the centrality of the issue to their missional work among other African Americans:

\[\ldots\text{ having been duly organized and constituted a body politic according to the laws of the Commonwealth, and having conformed to the doctrines, discipline, and worship of the Church for more than half a century, to this day stands, unacknowledged, as a branch of the Church in her representative capacity. Your petitioners further represent, that they are fully convinced of the superior adaptedness of our Church to the wants of the people represented by them, and that its having failed to command a more universal acceptance among them is owing, more than anything else, to the anomalous and undignified position we occupy, furnishing as it does, ground of no little discontent within, and of much deriding from without.}\]

In typical Episcopalian fashion, the Convention ordered a Committee to investigate, and report back at the next Convention. The majority report, which argued for the continued exclusion of St Thomas, had much to say about its interpretation of the gap in the official records of St Thomas’ connection to convention:

The Peculiar Circumstances referred to in the Proviso, are not stated anywhere on the face of the Journal of Convention. They may be gathered, however, from

\[\text{(Douglass 1862).}\]
\[\text{(Journal of the 68th Diocesan Convention of Pennsylvania, quoted in Krasulski (2019, p. 4).}\]
\[\text{(Krasulski 2019, pp. 2–4; Howe 1871, p. 233).}\]
\[\text{(Douglass 1862, p. 141).}\]
the records of the Standing Committee, and of the Church in Question, and were probably the following: the color and other physical properties of the parties, their political and social condition—their defects of education and cultivation—and their consequent unfitness, from all these causes, for the situation of legislators and rulers in the Church planted in Pennsylvania. This unfitness seems to have been conceded all round; and it does not appear, that in recognizing and acting upon it, it occurred to our first Diocesan, or to any of the Clergy and Laity who acted with him in the exclusion of the members of St Thomas’s congregation, from a participation in the general government of the Church, that they were violating any principle of that divinely constituted body which they were so earnestly labouring to extend

St Thomas, the committee acknowledges, sees the regulation as a violation of Christian kindness and courtesy—that it deprives the colored race of a portion of their spiritual privileges, and is an infringement of their inherent right as Christians to participate in the government of the Church.

The Committee, on the other hand, regard the Regulation as but the exercise of a clear power of so framing the lay representation of the church as most to conduce to its general good—as having no concern with the spiritual privileges of the members of Christ’s Church—and as founded upon a recognition of the manifest truth, that participation in the legislative power of the Church is but a qualified, and not an absolute right.

This is followed by a long explanation about apostolic right and early ecumenical councils and the Church of England, where many classes of people, such as lay people, were not permitted to be part of governance. Then, they get to the heart of it:

Our legislation should be for the good of the church, and to secure, so far as our judgements can do so, her prosperity and advancement. And let us ask, can there be a doubt, with dispassionate persons, as to the incompetency of the parties in question, for the post of advisers and legislators in the concerns of this portion of the American Church? Are they qualified for it, either by education, cultivation, or social position? Would their decisions and acts carry with them aught of the moral influence which is so desirable an attendant upon the decrees of authority? Are members of this House fully and sincerely prepared to receive the proposed new comers in such way as to exhibit in nothing, a distinction between them and others on the floor; and are they not fearful of betraying, in even the slightest degree, a feeling indicative of the absence of that entire equality and confraternity, which should mark the intercourse of the members of such an assemblage as this? Is there no reason to apprehend that heart-burning or jealousy will spring up from imagined, perhaps actual slights, induced by the unconquerable aversion, in many, to the admixture of races physically so diverse and separate, as the black and the white?

In responding to God’s chastisement for the evils of slavery, while whites have a duty to care for and keep Black people in tutelage, the committee “consider it a most signal error, to break down every barrier which instinctive nature has reared in the path of free intercourse; and they are of opinion, that the miscjudged, though well meant effort to place them on this floor, will conduce to their eventual injury”. Thus the Committee request that the resolution be denied.

The minority report—signed by only one clergyman, Samuel Magaw—took a different view.

16 (Douglass 1862, p. 144).
17 (Douglass 1862, p. 148).
18 (Douglass 1862, p. 152).
The exclusion of this Church from our councils does interfere indirectly with spiritual privileges of the parishioners. The Parish in question is cut off from what is certainly to be considered a privilege and an honor, the conferring with a band of brothers about the welfare of the Church, and aiding in the promotion of such plans and regulations as may seem best adapted to advance the cause of our beloved Redeemer...they are hindered from greater congress as a congregation and a subject of vexation and reproach is constantly kept before them. Here, Magaw is pointing out that the denial of inclusion in leadership of the denomination is not only a genuine denial of spiritual privilege that is due to Black Episcopalians, but that it makes the Episcopal Church unattractive to Black Christians, who prefer other denominations where leadership and self-governance is open to them—an intuition about the weakening of missional expansion among the Black community that the leaders of St Thomas also shared.

St Thomas Vestry printed and submitted a public response to the decision of convention to continue their exclusion, expressing shock at the expressions of the majority report as to the fitness of their complexion for moral and legislative leadership. They noted, “We are not surprised at the final result, but confess that we are perfectly astounded” that the reasoning was based in open, unChristian prejudice rather than Scripture or the Book of Common Prayer.

Therefore, Resolved, That if we were heretofore desirous of being admitted into union with the Convention, we are not now, nor can we hereafter be, (with due respect to ourselves and posterity) while “COLOR, PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL CONDITION AND EDUCATION”, continue to be the test of admission or rejection.

Resolved, That in the opinion of this Vestry, the expressions that were used by some of the members of the Convention, should be kept from the heathen, lest the Gospel should fail to have its salutary effect upon their minds, they instinctively rejecting the message at the hands of those who justify complexional distinctions in the Church of Christ . . .

Resolved, That the consideration offered, by reminding us that the rejection could not debar us from communion with the Spirit, did not, in our humble opinion, come with very good grace, after having been told, in terms not to be misunderstood, that we were ‘entirely unfit’ to hold visible fellowship with a delegated council of that body, which defines the Church to be a “VISIBLE BODY of faithful men” &c, whose high mission on earth is fulfilled only so far as she is a co-worker with the Spirit.

The Church of the Crucifixion and St Thomas were not admitted to Diocesan Convention until 1864.

For white congregations, being added to convention was a matter of course, a formality where the convention added them to its list in a quick vote. For Black congregations, and for the white conventions that debated their inclusion in governance, the question of inclusion in convention opened up a major debate on the significance of church governance as a marker of true membership in the universal church. For Black congregations, “catholicity” required not only including all races in the pews but also as requiring that all races have a share in governance. It was central to the church’s mission, not only in general theological terms, but in practical ones. Black leaders, and their white supporters such as Samuel Magaw, argued that African Americans were very unlikely to join a church—even the best church and the true church, which they believed the Episcopal Church to be—where they must always be second-class citizens and be denied leadership positions.

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19 (Douglass 1862, p. 164).
20 (Douglass 1862, pp. 168–69).
In examining this debate, the differing understandings of what constitute the “visible body” of the Church are becoming clear. The word “catholicity” does not occur in these submitted written documents, except a brief acknowledgment from the Majority Report that, if exclusion from Convention of fully qualified presbyters were “unlawful” in the Church, it would indeed be “uncatholic” to exclude Black clergy\textsuperscript{21}. Nonetheless, the theological ideal of catholicity, of the spiritual issues of polity and governance, and what it means to truly constitute the “visible body” of Christ on earth, lie behind much of the debate. For the Black Episcopalians requesting the same privileges at convention as every other congregation, their true inclusion in the church is doubtful, restricted, anomalous. The church which claims catholicity cannot be truly catholic, as it is not fully including them. For the white leaders in convention who refuse to grant these privileges, catholicity can exist even when entire categories of people are not permitted privileges of governance due to their race. While acknowledging openly that the current order is based on racial distinctions, they see the distinction as valid and justify this exclusion for the good of the church.

An important subtext is the need for white people to keep Black people in “tutelage”. African Americans are welcome to join the church—indeed, it is the best place for them—because there they can be guided by white leaders. In the postbellum era, this becomes more and more a dominant theme in tensions around catholicity and governance. For white Episcopalians after the Civil War, keeping African Americans in “tutelage” becomes a crucial reason to engage in mission work, and to consistently refuse connection with the church’s governance or leadership for Black people.

3. Postbellum: Exodus from Episcopalianism and the Call to Catholicity

Following the Civil War and Emancipation, the thousands of enslaved Episcopalians in Southern dioceses mostly took the opportunity to leave the church of the master, and to find churches where they were permitted to engage in leadership. The flight from the churches of the South was so notable that at least one rector resigned in despair; his thriving congregation, built up over thirty years of close collaboration with plantation owners, had gone from a membership of several hundred Black communicants to almost none\textsuperscript{22}. This, combined with general awareness of the destitution and “helplessness” of freed people in the South, led to the establishment of the Freedman’s Commission by General Convention in 1865, and immediate attention to “mission work” among the freedpeople. Much of this involved providing clothing and education, including founding schools, but it also included a desperate effort to get the fleeing African American Episcopalians back into the church, and to establish the Episcopal Church among freedpeople who previously had been without any connection to it\textsuperscript{23}.

Even before the close of the Civil War, dioceses in the South moved to establish Black congregations, and after Emancipation congregations were also established by Black people themselves in various southern cities. This raised the same question that the Diocese of Pennsylvania had not resolved till 1864: what should the relationship of these congregations be to their diocesan conventions, and to General Convention? Over time, the answer to this question in the Southern dioceses hardened into a strong color line: Black congregations and clergy should not participate in diocesan conventions, and moved beyond this simple exclusion to begin a program of full segregation and an emphasis upon white oversight of Black faith at all levels.

Immediately after Emancipation and for some decades after, White bishops and clergy mourned the loss of the “filial bonds” of slavery, throwing the slaves into the cold, harsh world that would not care for them as their masters had, and would leave them prey to “unscrupulous” whites and the spiritual degradation of their own emotional, uneducated

\textsuperscript{21} (Douglass 1862, p. 150).
\textsuperscript{22} (Shattuck 2000, p. 8; Hayden 1973; Graebner 2009).
\textsuperscript{23} (Hayden 1973).
natures left without white discipline. This vision of Emancipation as a catastrophe for the enslaved also grew in strength over the decades for Southern white churchmen, and they were not shy about sharing their views with Northern whites and with Black clergy and congregations. It could only be healed by ensuring that Black people were not permitted to govern themselves, and would always be under the close supervision and guidance of white people, particularly in the life of the church. This racial paternalism could also take on the language of “catholicity”, in that white Episcopalians argued that their church was different from “sects” such as Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists, which permitted and indeed sometimes required free Black people to set up their own separate judicatories after the Civil War. For white Episcopalians, the shared figure of the white Bishop as the religious authority for both white and Black Episcopalians guaranteed the true catholicity of the church, and thus paternalistic disenfranchisement of Black Episcopalians, segregated into separate congregations from white Episcopalians, could still be held within catholic structures. For Black Episcopalians, more and more explicitly after the Civil War, catholicity required that all people should have equal and shared access to the privilege of spiritual governance regardless of their race.

The post-Confederacy Diocese of Virginia made some of the earliest moves to create Black congregations while simultaneously disenfranchising them in the diocesan convention. In 1866, the diocesan convention affirmed the creation of “separate and distinct” African American congregations; from this would come congregations which often had white leadership and were overseen directly by the Diocesan Council. In 1882, the Council passed a new Canon “Of mission churches” which permitted African Americans to set up their own churches with their own, Black-inclusive vestry, and “administer its own affairs”, but had no right of lay representatives in Council. In 1875, the congregation of St Mark’s in Charleston, South Carolina, was rejected by its diocesan convention, over the objections of Bishop Elliott. Six of the Black congregations in that diocese then left the Episcopal Church entirely.

In 1883, the Bishop of Mississippi invited his fellow Southern bishops (“from the former slave states”, as he defined the group) to a conference at Sewanee, the church’s seminary in the South, along with any clergy they might recommend with experience working among the African Americans in their dioceses. This entirely white male group convened in order to determine a unified proposal to put to General Convention about the “race problem” in the Church. Their solution, offered as a memorial and resolution to the General Convention of 1883, was known as the Sewanee Canon. The second point of the conference’s Report noted that

> Your Committee believes that because of the Apostolic character of the Episcopal office, which has been received ‘always and everywhere and by all men;’ because of the Ecclesiastical unity thereby maintained and exhibited, which may not be broken; and because of the true welfare of all mankind – there can be but one fold and one Chief Shepherd for all the people in any field of Ecclesiastical designation. But your committee is of the opinion that because of the peculiarity of the relations of the two races, one to the other, in our country...there is need of special legislation, appointing special agency and method for the ingathering of these wandering sheep into the fold of Christ.

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24 Bragg (1909) provides one of many examples of this style of paternalistic attitudes towards Black Episcopalians and other Black Americans. The introduction to the book by A.S. Lloyd, a white priest, president of the Board of Missions, and later coadjutor Bishop of Virginia, is striking in its open paternalistic disdain for Black people and their “competency” for “civilization.” This was the person Bragg had asked to write the introduction—and therefore must be considered to be, in Bragg’s mind, a useful and helpful white ally despite his paternalism.

25 (Confessions of the Diocese: A History of Race and Racism in the Diocese of Virginia 2012). The Episcopal Church in the Southern dioceses had created separate national church during the Civil War, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America, which was dissolved after the War and Southern dioceses were re-seated in General Convention of the national church. The Confederate church began establishing some black congregations, but always with a white minister.

26 (Hayden 1973).

27 (Armentrout and Slocum 2007, p. 198).
The committee therefore rejected the model of Southern Methodists, who had developed separate “colored jurisdictions” with their own, Black-led supervision. While this was very successful in terms of increasing Black membership in Methodist denominations—it was believed that most fleeing African American Episcopalians had become Methodists—this was a threat to catholicity. Neither did the committee seem to seriously consider permitting Black congregations to have voice and vote in their conventions, just as white congregations did, in order to demonstrate that leadership was open to Black people as well as white. As Bragg would later note, many of the leading white Episcopalians sitting on diocesan conventions and councils were also leading white citizens, instrumental in destroying the rights and privileges of American citizenship among Black people in the South in the post-Reconstruction era; the idea of sitting in council as equals was probably never even raised. The solution from Sewanee, offered in resolution to General Convention, was to organize a separate “missionary jurisdiction” of colored people within each Diocese. This missionary jurisdiction would include all Black people, congregations, and clergy, and within it there would be some ability to manage their own affairs. It would, however, be directly supervised by the Bishop or some white appointee. The members of the missionary jurisdictions would have no voice or vote in diocesan convention at all, unless their diocese would so provide - indeed, they would not even be counted on the diocesan list.

One Bishop at Sewanee dissented strongly from the report. The dissenting opinion of Richard Hooker Wilmer of Alabama, the only Bishop consecrated during the existence of the Confederate Episcopal Church, noted the deep challenges to catholicity by such a plan.

It would be contrary to the mind of Christ, inconsistent with true Catholicity and detrimental to the best interest of all concerned, to provide any separate and independent organization . . . .inconsistent with true catholicity, because it legislated invidiously for a class, and thus introduced the element of caste into a ‘Kingdom which is not of this world’; and ‘Detrimental to the interests of all concerned”, because it tends to throw off the one part, the least wise and capable, to themselves, thus depriving them of the fullness of privileges granted to others, and also depriving the other part of the body of the benefits which flow from the exercise of the graces of condescension and sympathy which can only find full scope in integral unity and union28.

On the face of it, this argument against the segregation and disenfranchisement of the Black Episcopalians seems to harmonize with the desires of the Black Episcopalians to be fully included as a mark of true catholicity. In fact, however, Wilmer was in support of the idea that the Black Episcopalians needed the guidance of white people and they should not be permitted to exercise a role in governance. For Wilmer, the status quo of legislative disenfranchisement and second-class church citizenship was fine as it was, satisfied catholicity, and required no additional canonical work to clarify. The relationship between the two groups was catholic, but hierarchical; one’s holy role was to offer the “grace of condescension”, while the role of the other, the “least wise and capable”, to benefit from the privileges exercised by the first group.

The Sewanee Canon, when offered to the General Convention, was accepted by the House of Bishops, but rejected by the House of Deputies, and thus did not become part of the practice of the Episcopal Church at an official national level. Nonetheless, it was immediately put into action within most Southern dioceses, without requiring any national concurrence. In Virginia, for example, the Council created a diocesan Colored Missionary Jurisdiction in 1886 to include all black clergy and laity, with the expectation that they would manage their affairs there under the supervision of the Diocese, and that they would no longer attend Council or send delegates there. In 1889, since black clergy were still coming to Council despite the Colored Missionary Jurisdiction, the Council passed a new canon removing the right of attendance from black clergy29. It was this exclusion

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28 (Armentrout and Slocum 2007, p. 201).
29 (Confessions of the Diocese: A History of Race and Racism in the Diocese of Virginia 2012).
from diocesan convention in Virginia that was one of the precipitating causes of the 1889 Memorial to General Convention from Black Episcopalians.

The centrality of catholicity to this debate on Black Episcopalian inclusion in governance structures, and its ability to be used paternalistically as well as for resistance, is demonstrated by an exception to the rule. Where by the late 1880s most, if not all, Southern dioceses had excluded Black clergy and congregations from their diocesan governance, in North Carolina this was not the case—and despite a movement in 1903 to strip the right of participation from Black clergy, it never became so. The use of catholicity as the central motif supporting Black clergy’s privileges in the North Carolina context demonstrates how it could be used to support inclusion, but yet be undermined missionally by racial paternalism, segregation, and continued structural disregard for Black congregations.

The Bishop of North Carolina during and after the Civil War, Thomas Atkinson, viewed “catholicity” as a characteristic of the true church, which demonstrated its truth, relevance and validity for all humanity by being capacious enough for all varieties of people. In his first charge to the North Carolina diocesan convention in 1855, Atkinson emphasized that the church needed to go beyond the high and elite of society to support bringing the mission of the gospel to the poor, and to promote “unity” and healing. A church which failed among the poor failed also in God’s purpose. While Atkinson held the typical high church Episcopalian view of enslavement as biblically countenanced and was himself a slaveholder, he did not move from that into the more ideological position that slavery was a positive good and benefitted enslaved people. Thus after the Civil War he was able, with relatively little embarrassment, to accept the changed realities of emancipation and continue a missional call for the church to care for freedpeople, as (in his view), the church had previously cared for enslaved people. Atkinson was a member of the General Convention committee in 1865 which recommended the creation of the Freedman’s Commission, and worked hard to connect it to his diocese, including engineering the establishment of St Augustine’s College for Black freedmen and women in Raleigh, North Carolina.

In his 1865 address to Diocesan Convention, Atkinson said to the gathered white clergy and laity of a post-war Southern state that the catholicity and unity of the church both required a reunion with the Northern Episcopalians, and that the church must now take special care to provide for the religious education of the freed people, whom he characterized as “grown children”. Atkinson argued from a paternalistic but deeply felt catholicity: the Black community required the services of the Church to flourish in their newfound freedom, and the Church’s catholicity required the church to provide it.

North Carolina’s convention responded to their Bishop’s call with energy, if in a paternalistic mode.

The total change in our political and domestic relations, as regards the colored man, and the rapid and almost universal deterioration in his moral condition since his emancipation from slavery, demand, as it appears to your committee, bold, decisive and definite action in his behalf. In elevating his character, we shall make him more faithful and competent in his sphere, and discharge thereby more perfectly our religious obligations to his race. Moreover, your committee is of the opinion that the path pointed out is the most direct way of carrying to the colored man the blessings of our holy Christianity, through the instrumentalties of the Church. And as we believe the Church to be Apostolic and Catholic, we feel bound to do all within our power to convey its holy teachings as rapidly and as potently as possible, to every soul committed to our care, whether its casket be Anglican or African.

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30 I would here like to express my gratitude to N. Brooks Graebner, who kindly responded to emailed questions about his work in North Carolina history and on Bishop Atkinson in particular.

31 (Graebner 2017b; Graebner 2018).

32 (Graebner 2017b, p. 161; Atkinson 1865).
The Report resolved that separate churches and Sunday schools should be set up for the freed people as “his former and subordinate place in the Sunday School, in the congregation, and at the communion will not answer”; that “when competent” colored congregations could govern themselves, that they could have white wardens and either white or colored clergy, that clergy should energetically seek to find and teach colored catechists and assistants, and that colored clergy from other dioceses should be invited to come work in North Carolina. Should a Black congregation find a Black clergyman, that person, “when colored, [will have] relations to this Council to be determined hereafter”. The Convention thus left open the possibility that Black clergy might not be “found”, or that Black congregations might not be “competent”, and that their ability to be full participants in the governance of the church remained to be ascertained. In fact, the very next diocesan convention refused, for grounds not stated in the records, to accept the testimonials for ordination of a colored candidate, James Simonson, who then disappears from the diocesan lists completely.33

A year later, Atkinson insisted again on the importance of having “colored Ministers” for the colored community, comparing the idea of having white ministers for them as being similar to the English giving English priests to the Irish, and thus failing to develop the church among them. Somewhat exasperated, he pointed out the missional weakness of the diocese that was entailed thereby, both for white and Black people.

If, then, we had white clergymen to minister to the colored population, it would be very questionable whether we should use them exclusively; but actually we do not have them. We have not missionaries to our own white people...If we do not support Missionaries to the whites, then, what likelihood is there we shall send them to the blacks! . . . And is it to be endured that a Church which claims to be the Catholic and Apostolic Church in North Carolina, shall systematically refuse to do anything for the religious welfare of one third of the people of North Carolina?34

The Report of the Special Committee in response stated that, “We heartily approve and earnestly recommend the mental and moral training of the colored people in such manner and to such degree as the condition of affairs may justify”. This is vague to say the least, and it was not for several years that the convention resolved, after frequent and energetic charges of their bishop, to ordain “properly qualified” men of color.35

Yet despite Bishop Atkinson’s fervently held beliefs in the catholicity of the church, and his successful establishment of a diocesan convention that included Black clergy and their congregations on that basis, the structure of the church was profoundly segregated from its beginning. The very first resolution of the convention responding to Atkinson’s call, and all following responses, expressed the need for separate congregations and separate communal lives in all other ways than in union with convention. It appears that this included the practice of worship at convention, demonstrated in the report of the Fifty-Second Convention in 1868:

Saturday night, Divine service was celebrated . . .
Sunday morning, May 10th, Calvary Church, Tarboro was consecrated . . .
On Sunday afternoon, Rev. B.S. Bronson preached from St John xx: 27, 28, 29 . . .
There was a service also, for the coloured people, in the old church . . .
On Sunday evening, Divine service was again celebrated . . .

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33 (Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina 1865, pp. 36–38). The specific resolution that the proposed colored congregations have white wardens, a significant lay leadership role in the Episcopal Church, also points to the anxiety about Black congregations and self-governance by Black Episcopalians. On the rejection of James Simonson, see (Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina 1866, pp. 21, 31). A vote by orders about the acceptance of Simonson’s credentials demonstrates that the clergy were willing to accept them, but that the laity were not. This pattern is also visible in the various votes for inclusion of St Thomas in Pennsylvania’s diocesan convention.

34 (Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina 1866, p. 20).
35 (Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina 1866).
36 (Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina 1868, p. 52).
Prior to the Civil War, Atkinson had been instrumental in organizing a “mixed-race” congregation, which had been acceptable when the old order of clear racial hierarchy was obvious in terms of enslavement and civil disability of the small free Black community, and the legal taboo on teaching enslaved people to read37. After the war, social distinctions and hierarchy were developed instead through full segregation, as well as increasing social and political burdens on the community of free Black people. While the Sewanee Canon was rejected, throughout the South Black clergy were systematically disenfranchised everywhere but in North Carolina—and even in North Carolina, they and their congregations were more and more segregated from the white Episcopalians within the structure of the “catholic” church38.

Seeing where things were headed, Alexander Crummell and the group he and George Bragg had helped organize to oppose the Sewanee Canon, the Conference of Church Workers among Colored People, sent the memorial to General Convention in 1889 which opened this paper:

… In consequence of these facts and others which we shall not now mention, we believe that the confidence of many among us, and of most intelligent Colored People generally, has been greatly shaken respecting the reality of the Church’s Catholicity, and of her profession of interest … [there is] one great question, which we believe must have a satisfactory answer before the work of converting the Colored People can proceed with any prospect of success. The question which we would ask of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America, as represented in her General Convention, is this: What is the position of colored men in this Church? Is it in accordance with the real doctrines taught by this Church, that when men have once been admitted to the Sacred Ministry or Communion of the Church any restriction should be made in the spiritual or legislative rights of a colored man which would not be made in those of a white man? Does the action which has recently been taken in two Dioceses in the Church represent the true spirit of this Church? We ask the General Convention of the Church to give an emphatic and unequivocal answer to this our earnest and almost despairing inquiry39.

The Memorial clearly shows the dependence upon catholicity as an organizing, resisting principle. The church claims to be catholic, and that catholicity depends on equality of privilege among all groups of people in leading the church. Catholicity was prominent in the Majority response offered by the white Episcopalians at General Convention as well. The Majority Report, which was signed by several leading bishops active in issues of the Social Gospel, reassured the Black leaders that all was well; after all, the Episcopal Church had consecrated a Black man as Bishop already. “These facts declare to the whole world the position of this Church, following, as she does, the example of the Catholic Church in all ages; and show that this General Convention has by no act or law admitted or implied that a difference of race or color affords ground for a distinction in legislative rights or privileges40”. The Majority Report closed by remarking that General Convention had no power at all about what individual dioceses chose to do. The Black leaders, however, knew well that the only Black bishops consecrated by the church to date—James Holly and Samuel Ferguson—had been consecrated respectively for Haiti and Liberia, which was not reassuring to the Black Episcopalian community of the United States. As Bragg wrote years later, the Majority Report essentially told the Black leaders they would have to return to their dioceses and fight it out.

37 (Graebner 2017b).
38 (Lewis 1996, p. 69).
39 (Episcopal Church General Convention 1889, p. 265).
40 (Episcopal Church General Convention 1889, p. 328).
The Minority Report, written by Philips Brooks of Massachusetts, argued that General Convention needed to pass legislation clearly stating that there was no color line and no difference of privilege according to race in the church:

That principle [of discrimination by race] is foreign and hostile to the whole spirit of our Church. All men who are admitted to the same order of her Ministry are alike in her sight, and have the same responsibilities and rights. She knows nothing of the color of men’s skins. Every Ecclesiastical law imposed upon the black man must be imposed also on the white. Every Ecclesiastical privilege given to the white man must be given also to the black. Any legislative action which makes race or color a ground of discrimination causes the Church to be false to her mission as the messenger of her Master who is the Saviour and the Lord of all men. There can be no such thing as an African church within her borders.\(^{41}\)

Brooks, like Huntington and Muhlenberg, was known for his mission-focused outlook (as well as his preaching), and had been a sympathetic supporter of the African American community before and after Emancipation\(^ {42}\), but his resolution was not supported or passed by convention. In this version of the response to the Memorial, it is notable that the white supporters of anti-discrimination legislation avoided the use of “catholic” or “catholicity”—perhaps recognizing that it could just as easily be used to turn aside the call for inclusion as to support it. Instead, their rhetorical strategy was a brief, practical suggestion to state the church’s resolve to never engage in discrimination based on race, and to ensure that all clergy are guaranteed the same privileges of their order\(^ {43}\).

Yet even this clear call to avoid discrimination in the name of the universal mission and validity of the church did not necessarily serve the interests of the Black Episcopalians. In the Memorial, as Black clergy and leaders struggled harder to obtain the ability to participate in the governance of the church, catholicity came prominently to the fore in their language, insisting that the church demonstrate its catholicity through inclusion on the conventions and councils of the church, working alongside white clergy as equals. At the same time, another solution was being pursued: creating missionary districts for Black congregations, overseen by a Black missionary bishop with exactly the same rights and privileges of white bishops. This missionary district, and its bishop, would report directly to General Convention and would in no way be responsible to a white diocesan convention. Such a strategy had previously been suggested by white supporters of mission among Black people as early as 1874, and in fact a “racially based” missionary jurisdiction had briefly been established for Native Americans (though with a white bishop)\(^ {44}\). In requesting this, the Black clergy stated that

We utterly abhor and repudiate any insinuation that what we ask is the first important step in the creation of an African Church apart and separate from our present American Church. Separate jurisdictions and conventions do not imply separate and distinct churches. We are in the one Church by virtue of Holy Baptism; and the Episcopate, whether diocesan or missionary, constitutes the visible expression of the unity of all the parts in the one Catholic Church of Christ.\(^ {45}\)

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\(^{41}\) (Episcopal Church General Convention 1889, p. 329).

\(^{42}\) (Allen and Brooks 1907, p. 151).

\(^{43}\) (Episcopal Church General Convention 1889, p. 329).

\(^{44}\) (Lewis 1996, p. 66). Missionary bishops were bishops elected by General Convention specifically to do missionary work in areas that were not yet able to be self-sustaining dioceses, or overseas, or—in one case—that were racially and culturally distinct from the white American church. Missionary bishops had all the rights and privileges of diocesan bishops, and were thought of as crucial to the church’s spiritual validity as well as its practical functioning in their districts. The Niobrara Missionary District for the Sioux Nation was later amalgamated with the Diocese of South Dakota. I have not yet found any discussions or debate over issues of catholicity in establishing Niobrara, but it does not appear to have been controversial—perhaps because, although racially defined, its bishop was white (Anderson 1997).

\(^{45}\) (Bragg 1904).
What made the difference—what kept this option “catholic” rather than repressive for Black Episcopalians—was that the Black bishop would be equal to the white ones, just as any missionary bishop was equal to the diocesan bishops in the General Convention. The ideals of Brooks’ Minority Report, denying the validity of racial discrimination in the church, was the basis on which this option of a Black-led missionary district was denied, though it continued to be debated and discussed at General Convention for years to come. General Convention thus provided no relief to the calls of Black Episcopalians to honor their clergy privileges of shared government, either with a resolution denying racial discrimination or the opportunity of a missionary district for Black people and led by a Black bishop. Instead, in the early 20th century the Episcopal Church created the suffragan bishop role, a bishop with no voting rights or rights of succession, partly to provide a limited leadership role for Black clergy—but one which would always be completely dependent upon and subservient to the white diocesan bishop who appointed him.

4. Conclusions: Catholicity Challenged

Bishop Atkinson, and other white supporters working from a paternalistic viewpoint, eventually became frustrated by the failure of their heartfelt efforts to attract more freed Black people to the Episcopal Church. Catholicity was an ideal shared by Black Episcopalians, but they knew that it was an ideal which, unless fully supported by action and social justice, could not grow a church. Anna Julia Hayward Cooper, a Black Episcopalian scholar and activist, wrote in 1886, “We believe in the Holy Catholic Church. We believe that however gigantic and apparently remote the consummation, the Church will go on conquering . . . till the kingdom of this world, not excepting the black man and the black woman . . . shall have become the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ”. Yet the limits of white support for holistically oriented Black leadership, including the basic requirement of listening to African American leaders, meant that the work of the church became irrelevant to the community. Ironically, she noted, “A conference of earnest Christian men have met at regular intervals for some years past to discuss the best methods of promoting the welfare and development of colored people in this country. Yet, strange as it may seem, they have never invited a colored man or even intimated that one would be welcome to take part in their deliberations . . . “ For 19th century Black Episcopalians, as for many other Black Christians operating within the context of white-dominated denominational structures, the approach to the altar would always be blocked by a rail.

Similarly, scholars of Black Episcopalianism after the Civil War have noted the paucity of financial support (leading to the effective disbanding of the Freedman’s Commission only a few years after its establishment) and the very few ordinations for Black clergy which followed the Civil War. By 1869, only 403 congregations out of over 2400 in the Episcopal Church nationally had contributed anything at all to the Freedman’s Commission, and the work in the South was largely sustained by the sacrificial efforts of the local Black congregations and gifts from Northern philanthropists. Between 1865 and 1877, only six African American men had been ordained priests.

In tracing the struggles of Black Episcopalians for full recognition of their congregations and clergy in the governance of the church they shared with white Episcopalians, catholicity demonstrates the multivalency of a theological symbol of universal relevance in a contested, concrete and contextualized missional context. Black clergy protesting their growing exclusion from church governance insisted that catholicity required their rights and privileges as Episcopalians be fully acknowledged and honored. Opponents of St Thomas’ African Church’s inclusion in the diocesan convention insisted that exclusion of Black clergy and congregations was not “uncatholic”, but justified by a racist reading of...

46 (Lewis 1996, pp. 75–81).
47 Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, cited in (Graebner 2017a, p. 8).
48 (Hayden 1973; Lewis 1996).
the church’s governance and nature, while the vestry of St Thomas insisted that a catholic church must include their voices. Bishop Atkinson of North Carolina used catholicity to insist on ordaining Black clergy and giving them vote in diocesan convention, yet the contextual structure of racial paternalism and segregation undermined the ideal and the missional effectiveness of the church among Black Americans. Additionally, rather than use this slippery symbol, supporters of Black clergy privileges in 1889 simply avoided “catholicity” in favor of a practical call to a “color-blind” church policy—yet this pragmatic idealistic response also avoided the realities of racial inequity in the church’s life which would continue to replicate beneath the veil.

For Episcopalians today reading this history, it is worth considering how a refusal to engage catholicity on the terms of a marginalized group leads to the diminishment of the church—not only in numbers, but in the church’s ability to be transformed beyond a minimal, specific cultural setting in the name of the Gospel, of the “visible Body” of Christ. It is worth considering as well how accepting the catholicity requested by Black Episcopalians—the catholicity that acknowledges the gifts of a subordinated group, supports their ministry and their care for their people, and insists on their access to the privileges of shared self-governance with the socially dominant group—would have shifted the church’s understanding of catholicity much earlier than the mid-20th century with the rise of liberation theology, and its charge that the catholicity of the church must include the poor and be judged by its conformity to the mission of God’s kingdom. What might the history of the Episcopal Church have looked like had white diocesan conventions chosen specifically to embody true shared governance, as equals, with Black Episcopalians during the violent post-Reconstruction years? What difference might this have made in defending the human rights of Black people during Jim Crow, had the Church conscientiously refused to obey legal strictures of segregation? How might the church’s governance itself have been transformed by listening, as Anna Julia Haywood Cooper recommended, to the voices of Black people?

Attention to the details of history can inform our understanding of the historical use and abuse of theological symbols. The nature of “catholicity” in the daily give and take of a church trying to maintain boundaries, and simultaneously to expand beyond its historic borders, is not fixed. It is available to be used for multiple purposes, even opposing purposes. “Catholicity” is multivalent. The “catholicity” of the church became a way in which individuals could argue that the church had a responsibility to live up to its true mandate by providing opportunities to participate in leadership and governance in the church—itself noted as an important gospel responsibility by dominated peoples, and dismissed as irrelevant to “gospel citizenship” by white leaders. It also became a way in which white leaders could perpetuate social and racial dominance: “catholicity” required [only] that all members of all races be united under one diocesan bishop, but did not require shared governance, shared worship, or shared communal resources.

More generally, there are ramifications for the history of missions and Christian global relationships in understanding how theological symbols, as well as cultural practices, can be shifted as a result of debates over inclusion, governance, and leadership. This debate over catholicity maps onto others in the history of world Christian missions—particularly the struggles for “daughter churches” to develop a “native pastorate”, and the resistance of white missionaries in the field and white “home church” leaders to permitting this development. Indeed, the connection is not implied but explicitly documented—in 1907, the Archbishop of Canterbury advised privately that subordinate “native” assistant bishops, supervised by white bishops, had proved globally to be the best model of mission. Contextualization in world Christianity has generally been seen as the process by which “native” Christians transform or translate Christianity given by missionaries within their own contexts, using the materials of their culture. However, the debate over inclusion and

(Kater 1994).

(Lewis 1996, p. 81).
governance demonstrate that shared theological symbols are also transformed due to the relationships between Christian groups acting in a missional context, and particularly in contexts of conflict and struggle over expansion and incorporation.

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