Chapter 5

Religious Life for the Free Negro

In the antebellum South religion played an important role in the lives of Negroes, both slave and free. For instance, the majority of free Negroes in Louisiana belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, and "many were members of the same congregations as Whites and in some cases contributed to the support of this denomination with generous donations of money."[1] The free people of color of the Cane River colony of Louisiana "established what may well be the oldest church built by and for free people of color in the United States."[2] In South Carolina "the free black was closely associated with the slave in his religious activity, for the delineation of segregated congregations, located in the galleries of white churches, made no distinction between the slave and the free colored man."[3] "After the family the

---

[1]Sterkx, The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana, p. 257.

[2]Mills, The Forgotten People, p. 144. See also Gary B. Mills, "Piety and Prejudice: A Colored Catholic Community in the Antebellum South," in Catholics in the Old South, ed. Randall M. Miller and Jon L. Wakelyn (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), pp. 171-94.

[3]Marina Wikramanayake, A World in Shadow: The Free Black in Antebellum South Carolina (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), pp. 113-14.

church was the most important cultural institution of Charleston's free Afro-Americans," and "most members of Charleston's free colored aristocracy attended the Episcopal church."[4] Throughout the antebellum years free Negroes in Virginia purchased church property.[5] Numerous free people of color "belonged to the organized religious life of North Carolina."[6] Free nonwhites in Mobile were accepted by most major denominations, including Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian.

Several Catholic churches served free Negroes. They worshipped at St. Vincent de Paul and St. Joseph's Church. But their involvement was greatest in the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Mobile. Beginning in 1781 this church kept separate registers for whites and nonwhites, a practice that continued through the antebellum years, and several baptismal registers contain hundreds of entries for nonwhites. For baptisms, priests usually entered in the books the name, date of birth, parents, and godparents. Other books were kept for marriages and burials.

---

[4]Both quotes are from Johnson and Roark, Black Masters, p. 227.

[5]Luther Porter Jackson, Free Negro Labor and Property Holding in Virginia, 1830-1860 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1942), pp. 159-63.

[6]Franklin, The Free Negro in North Carolina, p. 177. See also Berlin, Slaves Without Masters, pp. 285-314, and Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Occasionally priests recorded baptisms and marriages of free people of color in the registers kept for whites.

Many of the free colored Creoles were Roman Catholics. Several of Dr. John Chastang's children, including Bazile, Zeno, Margaret, and Louise, were married in the Catholic faith; for instance, Fr. Vicente Genen married Zeno and Maria Theresa Bernody, a free woman of color.[7] Ten of their children were baptized, including Zeno, Jr., who, like his father, received the sacrament of marriage; six of the younger of Zeno's children were also baptized.[8] Many of the children and grandchildren of Maximilian Collins were baptized. Other instances of free people of color receiving the sacraments indicate the strong influence religion played in their lives.[9]

---

[7]Marriage Records, Book 1, p. 94a, June 10, 1801 (Bazile), MCA, PIC; ibid., p. 108, October 21, 1810 (Zeno); ibid., p. 72a, August 31, 1788 (Margaret); ibid., p. 108a, May 17, 1811 (Louise).

[8]Baptisma Nigrorum, 1806-1828, entry 120, July 23, 1811; ibid., entry 251, April 18, 1815; ibid., entry 352, November 11, 1817; ibid., entry 482, June 1, 1821; ibid., entry 306, April 18, 1824; ibid., entry 370, February 26, 1826; ibid., entry 470, March 20, 1828; BRC, entry 102, April 20, 1830; ibid., entry 137, April 7, 1833. The marriage of Zeno, Jr., is from Marriage Register for Black People, entry 55, August 28, 1844. The baptisms of the younger Zeno's children are from BRC, entry 1012, September 1, 1846; ibid., entry 1169, July 8, 1848; ibid., entry 1365, August 26, 1850; ibid., entry 1496, March 1, 1853; ibid., entry 1605, November 19, 1854; RBC, entry 140, July 19, 1857.

[9]For his children, see, for example, Baptisma Nigrorum, 1806-1828, entry 329, March 13, 1825; ibid., entry 382, May 16, 1826. For examples of his grandchildren see BRC, entry 1326, March 8, 1850; and ibid., entry 1585, June 22, 1854.

In late 1822 the Parish of the Immaculate Conception was incorporated. The articles of the incorporation dealt with record keeping, minutes of board meetings, and duties of trustees. Free males who owned pews in the church and who were aged twenty-one or over were qualified to serve as electors; Catholic officials did not specifically exclude free Negroes. Four free men of color signed the articles of incorporation, indicating that free people of color actively participated in the affairs of the parish.[10]

Free Negroes (and whites) demonstrated concern for the religious development of their slaves. When priests visited the Mount Vernon area of north Mobile County, they baptized more than twenty of the elder Zeno Chastang's bondsmen. Numerous slaves of Maximilian Dubroca received this sacrament. Like free people, when slaves were received into the church, their names, approximate ages--occasionally exact dates were furnished--and sometimes the mother's name were entered into the registers. The keeping of such information indicates the concern that slaveowners had for their slaves.[11]

---

[10]Miscellaneous Book A, pp. 92-95. They were Faustin Collins, Regis Bernody, and two of his sons.

[11]For examples of Chastang's slaves see BRC, entries 386-89, all dated December 1836. For Dubroca's slaves see BRC, entries 766-69, all dated January 19, 1843. The records kept by the Catholic church, for example, demonstrate that genealogical information is available for nonwhite Americans.

Free people of color acted as godparents for others of their race. Godparents were responsible for their godchildren's religious development in the event of the death of the children's parents. Augustin Collins, for instance, served as godfather in at least fifteen cases, mainly to slaves owned by prominent Mobilians such as Joseph Chastang and John Forbes. The respect that whites had for Collins is clear, as well as his devotion to the Catholic faith.[12] It was not uncommon for family members to be godparents for their relatives. Several brothers of Mrs. Louise Andry, daughter of Zeno Chastang, Sr., acted as sponsors to some of her children, indicating the close family relationships that existed among free people of color.[13]

In addition to the Catholic church, Methodist missionaries began work in the 1820s to establish a permanent church in Mobile. In late 1823 and early 1824 the Mississippi conference of the Methodist Church appointed Henry P. Cook missionary to Pensacola. He advised his superiors in late 1824 that he had "extended the bounds of this mission to Mobile. This I have not at all regretted. Mobile is an interesting place." Referring to that city, he

---

[12]See, for example, Baptisma Nigrorum, 1781-1805, entry 388, May 12, 1799; ibid., entry 544, October 28, 1804; ibid., entry 487, August 15, 1802; and Baptisma Nigrorum, 1806-1828, entry 154, July 13, 1812.

[13]BRC, entry 795, July 7, 1843; ibid., entry 960, December 21, 1845; and ibid., entry 1075, May 12, 1847.

added that "the society of colored people is in quite a flourishing state."[14] A "zealous young preacher" named John Russell Lambuth, successor to Cook for the Mobile mission, observed in 1826 that "the population [of Mobile] is now estimated at about five thousand; and notwithstanding the magnitude of the place and number of its inhabitants, there are but two churches, one Catholic and one Presbyterian." Lambuth, who informed the Missionary Society that a new Methodist church was about to open, recounted how he spent his Sundays and assessed his work among the Negro community. In the afternoon, he wrote, "I preach to the coloured people, at the house of an old black man, and I believe much good has been done among them."[15]

---

[14]Quoted in Wayne Bennett Dean, Sr., The Swarming Bee Hive: A History of Methodism's Mother Church in Mobile (Mobile: Wayne Dean Productions, 1984), p. 9, from The Methodist Magazine. Dean did not cite the volume number. The letter to the magazine was dated November 28, 1824. For the role of the Methodist Church in Alabama and its work among Negroes see Anson West, A History of Methodism in Alabama (Nashville: Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), pp. 598-608. For the early history of the Methodist Church in the Mobile area see Marion Elias Lazenby, History of Methodism in Alabama and West Florida: Being an Account of the Amazing March of Methodism through Alabama and West Florida (North Alabama Conference and Alabama--West Florida Conference of the Methodist Church, 1960), pp. 123-27, 254-59.

[15]Quoted in Dean, The Swarming Bee Hive, p. 10, from The Methodist Magazine, January 1826, vol. 9.

In late 1826 church officials at the Mississippi conference of Methodists reappointed the Reverend John Lambuth to continue for another year. The following year Mobile Methodists organized the first Sabbath School, with Mrs. Sabrina Ellis Redwood instructing Negroes. At the end of his two-year appointment Lambuth proudly reported that "during the past year we had galleries erected, in the church, for the accommodation of a larger congregation than could at first be seated in it. The congregation have been large and attentive; and there are at this time about 47 white and 90 colored members of the Society in this city."[16]

For the next two years, the Reverend Thomas Burpo led the Mobile mission. During his second year white membership decreased while the Negro congregation increased. In the summer of 1828, Burpo wrote that "the prospect is truly pleasing among the colored people. It is an affecting scene to witness the vast numbers of those poor offcasts of men, bending their course to the house of God every Sabbath evening."[17]

Several prominent white Mobilians, including Joshua Kennedy, realized that members of the Negro community needed not only their own place of worship but also their own school. Kennedy and the others believed that slaves and

---

[16]Quoted in Dean, The Swarming Bee Hive, p. 12.

[17]Quoted in West, A History of Methodism in Alabama, p. 262.

free people of color should have a "home for the public worship of Almighty God." To accomplish this goal, the Reverend John Lambuth purchased a lot in the city. In addition to the church, a group of whites were to operate a school (at the same location) "for the instruction [of] the coloured children." The trustees agreed to exercise complete control over the church which was named "The African Church of the city of Mobile."[18]

The African Church of Mobile and its management met with some public opposition. In 1832, although several men urged city fathers to consider "the annoyance which the African Church" was to the neighborhood, they did not want to prohibit Negroes from worshipping. Criticizing the management of the church, those in opposition alleged that the Negroes conducted services without white supervision, and they complained "of the immence noise that is made every Sunday at that church to the annoyance of every family in the neighbourhood."[19] Eight years later about seventy-five residents of Mobile again complained to city officials. They denounced "an evil which is daily increasing in magnitude--we allude to the assemblage of Negroes on the Sabbath day, and almost every night in the week, for the

---

[18]Deed Book 2, old series, pp. 621-22. For other African churches in the antebellum South see Berlin, Slaves Without Masters, pp. 285-306.

[19]Petition to the Mayor and Aldermen Concerning the African Church, Box 1, Envelope 3, Folder 3, Document 12, September 6, 1832, RG 2, S 1, CMMA.

ostensible purpose of religious worship." The petitioners claimed that "those residing in the neighbourhood of the meeting houses are annoyed and disturbed by the noise and outcries of the assembled Negroes so that it has become a perfect nuisance." To prevent these occurrences, they hoped that Mobile churches would meet the religious needs of the nonwhite population.[20]

The Reverend Jefferson Hamilton of the Franklin Street Methodist Church spoke in behalf of the Negro population. Urging city fathers not to abridge the "present religious privileges of the blacks in Mobile," Hamilton and other prominent Mobilians informed city officials of an effort to close the African Church on St. Michael Street. The Methodist pastor, however, suspected that opposition leaders objected to the Negro worship and the church for more serious reasons than the "loud singing and praying often heard there." He tried to alleviate the fear by informing the mayor that he and other white supporters of the African Church "frequently officiate at the colored church."[21]

---

[20]Petition to the Mayor, Aldermen, and Common Council of Mobile, August 5, 1840, Box 3, Envelope 5, Folder 4, Document 26, RG 3, S 1, CMMA.

[21]Jefferson Hamilton et al., to the Mayor and Board of Aldermen of the City of Mobile, n.d., Box 3, Envelope 5, Folder 4, Document 27, RG 3, S 1, CMMA.

To clarify any misconceptions, Hamilton explained to city officials the nature of the problem. Church membership numbered about four hundred, and their place of worship was "generally crowded to overflowing, particularly on Sabbath afternoons." On Sunday mornings either a minister or one of two designated white men delivered a sermon to the Negroes, and in the afternoons either a white man delivered another sermon or one of the authorized Negroes with at least five whites in attendance addressed the congregations. (Alabama law required that five slaveholders be present when slaves or free people of color preached.[22]) Concerning the presence of whites during these services, Hamilton reiterated that "never we believe is the number less than five and often over fifteen." He acknowledged that there had been loud singing and praying and sometimes "loud shouting" and that such worship could be "remedied . . . and if requested we will endeavor to have it done. . . . There have been no dangerous and improper instructions given," he reassured the mayor. Methodist leaders promised that "all further instruction shall be unexceptionable and all meetings of colored people under our direction lawful. We also pledge our best efforts." Hamilton emphasized that there was not, as others suggested, enough room in the

---

[22]C. C. Clay, comp., A Digest of the Laws of the State of Alabama: Containing all the Statutes of a Public and General Nature, in Force at the Close of the Session of the General Assembly, in February, 1843 (Tuscaloosa: Slade, 1843), p. 545.

galleries of other churches to accommodate Negro worshippers.[23]

Throughout the antebellum years the Methodist church in Mobile continued to develop. After Hamilton failed to persuade some of his congregation to establish a new church of their own accord, he selected thirty-nine members to form what eventually became the St. Francis Street Methodist Episcopal Church. Leaders of the St. Francis Street Church "gave attention to the establishment" of a "congregation made up of persons of African descent who wished to have their own meeting place."[24] Church leaders made arrangements for these Negroes to meet in a house at the northeast corner of Dearborne and Church Streets. Since slaves in Alabama were not legally allowed to own real estate, in 1848 three white members of the St. Francis Street Church executed the deed to this property.[25] In 1860 these same three white men acquired a lot on the northwest corner of Bayou and Church Streets for the Negro congregation.[26]

---

[23]Ibid. Evidently no strict measures were enacted.

[24]Dean, The Swarming Bee Hive, pp. 15-16. The quotation is p. 16.

[25]About ten years later the congregation was forced to relocate due to a fire.

[26]Ibid., p. 16. This community became the Little Zion Church. See West, A History of Methodism in Alabama, p. 710.

Another nonwhite Methodist church was located at St. Michael and Lawrence Streets, the same location where the African church had once stood. In early 1853 fire destroyed this church, but its members found a new home about three blocks north near the northwest corner of Lawrence and State Streets.[27] Several prominent Mobilians, including Alexander McKinstry, judge of the City Court, held the lot and premises in trust for the use of the Negro church.[28] The Reverend Thomas W. Dorman of the Franklin Street Methodist Church guided the planning and construction of this house of worship, now called the State Street Colored Church.[29] It was "a good brick church, with a spacious gallery, and at the close of 1856 had five hundred and forty-four members and eighty-nine probationers."[30] The State Street Colored Church was "to the credit of both congregations [white and Negro] that such an imposing building was able to be managed when slaves were to be denied the right of owning property for more than a decade following its erection."[31]

---

[27]Mobile Daily Register, February 22, 1853. See also Alabama Planter, February 28, 1853.

[28]Deed Book 14, new series, pp. 581-82.

[29]Dean, The Swarming Bee Hive, p. 21.

[30]West, A History of Methodism in Alabama, pp. 709-10.

[31]Dean, The Swarming Bee Hive, p. 21.

Minutes of the "Franklin Street Colored Charge" (the State Street Colored Church) reveal, for instance, positions of leadership granted to its Negro members and the strict rules and guidelines that shaped their lives. Free persons of color, such as Jacob Anderson and Cassius Swanson, together with some slaves were chosen as leaders and stewards.[32] Church officials did not tolerate drunkenness, adultery, quarreling, and profanity. For instance, by unanimous vote church authorities expelled several Negro members, including a man found guilty of drunkenness and "other immoralites," and another man accused of adultery.[33]

The Government Street Presbyterian Church, formally organized in 1831, also served the Negro community. The Presbyterian Church did not establish a separately run mission for nonwhites; however, in 1859 committees from the Government Street Presbyterian Church and the Second and Third Presbyterian Churches did discuss the possibility of organizing an African congregation.[34] In the meantime, the Presbyterian Church did allow active participation by free

---

[32]Minutes of the Franklin Street Colored Charge, 1853-1865, pp. 1-2, 82-83, Government Street United Methodist Church, Mobile, Alabama. This source is hereinafter cited as FSCC.

[33]Ibid., pp. 7, 13.

[34]Government Street Presbyterian Church, Session Book 3, pp. 88, 91, Government Street Presbyterian Church, Mobile, Alabama; Charles D. Bates, ed. and comp., The Archives Tell a Story of the Government Street Presbyterian Church (Mobile: Gill Printing Company, 1959), pp. 12, 157-58.

nonwhites. Free people of color married others of their class or slaves; for instance, Elam Page, who later purchased his freedom, married Sophia, a nonwhite servant.[35] A Negro servant married a free woman of color named Caroline, and John, a Negro servant, married Emily Carter, a free woman of color.[36] Two free people of color were joined in matrimony.[37]

During the Civil War, the Government Street Presbyterian Church continued to minister to the Negroes. In 1862, the pastor reported that "the colored people have recd. special attention. Our pastors preach to them every Tuesday night, and generally the congregations have been large." He added that the Sabbath school was often "filled with them." Two years later the pastor noted that "a special service has been held every Tuesday evening for the colored people until by a recent order from the Mayor, none of them were permitted to go out after dark." Presbyterian church leaders were concerned that Negroes were attending Methodist and Baptist services instead of worshipping at their own church, where the pastor taught them, for example,

---

[35]Church Register of the Presbyterian Church, Government Street Presbyterian Church, 1831-1901, p. 204, February 5, 1835, Government Street Presbyterian Church, Mobile, Alabama. This source will be hereinafter cited as GSPCR; this repository will be hereinafter cited as GSPC.

[36]Ibid., p. 211.

[37]Ibid., p. 206. They were Thomas Leavens and Mary Hannah Johnson.

about the life of Christ. "These lectures were listened to with increasing interest and delight," the pastor explained, "thus showing that the colored people can appreciate instruction and need not be exclusively entertained with exciting, sensational preaching."[38]

Negroes comprised a small percentage of the total congregation. From 1856 to 1861 the number of nonwhite communicants at the Government Street Presbyterian Church was less than 10 percent of the total assembly. The 1856 report indicated that there were twenty-five members, the fewest for the five year period; in 1861 there were thirty-seven, the highest number recorded up to that time.[39]

In addition to the Government Street Presbyterian Church, the Second Presbyterian Church, organized in 1842, contributed to the religious development of nonwhites.[40] In 1845, for instance, the church accepted two slaves into its Negro congregation; two years later the Presbyterians received another slave.[41] After an examination of Sidney

---

[38]Ibid., p. 193.

[39]Ibid., pp. 33, 48, 60, 68, 114-15, 142.

[40]Records of the Third Presbyterian Church, organized in 1853, do not mention either slaves or free people of color. See Record Book of the Trustees of the Third Presbyterian Church of Mobile, 1854-1869, and Records of the Third Presbyterian Church, Minutes, 1853-1868, Central Presbyterian Church, Mobile, Alabama. This church will be hereinafter cited as CPC.

[41]Session Book of the Second Presbyterian Church, Mobile, vol. 1, pp. 24, 62, CPC.

Godfrey's "experimental knowledge of religion," Presbyterians admitted her to "the fellowship and communion" of their church.[42] Before accepting Negroes from other denominations, Presbyterians required certification; on this basis the Second Presbyterian Church received from a similar body in Demopolis, Alabama, two free people of color and "their servant girl."[43]

Like Methodists, Presbyterians did not tolerate unacceptable behavior. James Sanford, an elder who supervised services held for Negroes at the Second Presbyterian Church, testified that on New Year's Eve, 1855, he had asked nonwhite members of the West Ward Church to "wipe out all difficulties" among themselves and to "commence the year anew."[44] He informed the session that "John Burton, a colored member of this church was guilty of unchristian conduct both in words and spirit."[45] Gilbert, a Negro member, wanted to reconcile differences with John Burton, who, according to testimony, said that their dispute "was a private matter and ought to be settled in a private

---

[42]Ibid., p. 84.

[43]Ibid., p. 63. For other examples of slaves and free Negroes who were admitted into the church see ibid., pp. 94, 107, 114.

[44]Session Book of the Second Presbyterian Church, Mobile, vol. 2, p. 7, CPC.

[45]Ibid., p. 5.

manner and that it was but of little importance."[46] Since Burton did not want to make public amends, church elders resolved to suspend him "from all the privileges he now enjoys as a member of this church for six months."[47]

Burton, who believed his suspension was a "manifestation of prejudice and injustice," appealed the decision. The Presbytery of South Alabama decided to sustain his petition and ordered the Second Presbyterian Church to restore Burton's standing in the church.[48] The Mobile session warned him "to be more circumspect in future in his walk and conversation."[49]

Negroes constituted a significant part of the congregation of the Second Presbyterian Church. The 1851 annual report reveals that the thirteen Negro members were 9 percent of the total number of communicants. From 1852 to 1864, however, nonwhites comprised anywhere from 20 percent to more than 40 percent of the number of communicants. The

---

[46]Ibid., p. 7.

[47]Ibid., p. 8.

[48]Ibid., pp. 12, 15-16. The quotation is p. 12.

[49]Ibid., p. 17. Evidently as a result of this conflict Sanford resigned as director of the West Ward Negro congregation.

high percentages of nonwhite membership indicate the concern this church had for the Negro community.[50]

The Episcopal Church also included Negroes in its activities. The Reverend Samuel Lewis, Rector of Christ Church in Mobile from 1835 to 1846, "always felt a deep interest in the colored people, preached to them from time to time, had some communicants, and a Sunday school sometimes."[51] Two other Mobile Episcopal parishes--Trinity Church and St. John's Church--accepted Negro members. The registers of the three churches contain records of the baptisms, communicants, marriages, confirmations, and funerals of nonwhites, slave and free. For instance, an unidentified free child of color was baptized, and two Negroes who were evidently slaves were married at the residence of a white man.[52] Several Negroes were listed as communicants in Christ Church.[53] At St. John's, for

---

[50]Session Book of the Second Presbyterian Church, vol. 1, pp. 99, 108, 118, 128; Session Book of the Second Presbyterian Church, vol. 2, pp. 37, 44, 48, 55, 59, 61, 63.

[51]Reverend J. A. Massey to Mr. Bunker, February 27, 1885. This is a copy of the letter located in A Complete Register, Adopted for Parishes of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States: Trinity Episcopal Church, Mobile, Alabama, vol. A, n.p. This source will be hereinafter cited as Trinity Episcopal Church Register.

[52]Church records do not always distinguish whether a "colored" person was free or slave. Records of Christ Church, vol. 2, part 1, p. 13, June 5, 1836, copy at Local History Division, Mobile Public Library, Mobile, Alabama; ibid., vol. 2, part 2, p. 284, copy at Local History Division, Mobile Public Library.

[53]Ibid., p. 5, n.d.

example, two free Negroes, Alabama Virginia and Abraham, children of William and Elizabeth Royal, were baptized; the sponsors were the rector and the children's parents.[54] At the house of the bride, the Reverend Henry N. Pierce married two free people of color, and at the church the rector married Benjamin, a slave, and Cecelia Philips, a free Negro.[55] The rector performed the burial service for a free man of color.[56] At Trinity, a few free nonwhites, such as Hercules Strong, were baptized, and the Right Reverend Nicholas H. Cobbs confirmed six Negro members.[57] Negro marriages were performed in different locations--at the house of a free Negro and at the residence of the rector.[58] The rector also delivered burial rites for several Negroes, including a "free woman" who was interred at the New Grave Yard in Mobile.[59]

---

[54]St.John's Episcopal Church, Mobile, Register of Marriages, Confirmations, Funerals, 1854-1943, pp. 42-43, September 4, 1856. See ibid., April 25, 1854, for the baptism of a free woman of color.

[55]Ibid., p. 512, September 19, 1860; the two were Francis Moss and Mary L. Leavens; ibid., pp. 522-23, January 31, 1864.

[56]Ibid., p. 638, September 11, 1859.

[57]Trinity Episcopal Church Register, baptisms section, March 29, 1863. See also the unnumbered entry dated October 21, 1857, for a baptism of a nonwhite. Ibid., confirmation section, May 28, 1854.

[58]See ibid., marriage section, April 29, 1856, for the union of a slave and free woman of color, and ibid., January 10, 1864, for the marriage of two free Negroes.

[59]Ibid., funeral section, June 15, 1856.

Concerned Episcopal leaders established a separate congregation for Negroes. The Reverend Massey organized the Church of the Good Shepherd after "unusual interest in the church was manifested among" the nonwhites. In 1854, after the feast of the Ascension seven of them were confirmed in Trinity; these seven left Trinity to form the basis of the new church. The Episcopal bishop appointed the Reverend J. J. Scott to head the Negro assembly; after he served for nine months, the Reverend Massey assumed the leadership of Good Shepherd.[60]

The register of Good Shepherd Church chronicles the religious affairs of its members and demonstrates the role that the church played in the life of its members. An illustration of the involvement can be seen in the record of Armstead Saxon, a prominent free Negro in the church and evidently one of the original seven members. He witnessed the baptisms for three of his children, including Sally.[61] Within three weeks, however, tragedy struck the Saxon family, and Sally died. The Reverend Massey conducted

---

[60]Reverend J. A. Massey to Mr. Bunker, February 27, 1885, Trinity Episcopal Church Register. See also Christ Church Parish Register, vol. 4, p. 3, Christ Church, Mobile, Alabama.

[61]Church of the Good Shepherd Parish Register, vol. 2, February 18, 1855, July 15, 1855, February 27, 1859, Church of the Good Shepherd, Mobile, Alabama. This source will be hereinafter cited as GSPR. Trinity Church records list "Armstead" as one of the seven communicants who was affiliated with Good Shepherd. It is assumed that it was Saxon.

funeral services from the Saxon home.[62] Saxon acted as sponsor to numerous slaves owned by whites, indicating that he developed friendships and earned the respect within the white community.[63] Bishop Cobbs confirmed several Negroes, including Saxon, and several years later two of his children received similar graces.[64]

The role of the Baptist church in Mobile's nonwhite society involves a controversy over the history of the founding of Stone Street Baptist Church for Negroes. A present-day member insists that the church is the state's first Baptist church and that it had been organized in 1806 "by free black people, not by slaves," twenty-nine years before whites formed the First Baptist Church of Mobile.[65]

---

[62]Mobile Daily Register, March 20, 1859; GSPR, March 18, 1859.

[63]See, for example, GSPR, July 22, 1855, March 15, 1857, and May 3, 1862.

[64]Ibid., List of Confirmations, April 30, 1855, and April 18, 1869.

[65]"Stone Street Church in Mobile Called State's First Baptist Church--Black or White," Mobile Press Register, September 3, 1983, p. 8B, copied from Vertical File Collection, MHPSA. See also Frederick Douglas Richardson, comp., The Stone Street Baptist Church--Alabama's First, 1806-1982, n.p., n.d. Richardson mistakenly claimed that "a few records were kept on free blacks," and that "until 1865 records such as marriages and births were unkept on free blacks." Mobile County Marriage books, as well as numerous church registers, contain references to whites and nonwhites; some Mobile newspapers also list death notices for both races. See Fred Richardson, "Stone Street Church Member Says Research Accurate," Mobile Press Register, September 8, 1984, p. 11B, copied from Vertical File Collection, MHPSA.

Another source concluded that the Flint River Baptist Church in Madison County was the first such establishment.[66]

One source describes the Stone Street Baptist Church as having been founded in 1806, by "a pious old African man by the name of Uncle Dick." Consequently the church was originally known as "Uncle Dick's Church."[67] Uncle Dick apparently was a free Negro named Richard Field, who was listed in the 1830 federal census and in the 1837 city directory.[68] The church was a

> low roofed cabin covered with straw and pine tops, only one door at the front entrance, and two very small windows on either side. The church was well crowded at every service; seats made of rude pieces of timber, old boxes and benches, or whatever they could secure for a seat, and some very often were seated on the floor. Outside was a large refused iron wash pot, which hung on a tree rack; accompanied by an extra nail which served for a bell.[69]

---

[66]Avery Hamilton Reid, Baptists in Alabama: Their Organization and Witness (n.p.: The Alabama Baptist State Convention, 1967), p. 11. See also Gladys Kennedy, comp., "History of First Baptist Church, Mobile, Alabama, for its First One Hundred Years, 1845-1945," unpublished paper written in 1959, kept at the First Baptist Church, Mobile, Alabama; Sylvia Hart, "Layman Acquires Historic Note during Search for Founding Date of Stone Street Baptist Church," Mobile Press Register, December 10, 1983, p. 8B; Sylvia Hart, "Proper Place Given in History to Black Church?," Mobile Press Register, September 13, 1975; and John Andrews, "Founding Date of Stone Street Baptist Church Disputed," Mobile Press Register, September 8, 1984, p. 9B. The newspaper articles were copied from the Vertical File Collection, HMPSA.

[67]Mrs. Sarah King Rice, comp., The History of Stone Street Baptist Church (n.p. ca.1922) p. 5.

[68]Richardson, The Stone Street Baptist Church, pp. 26-27.

[69]Rice, The History of Stone Street Baptist Church, p. 5.

From its inception the First Baptist Church of Mobile served the Negro population. In 1835, Baptist leaders decided that nonwhite members needed written permission from "their owners or the person exercising control over them."[70] Applications were accepted only after Baptist authorities obtained either proper letters of dismissal from a previous church or "other testimony of membership."[71] For instance, Baptist leaders "received into fellowship as a member of the church coloured brother William Jones, belonging to J. G. S. Walker, upon a letter of dismission from the Baptist church in Augusta, Georgia." Baptists in the city of Mobile made arrangements for Negro members of the Shiloh Baptist Church in Mobile County to join their congregation; a year later the Mobile assembly accepted from that church "Sister Sarah."[72]

At some point the First Baptist Church of Mobile established a mission for Negroes. In 1841 Baptist authorities complained about the organization of its African branch, reporting that it had "been found materially defective in several points." It was charged that some members of the African church abused privileges which led "to the destruction of the good order and harmony among

---

[70]The First Baptist Church of Christ, Minutes, 1835-1848, p. 10, First Baptist Church, Mobile, Alabama.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Ibid., pp. 11, 23.

themselves and to the grief of this church, and general and manifest discredit of the cause of Christianity." Therefore, white church leaders instructed a committee to submit a plan for the "better regulation and government of the coloured members" of the African branch.[73] The committee governed the affairs of the Negroes within the African branch. For example, the committee recommended the restoration of six members "into the fellowship of the African branch"; it examined the qualifications of several members who wanted to preach.[74] It also dealt with a question regarding its relocation to Stone Street.[75]

In 1845 a controversy developed concerning the management of the African branch. The committee complained about two men, one named John Grant, who were preaching to the Negroes. "Unless this church silenced their preaching untill they became recconciled to all the members of this church," said the committee, "they cannot act with the church any longer."[76] The exact nature of the rift is not known, but the controversy led to the resignation of three committee members. The group investigating the matter reported that "we have ascertained verbally of various individual members of this Church that Brother Grant has

---

[73]Ibid., p. 54.

[74]Ibid., pp. 64, 73.

[75]Ibid., pp. 91-93.

[76]Ibid., p. 125.

conducted himself as becometh a Gospel Minister, whilst he has been pastor of the African branch," and that he "diligently toiled and labored with the colored branch without pay, and that he has not violated any of the laws of the land." They concluded that there was no reason to censure him.[77]

About a month later, the First Baptist Church gave some members of the African board an opportunity to present their grievances. Although First Baptist Church authorities had previously agreed to adopt new rules for the African branch committee, they concurred that "any brethern shall have [a] right to complain now, just the same as tho' no new rules had been adopted, and moreover that any brother be requested to point out any fault or defect in the new rules."[78]

The St. Anthony Street Baptist Church adopted rules in 1845 for the African Baptist church. To insure strict control over the Negro congregation, five white males from the St. Anthony Street Church were to manage the affairs. To prevent a recurrence of problems, one rule stated that "this church shall be a branch, or arm of the St. Anthony Street Baptist Church of Mobile and shall in all cases be subjected to the control and supervision by this . . . committee." Only certain members of the St. Anthony Street

---

[77]Ibid., pp. 126-27.

[78]Ibid., p. 131.

Church were allowed to preach to the Negroes; and the pastor and the committee had to approve Negro members who wanted to preach.[79]

The Second Baptist Church of Mobile, organized after a dispute concerning the management of the African church, also contributed to the religious development of nonwhites. It accepted a slave as a candidate for baptism, and "at the water's edge a free woman of colour, Sally Chamberlain, presented herself for membership when upon her Christian experience she was received for baptism." Other free Negroes, such as Charles Leavens, his wife, and daughter, "were received by letters" into the church. At a later time the Baptist pastor baptized Leavens's mother, a free woman of color.[80] Furthermore, Negroes in the Second Baptist Church held positions of responsibility. For instance, "the church took into consideration the application of the African church to license four of their members to preach," and since they were "of good character, orderly, and consistent in their conduct they were licensed to preach or exhort according and in conformity with the laws of Alabama."[81]

---

[79]Ibid., pp. 136-37.

[80]The Second Baptist Church, Mobile, Minutes, 1845-1875, pp. 4, 7, 13, First Baptist Church, Mobile, Alabama. The quotation is p. 7.

[81]Ibid., p. 24.

Religion played a significant part in the lives of Negroes. White churches, Catholic and Protestant, generally served the needs of the Negro population, free and slave. Many of the nonwhite descendants of the French and Spanish adhered to the Catholic faith--they not only received the sacraments themselves but also their slaves received similar graces. Free people of color (Catholic and Protestant) acted as godparents to others of their class; they also served in this capacity for their slaves and the slaves of whites.

Some of the Protestant denominations established separate missions for Negroes, such as the Episcopalians who formed the Church of the Good Shepherd. Although there was some opposition to the nonwhite congregations, they continued to hold services under white supervision as the law prescribed. Some Negroes became leaders in their assemblies, as in the State Street Church. Together the various opportunities provided by the variety of religious bodies met the needs of the nonwhite population. Clearly, the church was an important institution in the Mobile area.