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"Though Their Skin Remains Brown, I Hope Their Souls Will Soon Be White": Slavery, French Missionaries, and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the American South, 1789–1865[1]

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On August 21, 1861, Bishop Auguste Marie Martin of Natchitoches, Louisiana, issued a pastoral letter "on the occasion of the War of Southern Independence." In it, Martin argued that slavery was "the manifest will of God." It was the will of God for Catholics to continue "snatching from the barbarity of their ferocious customs thousands of children of the race of Canaan," the cursed progeny of Noah. It was also the obligation of Catholics to repudiate abolitionists for "upset[ting] the will of Providence" and misusing "His merciful plans for unrighteous actions."[2] Father Napoleon Joseph Perché, coadjutor of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, submitted his approval of Martin's pastoral statement by printing it in the Catholic newspaper *Le Propagateur Catholique*. Three years later, the Roman Congregation of the Index issued a statement condemning the

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[2]Auguste Marie Martin, "Lettre Pastorale de Mgr. l'Eveque de Natchitoches a l'Occasion de la Guerre du Sud Pour Son Independence," Natchitoches, Louisiana, 21 August 1861, F96, Society for the Propagation of the Faith Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives (hereafter UNDA), Notre Dame, Ind.; Auguste Marie Martin, Lettre Pastorale a l'Occasion de la Guerre du Sud pour son Independence, *Propagateur Catholique* (New Orleans), 37:983, 7 September 1861. See also Maria Genoino Caravaglios, *The American Catholic Church and the Negro Problem in the XVIII–XIX Centuries*, ed. Ernest L Unterkoefler (Charleston, S.C.: 1974); and Elisabeth Joan Doyle, "Bishop Auguste Marie Martin of Natchitoches and the Civil War," in *Cross, Crozier, and Crucible: A Volume Celebrating the Bicentennial of a Catholic Diocese in Louisiana*, ed. Glenn Conrad (Chelsea, Mich.: The Archdiocese of New Orleans in cooperation with the Center for Louisiana Studies, 1993), 135–144.

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opinions espoused by Martin and approved by the French ecclesiastical leadership of New Orleans. The Index was Pope Pius IX's organization in charge of censoring ideas deemed unacceptable to Catholic doctrine. The Index argued against Martin's proposition "that there exists a natural difference between negroes and whites," and that God sanctioned slavery as a means of redeeming Africans. The Index continued,

> It is an evil to deprive [people] of freedom and subject them to slavery; it is a violation of a natural right; for this reason people must not commit this evil to obtain good, from which they may draw an advantage, since God's purpose does not justify the immoral means of men. [Man] permits the evil to exist in order to deprive good, but [God] does not will the evil; on the contrary, He disapproves of it and punishes it. The true Christian good is the one which does not harm people's rights.

The Index concluded with the forceful comment that slavery in the South was "in opposition to the will of the Sovereign Pontiffs who . . . have not condemned the slave trade but slavery itself . . . [and] those who favor it, or those who teach it to be lawful." The Catholic leadership of Rome considered the words of Martin to be a promotion of the institution of "slavery as existing in the Southern Confederate States to which Louisiana belongs."[3]

Martin's position on slavery contradicted a growing anti-slavery sentiment among clerics in France and Rome. Yet from the perspective of many Catholic priests in the United States, Martin's words seemed unsurprising, if not justified, given the previous sixty years of missionary experiences in the United States. Catholic priests began migrating to the United States after the French Revolution. Archbishop John Carroll welcomed the influx of French priests until his death in 1815. Afterward, with the support of bishops in America and Europe, the number of missionary priests continued to rise throughout the antebellum period, especially in the states and territories of Maryland, Kentucky, and Louisiana. As many of these missionaries studied and lived in France, they brought with them deep suspicions of political and religious liberalism, and deep allegiances to social conservatism and ultramontane Catholicism.[4] Their ideological predispositions, however, did

[3]Congregation of the Index to Auguste Marie Martin, 15 November 1864, in *American Catholics and Slavery*, ed. Kenneth Zanca (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1994), 221. See also Maria G. Caravaglios, "A Roman Critique of the Pro-Slavery View of Bishop Martin of Natchitoches, LA," *American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, Records* 83 (June 1972): 67–82.

[4]Here, ultramontanism refers to the relationship between the French clergy and the pope following the French Revolution. Many French clerics looked to the pope *ultra montes*, or over the Alps, as a source of religious authority in a time of religious persecution. The French clergy was especially ultramontanist during the military campaigns of Napoleon III. See Patricia Byrne,

not adequately prepare them for the physical, political, and social environments of the missionary fields. An analysis of the experiences of missionary priests on the American frontier reveals a crisis of clerical authority that generated significant alterations in the direction of the Roman Catholic priesthood in the United States. More specifically, with theological and practical implications in mind, missionary priests reconsidered their relationships with French and Roman authorities as they lived within slave societies and came in contact with enslaved persons and those who enslaved them. By the 1850s, the priests under consideration in this article identified themselves as both foreign missionaries bent upon the Catholic evangelization of a non-Catholic nation and pastoral protectors of a southern way of life based on slavery.

The responses of French priests to the problem of slavery marked a reorientation in the transnational character of the Roman Catholic priesthood in the American South. In the early nineteenth century, French missionaries took an active role in the salvation of individual souls and a passive role in the maintenance of social order. They considered it necessary to aggressively work for the transformation of the interior dispositions of masters and slaves through the practice of Catholic rituals and the reception of Catholic education. Sacramental and catechetical requirements, they believed, demonstrated neither opposition to nor support for the legal and social rules of enslavement in the American South. It was not until after the 1839 papal statement *In Supremo Apostolatus* on slavery and the ensuing public debate among American bishops that French missionaries took an openly deliberate role in maintaining the slave society of the South. They started to feel less uncomfortable as alien inhabitants of a foreign place and more uncomfortable as representatives of an activist church claiming transnational authority in a place they were beginning to consider their home. Pope Gregory's reappraisal of slavery contributed to the movement of missionaries out of their passive approach to society; it encouraged them to accept responsibility both for the salvation of individuals and the proper direction of society. Coincidentally, Rome reminded priests of their active role in the shaping of societies at the same time that many American politicians and Protestant ministers pressed their constituents to support southern nationalism and sectionalism. The combination of these ideological shifts also coincided with first-generation missionaries assuming positions of greater ecclesiastical authority and second-generation priests arriving in

C.S.J., "American Ultramontanism," *Theological Studies* 56:2 (June 1995): 301–338; and Austin Gough, *Paris and Rome: The Gallican Church and the Ultramontane Campaign, 1848–1853* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

missionary fields with more stable ecclesiastical infrastructures, thus convincing many missionaries of their stake in a society that most priests in Europe still considered foreign. By the American Civil War, the desire to be at home in the world of the American South, more so than the desire to change the world according to Roman Catholic standards, convinced French missionaries of the inadequacies of canon law in meeting the everyday demands of missionary life in a slave society.

The limited inclusion of Catholic thoughts and actions in the history of the national debate over slavery is the result of at least two historiographical trends. First, many historians have been reluctant to envision the South as anything other than Protestant. The stamp of evangelicalism upon all aspects of southern culture has proved difficult to overcome since before Samuel Hill characterized the South as a solid evangelical region.[5] Donald Mathews complicated the image of southern religion by including African Americans in his depiction.[6] Christine Heyrman has also proposed a corrective to the solid Protestant interpretation by emphasizing the long process by which Baptists and Methodists altered and were altered by southern standards of honor, manhood, gentility, and slavery.[7] Paul Harvey has extended the logic of Heyrman in his respect for the alternative religious culture of African Americans in the South and the resultant multicultural diversity of the region.[8] Despite this heightened respect for cultural and religious diversity in the American South, historians such as Drew Gilpin Faust, Mitchell Snay, and Eugene Genovese have continued to limit the study of slavery and religion to questions of Protestant participation.[9]

[5]Samuel Hill set the standard for understanding religion in the South with his seminal work *Southern Churches in Crisis* (Boston: Beacon, 1966). In it, he argued that "no single feature of the southern religious picture is more revealing than the absence of pluralism and diversity from the popular denominations—and to a large extent from the other white Protestant bodies also. It is the homogeneity of that picture which marks southern religious history as distinctive" (xvii).

[6]Donald Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). More recently, Mathews urged scholars to "deal with the pervasiveness of myth, type, and image—that is, with popular belief that seems to hide or at least to confound the historical." The idea that the South was always a solidly evangelical region is one of those popular, misleading beliefs about the past: Epilogue, in *The Southern Albatross: Race and Ethnicity in the American South*, eds. Philip D. Dillard and Randall L. Hall (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1999), 276.

[7]Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 6.

[8]Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Culture and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865–1925* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 3.

[9]Eugene Genovese argued that "virtually all Southern spokesmen, clerical and lay, acknowledged that the South was fighting to uphold slavery. . . . Prominent Catholics and Jews joined Protestants in upholding the biblical sanction for slavery while they complained that Southern slavery fell short of biblical norms." His references to Catholics are tangential to his general respect for Southern Protestants: Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998). See also Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton

Second, many historians have been reluctant to envision American Catholicism as anything other than an urban and northern institution. They have conditioned their grand narrative of American Catholicism on the undisputed fact that most Catholic immigrants arrived and remained in places like New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Though historian Jay Dolan argued that Catholicism was primarily a southern institution before the post-1830s rise in immigration, most accounts of Catholicism in Kentucky and Louisiana can best be described in the words of his predecessor, John Tracy Ellis, as a "strange amalgam of Catholic life on the distant American frontier."[10] *Catholics in the Old South*, edited by Randall Miller and Jon Wakelyn, remains the only book dedicated to the history of Catholics in the entire antebellum South. Miller recognized two scholarly perspectives not conducive to the incorporation of Catholics in southern history: "the narrow geographic range of good Catholic scholarship and the evangelical Protestant orientation of southern religious scholarship."[11] Despite their best efforts, Miller and Wakelyn continued to reinforce a "cultural captivity" thesis which stipulated that white evangelical Protestants almost always pushed non-white, non-Protestant groups to the margins of southern culture during the nineteenth century.[12] This marginal status made Catholics into powerless inhabitants being drawn into the cultural currents of a solid and cohesive region. Historians of slavery and American Catholicism have reinforced the cultural captivity narrative of Catholics in the South by highlighting the theological positions of bishops without giving due attention to the practical and pastoral responses of priests to enslaved and free persons of color.[13] One of the purposes of this article is to reinforce the sentiments of

Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); and Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[10]Jay Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1985), 123; and John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 80.

[11]Randall M. Miller and Jon L. Wakelyn, eds., *Catholics in the Old South: Essays on Church and Culture* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983), 4.

[12]For examples of the "cultural captivity" argument, see Randall Miller, "A Church in Cultural Captivity: Some Speculations on Catholic Identity in the Old South," in *Catholics in the Old South*, 11–52; Randall Miller, "Catholics in a Protestant World: The Old South Example," in *Varieties of Southern Religious Experience*, ed. Samuel Hill (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 115–134; and Fred J. Hood, "Kentucky," in *Religion in the Southern States: A Historical Study*, ed. Samuel Hill (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983), 101–122.

[13]Madeleine Hooke Rice, *American Catholic Opinion on Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); Benjamin Blied, *Catholics and the Civil War* (Milwaukee, 1945); and Randall M. Miller, "Slaves and Southern Catholicism," in *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740–1870*, ed. John Boles (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 127–152.

historian Jon Sensbach, who insists that "the weight of an apparent Protestant evangelical destiny simply overwhelms the narrative of southern religious history," thus limiting insight into the diversity of peoples and places throughout the southern frontier.[14]

A third historiographical trend treats Catholicism as a transnational institution with cultural and religious ties at home and abroad. This approach is beneficial to a study of Catholics in the United States because of its respect for a multiplicity of ethnic and national identities. Robert Orsi, in his book *The Madonna of 115th Street*, persuaded many historians to stop treating culture as "a hermetic field of singular meanings" and instead to understand culture as "the web of meaning that humans spin and in which they are suspended, the ways that humans create and represent themselves and others."[15] John McGreevy, in *Catholicism and American Freedom*, highlighted the "interplay between Catholic and American" by giving serious consideration to conversations between priests, bishops, and theologians across the Atlantic.[16] And Peter D'Agostino, in *Rome in America*, recognized "an internalist narrative" of American Catholicism "driven by a presentist agenda" to create "an unproductive polemic with 'European Catholicism,' a straw man that serves as a monolithic, static symbol of ecclesiastical absolutism and a foil to an imagined democratic 'American

[14]Jon F. Sensbach, "Before the Bible Belt: Indians, Africans, and the New Synthesis of Eighteenth-Century Southern Religious History," in *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, eds. Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald Mathews (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 7. For depictions of the South as composed of frontier cultures, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s–1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, & Manhood in the Rural South, 1865–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). Several studies also refer to the experiences of Catholic missionaries in frontier environments, including Dolores Liptak, R.S.M., *Immigrants and Their Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 13–32; Anne M. Butler, Michael E. Engh, and Thomas W. Spalding, eds., *The Frontiers and Catholic Identities* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999); Thomas W. Spalding, "The Catholic Frontiers," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 12:4 (Fall 1994): 1–15; Leslie Woodcock Tentler, "'How I would save them all': Priests on the Michigan Frontier," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 12:4 (Fall 1994): 17–35; and Margaret C. DePalma, *Dialogue on the Frontier: Catholic and Protestant Relations, 1793–1883* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2004). For an introduction to Catholicism and ethnicity in the South, see David Edwin Harrell, "Religious Pluralism: Catholics, Jews, and Sectarians," in *Religion in the South*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1980); Dennis Clark, "The South's Irish Catholics: A Case of Cultural Confinement," in *Catholics in the Old South*, 195–210; David Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815–1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and George B. Tindall, *The Ethnic Southerners* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976).

[15]Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950* ([1985] New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), xx.

[16]John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 14.

Catholicism.' "[17] By looking at French missionaries as traveling across geographic and cultural boundaries, as Thomas Tweed suggests in *Crossing and Dwelling*, it is possible to avoid both static renderings of Catholics as cultural captives of the American South and internalist narratives of American Catholicism.[18]

In addition to incorporating transnational approaches to the analysis of Catholicism in America, this article also uses recent studies of Catholic women religious as models for re-conceptualizing the lives of Catholic priests. Beginning in the 1970s, historians and women religious combined their perspectives to engage in scholarly interpretations of the lives of sisters and nuns in the United States. Sister Elizabeth Kolmer surveyed literature pertaining to the history of women religious in 1978, admitting that "although Catholic sisters have been active on the American scene since the eighteenth century, the story of their life and work remains largely untold."[19] The same could not be said of Catholic priests, for there are hundreds of books related to the institutional history of the church in the United States, with priests almost always playing a central role in the narratives. Moreover, the self-reflexive nature of sister-historians on the history of women religious—on their own personal history—does not regularly appear in literature related to the history of Catholic priests.[20] Non-religious historians have joined women religious historians in recounting the history of Catholic sisters since the 1970s.[21] In particular, historians Tracy Fessenden, Diane

[17]Peter R. D'Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 5.

[18]Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 129–131. As missionaries worked to reorient themselves in parts of the American South, they noticed discrepancies between an ideal priesthood and a lived priesthood. Living according to a strict code of missionary behavior, they learned, often inhibited the feeling of being at home in the world. According to Tweed, religions "involve finding one's place and moving through space. One of the imperfections the religious confront is that they are always in danger of being disoriented. Religions, in turn, *orient* in time and space" (74). Tweed also treats missionaries as transnational migrants trying to make sense of their position in a world unlike their homeland. The missionary priests of this article are not outside Tweed's characterization of crossing and dwelling.

[19]Sister Elizabeth Kolmer, A.S.C., "Catholic Women Religious and Women's History: A Survey of the Literature," *American Quarterly* 30:5 (Winter 1978): 639.

[20]Sister Mary Ewens, O.P., is an important contributor to the history of women religious in the United States. She was a religious and a historian, and this dual perspective reveals itself in her scholarly works. See Mary Ewens, "The Double Standard of the American Sister," in *An American Church: Essays on the Americanization of the Catholic Church*, ed. David J. Alvarez (Moraga, Calif.: St. Mary's College of California, 1979), 23–35; and Mary Ewens, "Removing the Veil: The Liberated American Nun," in *Women and Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, eds. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

[21]Joseph Mannard, "Maternity of the Spirit: Nuns and Domesticity in Antebellum America," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 5 (Summer/Fall 1986): 305–323; Margaret Susan Thompson, "Discovering Foremothers: Sisters, Society, and the American Catholic Experience," *U.S.*

Batts Morrow, Carol Coburn, and Martha Smith have provided historians with insight into questions of race, gender, and religious identity in various historical and cultural contexts.[22] Historian Amy Koehlinger, perhaps more than most, respects the unfinished, processual quality of the institutions of women religious. In doing so, she "aims to shed new light on the diversity and internal complexity of the lives that sisters created for themselves."[23]

Taking a cue from these historians, it is important to treat Catholic priests less as perfect representatives of a static Catholic Church and more as contributors to a common Catholic culture composed of lay and ecclesiastical persons with varying degrees of cultural capital.[24] In doing so, it is possible to disrupt the clear distinction that many historians have made between immigrant/European Catholics and republican/American Catholics. Isaac Hecker and Orestes Brownson remain fixed as exemplars of this latter form of Catholicism, one that was composed of people who, according to historian Patrick Carey, "were at home in the Anglo-American republican tradition and understood Catholicism . . . as compatible with American republicanism," and who, "unlike the immigrants, encouraged Catholics not simply to preserve Catholicism in its ethnic conclaves but to make America itself Catholic."[25] One of the purposes of this article is to demonstrate how

Catholic Historian 5 (Summer/Fall 1986): 273–290; Margaret Susan Thompson, "*Philemon's* Dilemma: Nuns and Blacks in Nineteenth-Century America—Some Findings," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society* 96 (March–December 1985): 3–18; Barbara Misner, *"Highly Respectable and Accomplished Ladies": Catholic Women Religious in America, 1790–1850* (New York: Garland, 1988); James J. Kenneally, *The History of American Catholic Women* (New York: Crossroad, 1990); Barbara Mann Wall, "'We Might as Well Burn It': Catholic Sister-Nurses and Hospital Control, 1865–1930," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30 (Winter 2002): 21–40; and John J. Fialka, *Sisters: Catholic Nuns and the Making of America* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2004).

[22]Tracy Fessenden, "The Sisters of the Holy Family and the Veil of Race," *Religion and American Culture* 10:2 (Summer 2000): 187–224; Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious At the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence, 1828–1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

[23]Amy Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

[24]French historian Pierre Pierrard contends that there is a myth of the *bon prêtre*, or good priest, in the representation of Catholic priests in French history: Pierrard, *La Vie Quotidienne du Prêtre Francais au XIXe Siècle, 1801–1905* (Paris: Hachette, 1986), 13, 22. The same could be said of priests in United States history, though American historians have been less amenable to such interpretations. For further discussion of the "vie quotidienne" of Catholic priests, see Marcel Launay, *Le Bon Prêtre: Le Clergé Rural au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1986), 7; and Joseph Rogé, *Le Simple Prêtre* (Paris: Casterman, 1965), 5–7.

[25]Patrick Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 29–30. Jay Dolan reiterates the distinction between Brownson, "who clearly wanted Catholics to become more American," and Archbishop John Hughes, who "wanted to emphasize the Catholic dimension of

uncommon it was for Catholics in the United States to debate what it meant to be American and Catholic in such clearly defined ways. French missionary priests, who were immigrants for all intents and purposes, responded to the practice of enslavement as Catholics and ultimately justified the practice of enslavement as Catholics. They embraced the American institution of slavery by using non-American theological and philosophical arguments, ultimately finding commonalities in the conservative and authoritarian social orders of the American South and the Roman Catholic Church. But more important, they embraced the American institution of slavery because of their practical experiences as missionaries to enslaved persons and as owners of slaves. Put simply, the experience of evangelizing and owning slaves cannot be underestimated when explaining how "Catholics became American."

I. Slavery and Missionary Catholicism in the Early American Church

Geographically, the migration of French missionaries flowed from France to Maryland, Kentucky, and Louisiana throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These missionaries encountered ideas about slavery and the bodies of slaves along the way. Yet before arriving in North America, potential missionaries did not live in a slave society. They did not experience firsthand the realities of the slave trade or the treatment of enslaved persons on American plantations. They did, however, read the literary depictions of slavery by French missionaries in the *Jesuit Relations*, *Lettres Édifiantes*, and other travel narratives of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. Historian Friedrich Wolfzettel described the textual representations of missionary life as subject to *les discours du voyageur*, or the discourses of the voyager. More specifically, missionaries perpetuated a missionary discourse by reinforcing tropes such as suffering, martyrdom, Divine Providence, exoticism, and evangelistic necessity.[26] When it came to the characterization of slavery within this missionary discourse, humanitarian paternalism appeared as a primary trait of missionary priests in relation to enslaved persons, most often in French

American Catholicism": Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 65.

[26]Wolfzettel argues that "la literature de voyage missionaire est caractérisée par des buts de propaganda visant, le plus souvant, un public relativement restraint" ("The literature of missionary travel is characterized by its propaganda purposes, which aim, most often, at a relatively controlled public"): Wolfzettel, *Le Discours du Voyageur: Pour une histoire littérraire du récit de voyage en France, du Moyen Age au xviiie Siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), 166–167. See also Tangi Villerbu, *La Conquête de l'Ouest: le récit francais de la nation américane au XIXe siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007).

colonies throughout the Caribbean and parts of South America.[27] There were limits, however, to the humanitarian impulse of some priests after the French Revolution, due in large part to the rise in anticlericalism. The same ideology of humanitarianism that produced abolitionism also generated widespread disrespect for the religious authority of priests.[28] Potential missionaries in France, as a result of this predicament, generally tended to distrust the means and ends of liberal humanitarianism, which by extension meant that most potential missionary priests identified abolitionism as a sign of social disorder. With these two ideological sources—missionary literature and post-revolutionary liberalism—in mind, French priests chose to become missionaries for at least two important reasons: first, to bring religion to a literally captive audience of enslaved persons and, second, to conduct themselves in such a way as to improve their chances of personal salvation.[29] They did not consider abolitionism to be an acceptable means of social reform.

Missionary migrants did not apply the antislavery sentiments of their French compatriots to the ecclesiastical contexts of Maryland, Kentucky, and Louisiana. In fact, they found themselves in American dioceses already invested in the institution of slavery and among priests already buying and selling slaves. In the decade following the American Revolution, Archbishop John Carroll estimated that blacks comprised 20 percent of all Catholics in Maryland. By 1838, English Jesuits owned six plantations and 272 slaves throughout Maryland.[30] Missionary priests from

[27]Sue Peabody, "'A Dangerous Zeal': Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635–1800," *French Historical Studies* 25:1 (2002) 53–90; Charles Frostin, "Méthodologie missionaire et sentiment religieux en Amérique francaise aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: Le case de Saint-Domingue," *Cahiers d'histoire* 24:1 (1979) 19–43; and George Breathett, "Religious Protectionism and the Slave in Haiti," *Catholic Historical Review* 55:1 (1969–1970): 26–39.

[28]For more on the abolitionist movement in France, see Patrick Weil and Stéphane Weil, eds., *L'Esclavage, la colonization, et après . . . : France, Etats-Unis, Grande-Bretagne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires des France, 2005); Nelly Schmidt, *Abolitionistes de l'esclavage et réformateurs des colonies, 1820–1851: Analyse et documents* (Paris: Karthala, 2000); and Lawrence Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery: The Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France, 1802–1848* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[29]The nationwide canvassing of missionary literature in the mold of the *Jesuit Relations* provided potential missionaries with a partly accurate rendering of American missions and ample opportunity to imagine themselves in the image of Jesuit martyrs in New France and the new wave of missionaries in the early American republic. It also contributed to the formation of what historian André Latreielle called *les réveils missionaires*, or the missionary awakenings, of nineteenth-century France. Latreille, "Preface," in *Les Réveils Missionaires en France: Du Moyen-Age a Nos Jours (XIIe–XXe siècles)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 9. This *renaissance de l'idée missionaire*, according to historian Jean-Claude Baumont, was a direct result of "the significant impact of missionary writings" on the decision of seminarians and priests to become missionaries. Baumont, "La renaissance de l'idée missionaire en France au début du XIXe siècle," in *Les Réveils Missionaires en France*, 215, 219.

[30]Thomas Murphy, *Jesuit Slaveholding in Maryland, 1717–1838* (New York: Routledge, 2001). For more on Catholicism in Baltimore, see Thomas W. Spalding, *The Premier See: A History of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1789–1989* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989);

post-revolutionary France perpetuated the practice of slave ownership during the antebellum period in Maryland. They recognized the usefulness of slave labor in the practical and economic maintenance of missions and seminaries. And at least for the first three decades of the nineteenth century, they demonstrated little interest in discussing the moral implications of treating humans as property. Father Jean Marie Tessier, among the first Sulpicians to flee France after the French Revolution and arrive at Baltimore, purchased and manumitted slaves during his tenure as superior of the Sulpician community in North America.[31] The slaves of Sulpicians worked as domestic servants in seminaries and convents while lay overseers regulated the daily activities of Sulpician plantations in Baltimore and Emmitsburg.[32] The Archdiocese of Baltimore sometimes supplied Kentucky missionaries with enslaved laborers, as seen when Father Stephen Badin asked Carroll if, "without much inconveniency to the clergy of your Archdiocese, [you might spare] a few boys of the plantations of Maryland, the price of whom (if they cannot be donated) may probably be paid from their labors in Kentucky in the course of a few years."[33] Father Louis William DuBourg purchased slaves while president of St. Mary's College in Baltimore, as did other Sulpicians of lower rank within the order.[34] DuBourg, perhaps more than any other missionary priest in North America, was responsible for convincing religious and diocesan priests of the necessity of slave labor. He purchased slaves on behalf of the

and Annabelle M. Melville, *John Carroll of Baltimore, Founder of the American Catholic Hierarchy* (New York: Scribner, 1955).

[31]John Tessier, Slave Purchase Contract of "the Negro Boy named Basil," Baltimore, 4 February 1819, RG 1 box 11, Archives, U.S. Province, Society St. Sulpice (hereafter, AUSPSS), Associated Archives at St. Mary's Seminary and University (hereafter, AASMSU), Baltimore, Md.; John Tessier, Manumission of Marie Magdeleine Georgette, Baltimore, Md., 13 June 1826, RG 1 box 11, AUSPSS, AASMSU. Other Sulpicians bought and sold slaves: Pierre Babad, Receipt of Sale of Slave named Colmar, Baltimore, Md., 5 June 1820, Babad Papers, RG 3 box 12, AUSPSS, AASMSU. Tessier also hired indentured servants: John Tessier, Termination of Indenture of John G. Heydecker, Baltimore, Md., 20 June 1809, RG 1 box 11, AUSPSS, AASMSU; and John Tessier, Indenture of Augustine Snyder, Baltimore, Md., 20 November 1816, RG 1 box 11, AUSPSS, AASMSU.

[32]John Dubois to Simon Bruté, Mount St. Mary, Md., 5 February 1816, RG 3 box 12, AUSPSS, AASMSU; Simon Bruté to Abbé Garnier, Emmitsburg, Md., 1815(?), RG 1 box 13, AUSPSS, AASMSU; and Benedict Joseph Flaget to Father Deluol, Kentucky, 10 September 1842, Flaget Letters, Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky, Records (hereafter, NAZ), UNDA.

[33]Stephen Badin to John Carroll, near Bardstown, Ky., 16 December 1810, Francis P. Clark Copies, Transcripts, and Translations (hereafter, CCOP) 6, UNDA.

[34]Archibald McDonnell to William Louis DuBourg, Slave of Negro Boy called Bob, Baltimore, Md., 12 May 1808, RG 3 box 18, AUSPSS, AASMSU; and Pierre Babad, Receipt of Sale of Slave called Colmar, Baltimore, Md., 5 June 1820, Babad Papers, RG 3 box 12, AUSPSS, AASMSU.

Vincentian Order in Missouri and perpetuated the practice of priests owning slaves while bishop of Louisiana during the 1810s and 1820s.[35]

Before DuBourg made his mark on the role of slavery in the American Catholic Church, French and Spanish priests contributed to the formation of slave societies down the Mississippi River and across the Gulf Coast during the colonial period, thus making the Catholic Church the single largest slaveholding entity in the Louisiana Territory.[36] Spanish, French, and Irish priests of the late eighteenth century bought and sold slaves with little evidence of moral, ethical, or theological equivocation.[37] With the example of Father Antonio de Sedella, more popularly known as Père Antoine, many priests seem to have allowed those under their legal ownership to move more freely in the city of New Orleans than on plantations throughout the territory.[38] However, as seen in the case of Father Josef de Xerez, who freed his slaves but did not tell them about their emancipation, priests exhibited a paternalistic understanding of their relationship with *gens de colour*.[39] At times, paternalism could turn into sexual exploitation, as seen in the case of Father Paul de St. Pierre, who bought a female slave and later was accused of sexually abusing her.[40] Sisters of the

[35]For more on the life of DuBourg, see Annabelle M. Melville, *Louis William DuBourg, Bishop of Louisiana and the Floridas, Bishop of Montauban, and Archbishop of Besancon*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1986). For more on Catholicism and slavery in Missouri, see Stafford Poole and Douglas Slawson, *Church and Slave in Perry County, Missouri: 1818–1865* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 148–186.

[36]Stephen Ochs argued that the Catholic Church was the single largest slaveholding entity in the territory of Louisiana in *A Black Patriot and a White Priest: André Cailloux and Claude Paschal Maistre in Civil War New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 22. See also Roger Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans: A. W. Hyatt Stationary, 1939); Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); and Glenn R. Conrad, ed., *Cross, Crozier, and Crucible*.

[37]Luis Penalver y Cardenas, New Orleans, 12 September 1799, V-3-a, UNDA; Miguel Bernardo Barriere to Luis Penalver y Cardenas, Attakapas, La., 24 October 1800, V-3-e, UNDA. For an introduction to the history of colonial Louisiana, see Bradley G. Bond, ed., *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Charles Edward O'Neill, *Church and State in French Colonial Louisiana: Policy and Politics to 1732* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966); and Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1763–1803* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).

[38]For more on the influence of Antonio de Sedella on the Catholic Church in colonial New Orleans, see Charles Edward O'Neill, S.J., "'A Quarter Marked by Sundry Peculiarities': New Orleans, Lay Trustees and Père Antoine," *Catholic Historical Review* 76 (1990): 235–277; and Richard E. Greenleaf, "The Inquisition in Spanish Louisiana, 1762–1800," *New Mexico Historical Review* 50:1 (January 1975): 45–72.

[39]Cirilo de Barcelona, 28 January 1792, New Orleans, V-3-e, UNDA.

[40]William Duparc to Manuel de Salcedo, Pointe Coupee, La., 30 September 1803, V-4-a, UNDA. For insight into "sex across the color line," see Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997). See also Diane Miller Sommerville, *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Order of St. Ursula, the first female religious order to establish a convent in what would become the United States, also bought and sold slaves throughout the periods of colonization and the early republic.[41] Additionally, priests of Spanish colonial Louisiana demonstrated a willingness to categorize Catholics by race in baptismal and burial registries, as well as a desire to dispense the sacraments to enslaved persons even when faced with the opposition of masters.[42] For instance, in 1800, 52 percent of those baptized in the Church of St. Louis were enslaved persons, 31 percent were categorized as white, and 17 percent were free persons of color. Furthermore, the death records of 1800 include 111 enslaved persons, 76 whites, and 55 free persons of color.[43]

In addition to participating in the practice of enslavement within Catholic institutions, missionary priests encountered a variety of thoughts and actions pertaining to slavery within the slave societies of the Upper South and the Gulf South. Historians have described Baltimore, the primary Catholic see of the United States, as a "middle ground" between a slave society and a free society.[44] In Baltimore, free people of color mingled with free whites and

[41]Sister Antonia de St. Monica Ramos, O.S.U., to Thomas Hassett, New Orleans, 21 March 1803, V-3-n, UNDA; Sister Antonia de St. Monica Ramos, O.S.U., to Thomas Hassett, New Orleans, 24 March 1803, V-3-n, UNDA; Sister Antonia de St. Monica Ramos, O.S.U., to Thomas Hassett, New Orleans, 7 May 1803, V-3-o, UNDA; and Patrick Walsh, New Orleans, 1798, V-4-c, UNDA. For more on the Ursulines in colonial New Orleans, and for more on Roman Catholicism in colonial New Orleans in general, see Emily Clark, "'By All the Conduct of Their Lives': A Laywomen's Confraternity in New Orleans, 1730–1744," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., 54:4 (October 1997): 769–794; Emily Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould, "The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans, 1727–1852," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59:2 (April 2002): 409–448; Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727–1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and Mary V. Miceli, "The Influence of the Roman Catholic Church on Slavery in Colonial Louisiana, 1718–1763," Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1979.

[42]Diocesan priests went to considerable lengths to make sure that baptismal and burial registries were accurate in the categorization of Catholics by race. By extension, they also demonstrated a serious concern that all persons of color, whether enslaved or free, receive the sacraments. See Pierre Genti to Luis Penalver y Cardenas, n.p., 1800, V-2-i, UNDA; Penalver y Cardenas, New Orleans, 14 January 1800, V-2-i, UNDA; Isidro Quintero, New Orleans, 14 January 1800, V-2-i, UNDA; Penalver y Cardenas, New Orleans, 15 January 1800, V-2-i, UNDA; Antonio de Sedella to Luis Penalver y Cardenas, New Orleans, 17 January 1800, V-2-i, UNDA; Antonio de Sedella, New Orleans, 3 January 1800, V-2-i, UNDA; Penalver y Cardenas, New Orleans, 1 February 1800, V-2-i, UNDA; Thomas Hassett to Manuel de Salcedo, New Orleans, 22 June 1802, V-3-j, UNDA; Manuel de Salcedo to Thomas Hassett, New Orleans, 22 June 1802, V-3-j, UNDA; and Miguel Bernardo Barriere, Census of St. Martin's Church for 1801, Attakapas, La., 4 June 1801, V-2-a, UNDA.

[43]Alfred E. Lemmon, "Spanish Louisiana: In the Service of God and His Most Catholic Majesty," in *Cross, Crozier, and Crucible*, ed. Conrad, 28.

[44]According to Barbara Jeanne Fields, Maryland was a "middle ground" where the social mixture of free whites, free people of color, and enslaved persons produced a space of continual negotiation over the ideas of slavery and freedom: Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985). T. Stephen Whitman reiterated the findings of Fields in *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington: University Press of

enslaved blacks during the period of the early republic, only to be met with a general turn toward white supremacy by the end of the 1830s as already present in the rural areas of Maryland. Historians have also described Kentucky as a state in between northern abolitionism and southern proslavery sentiment. Yet calls for reform, however strident, remained conservative in comparison with northern states, ultimately leading many white Kentuckians to refer to slavery as a "necessary evil."[45] New Orleans maintained a similar reputation during the antebellum period as a racially diverse place where the boundaries between slavery and freedom remained fluid. And yet, as historian Walter Johnson has demonstrated, New Orleans was the slave-trade capital of the United States.[46] It was a place where people experienced the brutality of slavery on a daily basis. It was a place where slave auctions and Catholic churches shared the same blocks of the Vieux Carré and where race mattered when considering social status and economic opportunity.[47]

The practice of enslavement, in other words, was visible, audible, touchable, and thinkable for all missionary priests, as were the many alternative approaches to the slavery question. The physical and social conditions of slavery in Maryland, Kentucky, and Louisiana met the transnational ideologies of French liberalism and Roman Catholicism in the minds and bodies of missionary priests. As a result of this convergence of experiences and assumptions, French missionaries neither approached the question of slavery

Kentucky, 1997). However, Whitman was careful to distinguish between the negotiated "middle ground" of urban Baltimore and the more clearly defined white rule of rural plantations: "Baltimore's hinterlands," he wrote, "remained strongly committed to slave labor even as blacks transformed the city into an island of freedom" (1).

[45]Harold Tallant, like many of his predecessors, referred to Kentucky as a moderate middle ground between immediate emancipation and the biblical justification of slavery as a moral good: Harold Tallant, *Evil Necessity: Slavery and Political Culture in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2003).

[46]In his cultural study of the slave market in antebellum New Orleans, Walter Johnson captures the private and public lives of both masters and slaves: Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[47]Herbert Klein argued in *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) that "racism was a part of every American system that held African slaves and did not disappear when blacks and mulattoes became free citizens and economic and social competitors" (218). Virginia Dominguez argued in *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986) that "race is the issue in Louisiana" (xiv). Recent scholarship has also challenged the popular conception of New Orleans as a multiracial community of white, colored, and black people: Bell, in *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana*, argued that antebellum New Orleans subscribed to a "new American racial order," or a binary system of black and white (65–88). Thomas N. Ingersoll, in *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718–1819* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), extended the binary system of racial order to the Louisiana colonial period in spite of French and Spanish influences (275).

from a clear ideological standpoint nor did they encounter a static model for enslaving persons. The work of bringing Catholicism and slavery into some theological and practicable agreement would be done over the course of the antebellum period and within the context of an unstable missionary field.

II. Missionary Priests and the Application of Canon Law in a Slave Society

The disorienting state of ecclesiastical affairs during the first four decades of the nineteenth century prevented the first generation of nineteenth-century French missionaries from immediately activating their desire to work among enslaved communities on any large scale. The physical hardship of rural life, the lack of a strong institutional infrastructure, and lay opposition to Catholic moral teachings produced reluctance among many missionaries to criticize social ills already present in the missions. Missionary priests tried to legitimate themselves as a source of religious authority within slave societies of the South and within a church that understood slavery to be morally acceptable; they tried to apply the sacramental and catechetical prescriptions of Catholicism to what they perceived to be the given social and ecclesiastical orders. As they began to engage the system of slavery, however, missionary priests found great frustration in the difficult implementation of canon law in slave societies. The history of French missionaries in segments of the American South from 1789 to 1839, as a consequence, is a history of priests whose minds were fixed on France and Rome but whose bodies were situated in slave societies a world away from Europe. Only after forty years of missionary experiences in the southern states, and only after the pope issued a controversial apostolic letter on slavery (*In Supremo Apostolatus*) in 1839, did missionaries begin to demonstrate a willingness to align themselves with a distinctively southern proslavery ideology.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, French missionaries looked to Rome, and specifically to the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide), for help in applying canon law to circumstances surrounding slavery in the foreign environments of Maryland, Kentucky, and Louisiana.[48] In an ideal scenario, DuBourg instructed priests to sell slaves

[48] *United States Documents in the Propaganda Fide Archives, Index to Calendar*, vols. I–VII, edited by Finbar Kenneally, O.F.M. (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1981). These seven volumes refer to thousands of letters between cardinals of the Propaganda Fide and priests in the United States. For an introduction to the early history of the Propaganda Fide, see Bernard Jacqueline, "La Sacrée Congrégation de la *Propaganda Fide* et le réveil de la conscience missionaire en France au XVIIe siècle," in *Les Rèveils Missionaire en France du Moyen-Age a Nos Jours (XIIe–XXe siècles)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 107–118; and Raphael Hung Sik Song, *The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith:*

only on three conditions: if potential buyers were "humane and Christian masters who will purchase them for their own use"; if slaves disobeyed the orders of their masters; or if slaves acted immorally.[49] In reality, DuBourg and other missionaries recognized the scarcity of "humane" masters and thus the problem of how to offer the sacraments to enslaved persons without disrupting the already tenuous relationship between priests and masters. DuBourg asked the Propaganda Fide if it was wise to "disturb the consciences" of masters in matters related to the possession of slaves when civil laws protected the property rights of white citizens. He also expressed equivocation in his characterization of, on the one hand, the unfortunate necessity for slaves to work on the Sabbath in order to make money and grow crops for their own sustenance and, on the other, the preservation of public order by limiting the leisure time of "the lowest class of men."[50] DuBourg's movement between a canonical concern about the proper practice of Catholicism as defined by Rome, the practical application of canon law when faced with the legal limitations of slave societies, and a general suspicion of enslaved persons who were free of paternal oversight generated considerable frustration for priests trying to balance legal and social customs with their missionary requirement to dispense the sacraments according to canon law.[51]

In Kentucky, early French missionaries exhibited a similar concern about the preservation of Tridentine Catholicism in ritual and doctrinal form. The legal and physical welfare of enslaved persons, as a result of their fixation on Catholic orthodoxy and orthopraxy, did not generate a noticeable level of anxiety among the first missionary migrants of the Ohio River and Upper

A Dissertation (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1961). References to "Rome" in this article are not meant to imply that all Catholic authorities in Rome spoke with the same voice or with the same authority. The Propaganda Fide, in fact, can be described as a relatively loosely organized contingency of cardinals, bishops, and priests who attempted to control missionary operations the world over. Missionaries in the United States, however, acted as though the decisions of the Propaganda Fide represented the decisions of the pope, which in turn meant that Rome spoke with a common, definitive voice. In other words, missionaries thought of Rome as a source of order and clarity, a source that was all the more desired in the face of disorder and confusion in the American missions.

[49]William Louis DuBourg to Jesuits of Missouri, St. Louis, 10 April 1823, *American Catholics and Slavery*, ed. Zanca, 155–156.

[50]William Louis DuBourg to the Propaganda Fide, *Scrutture Riferite nei Congressi* 3, fol. 466, Congregation of the Propaganda Fide Archives, UNDA.

[51]*Scritture Riferite nei Congressi* 9, fol. 339rv, u.d., Congregatio de Propaganda Fide Collection, UNDA; *Decisioni, cherichiede alla Sac. Congr' de Propaganda Fide: Il Vescovo d'alta Louisiana*, Congregatio de Propaganda Fide Collection, UNDA. DuBourg demonstrated this frustration in his attempt to marry enslaved persons when slaveholders refused to give their consent. Without the consent of masters and without adequate sacramental records, priests were unsure of how to canonically validate the marriages of enslaved persons.

Mississippi River valleys. In 1802, Father Michael Fournier consulted Carroll on the practice of selling slaves. "What is to be done with masters who sell their Negroes to heretics on the condition that they will go to their church," the novice missionary asked, especially since such a "condition is not often filled?"[52] Apparently there was no consensus among missionary priests by 1816, as seen in Father Charles Nerinckx's questions to the Propaganda Fide: "What is to be thought about the selling of servants, or of slaves in general? What if they are sold to heretics in public auction?" The Propaganda Fide answered simply, "It is not permitted."[53] Yet despite the fairly straightforward Roman response, Flaget again asked the Congregation about the domestic slave trade in 1828:

> 1. What is to be thought concerning Catholic Masters who having Catholic slaves sell them indiscriminately to Catholics or Heretics and very often to Heretics because they are richer than Catholics? 2. Can owners who have unruly slaves, given up to depraved habits, taking no account of warnings and beatings, sell them also to Heretics dwelling in far-distant regions? 3. If the abovementioned slaves so depraved and corrupt were joined in legitimate wedlock, can the Masters sell them to the first bidder even a Heretic who would take them into a region far away from their spouses? It must be noted, 1. that those slaves commonly are bought by Heretics because our Catholics, generally speaking, are too poor to be able to buy slaves. It must be noted, 2. that very often there is present a certain necessity to sell those wicked slaves into far-removed regions on account of a well-founded fear that they may do some harm to the former Master, whether by robbery, or by fire or poison.[54]

Unfortunately, the Propaganda Fide's answers to Flaget's questions of 1828 are not available. It can be surmised, nevertheless, that missionaries still displayed great discomfort in making canonical decisions without the sanction of the Propaganda Fide by the 1830s. It can also be surmised that French missionaries presented themselves to the Propaganda Fide as more concerned about the religious implications of *who* owned slaves—Catholics or "heretics"—and less about the moral implications of enslaving people at all.

The fact that priests bought and sold slaves in Kentucky further demonstrates the missionary conviction that slaves were better off under the authority of

[52]Michael J. C. Fournier to John Carroll, 25 January 1802, Baltimore Cathedral Archives (hereafter, BCA), box 4, CCOP 8, UNDA.

[53]"Doubts proposed by Monsignor Nerinckx," Kentucky, 1816, Acts of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith (hereafter, ASCPF), Propaganda Fide Translations, vol. 179, fol. 6–26v, CCOP 12, UNDA.

[54]Benedict Joseph Flaget to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide, Bardstown, Ky., 4 February 1828, "Writings Referring to the General Congregations," Propaganda Fide Translations, CCOP 12, UNDA.

Catholics, and especially Catholic priests.[55] Otherwise, as the above statement of Flaget demonstrates, enslaved persons were more likely to remain "wicked," "heretical," "unruly," and "depraved." Of course, it was neither possible nor desirable for missionaries to own every slave in Kentucky, which in turn convinced priests of the need to educate enslaved persons and provide them with the sacraments. Recognition of a need to communicate their Catholicism to slave communities, however, did not translate into a large-scale evangelization operation. There were simply too few priests to provide for the religious welfare of every enslaved person outside their own plantations and households on any regular basis. Nonetheless, there were occasions when missionary priests like Benedict Flaget of Kentucky and Joseph Rosati of Missouri attempted to catechize enslaved persons despite immoral treatment at the hands of their masters, the most startling activities being "concubinage" and sexual abuse.[56] They also tried to maintain their obligation to dispense the sacraments to all persons regardless of slave or free status. Flaget, while on a circuit of Kentucky in 1814, visited households where he heard the confessions of enslaved persons and performed the ritual of extreme unction in cases where death was imminent. On one occasion, "Mr Hirt's negress died without the sacraments." Flaget admitted that it "could be my fault," asked God to "pardon me," and admitted that "my heart is broken with doubts."[57] The bishop continued to exhibit doubts many years later when he asked the Propaganda Fide about the circumstances under which a priest could baptize an infant who was the

[55]On the enslavement of persons by missionaries in Kentucky, see C. Walker Gollar, "The Role of Father Badin's Slaves in Frontier Kentucky," *American Catholic Studies* 115:1 (Spring 2004): 1–24; C. Walker Gollar, "Father John Thayer: Catholic Antislavery Voice in the Kentucky Wilderness," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 101 (Summer 2003): 275–96; and C. Walker Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky," *Catholic Historical Review* 84 (1998): 42–63. On the maintenance of plantations with enslaved workers, see Benedict J. Flaget to Cardinal Fransoni, Louisville, Ky., 18 June 1848, ASCPF, vol. 14, 704r-v, Propaganda Fide Translations, CCOP 12, UNDA; John David to Simon Brute, Louisville, Ky., 4 June 1811, CCOP 17, UNDA; John David to Simon Brute, St. Stephen's, Ky., 21 June 1811, CCOP 17, UNDA; Benedict Joseph Flaget to Louis William DuBourg, New York, 1 March 1832, RG 3 box 19, AUSPSS, AASMSU; Benedict Joseph Flaget to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide, Bardstown, Ky., 5 November 1827, CCOP, UNDA. On the purchase of slaves and the reliance of priests on the services of enslaved persons, see Benedict Joseph Flaget to Louis Regis Deluol, Kentucky, 10 September 1842, Flaget Letters, NAZ, UNDA; Charles Nerinckx to Joseph Rosati, Loretto, Ky., 1823, CCOP, UNDA; and Flaget Diary, 7 February 1814, NAZ, UNDA.

[56]Joseph Rosati to Louis William DuBourg, St. Louis, Mo., 1 May 1832, RG 3 box 19, AUSPSS, AASMSU; and Flaget Diary, 24 October 1814, NAZ, UNDA. In an undated note at the end of Flaget's diary, the bishop refers to "Suzanne, a negress of Mr. Duket, [who] told me, first, that she had been forced to [commit] the crime [of extramarital sexual intercourse]. . . . [S]he told me then [during confession] that . . . she was in her bed and that he committed the crime with her": See the Flaget Diary, Notes, NAZ, UNDA.

[57]Flaget Diary, 14 January 1814, 15 January 1814, 26 January 1814, 21 February 1814, NAZ, UNDA.

child of non-Catholic enslaved parents. Under the circumstances, he refused to baptize the child, but not without demonstrating what he considered to be a tension between a "burning zeal for the faith and for souls."[58]

In addition to seeking direct assistance from the Propaganda Fide, many French missionaries communicated their concerns about the practical and canonical dilemmas of slavery with peers already in the United States or those associated with the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in France.[59] The collegiality among missionary priests in America and parish priests in France translated into a more lucid discussion of missionary experiences in slave societies. The brutality of slavery and the resultant lack of access to slave communities, in particular, was a topic of much reflection among priests during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Michel Portier, a missionary deacon and future bishop of Mobile, recognized "the hardship of slave[s] surrounded by ignorance and uncontrolled libertinage." His recognition of slavery as "a thousand times harder than death," however, did not result in a public rebuke of slaveholders. "If we see all we must be quiet," Portier wrote his former superior in Lyon in 1818. "We must moan in silence."[60] Flaget identified "great difficulties on the part of the slaves" due to the fact that "the poor Negroes are all but neglected" by their masters and, as a result, without regular access to priests.[61] Father Antoine Blanc, a missionary priest and future archbishop of New Orleans, acted as pastor of the mission of Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, during the 1820s. He estimated that his mission included five thousand enslaved persons. "The slaves born here are baptized," he noted, "but unfortunately most often this is the only blessing they receive from religion, and this is due to reasons which it would be difficult to put in a letter."[62] Father Etienne Richard, chaplain of the

[58]Benedict Joseph Flaget to the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, Bardstown, Ky., 16 April 1825, "Writings Referring to the General Congregations," Propaganda Fide Translations, CCOP 12, UNDA.

[59]DuBourg, always seeking monetary support for his missions in Louisiana, contributed to the formation of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Lyon in 1822. In coordination with a wealthy laywoman, Pauline Jaricot, and several other French Sulpicians, the Society started as an association interested in supporting Catholic missionary activities in what were considered non-Catholic countries. French missionaries corresponded regularly with their colleagues still in France, as seen in the Society's publication, *Annales de l'Association de la Propagation de la Foi*. See Edward John Hickey, *The Society for the Propagation of the Faith: Its Foundation, Organization, and Success (1822–1922)* (New York: AMS, 1974); and Baumont, "La renaissance de l'idée missionaire en France," in *Les Réveils Missionaires en France*, 210.

[60]Michel Portier to Cholleton, New Orleans, 15 April 1818, Propagation of the Faith Collection, #2724, L65, Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans (hereafter, AANO), New Orleans.

[61]Benedict Joseph Flaget Diary, 4 October 1814, NAZ, UNDA; and Benedict Joseph Flaget to M. Garnier, Priestland, Ky., 17 June 1811, CCOP, UNDA.

[62]Antoine Blanc to his cousin, Pointe Coupée, La., 17 November 1823, Propagation of the Faith Collection, #2735, L65, AANO; and Antoine Blanc to Lyon Seminary, Pointe Coupée, La., 10 May 1823, Propagation of the Faith Collection, #2733, L65, AANO.

Ursuline convent in New Orleans, blamed masters for leaving slaves "without religion; [the] ignorance [of slaves] and the bad example of their masters are grave obstacles to their salvation."[63] French missionaries were finding that southern slave societies did not provide sufficient avenues for introducing enslaved persons to the sacraments and the catechism. They were finding, as Portier wrote, that "if you decided in your study [while in France] the great matter of slavery, your decision would be wrong."[64]

Though missionaries such as Flaget, Blanc, Portier, and Richard identified the material and physical hardship of slavery, they did not include social activism and abolitionism in their prescription for moral and canonical rectitude. This passive approach to the slave question was due in part to their paternalistic understanding of enslaved persons as innocent children trapped "in Babylon, in the midst of scandals" perpetrated by a religiously indifferent populace, or at least a populace that did not subscribe to a form of Catholicism favored by missionaries.[65] Early missionaries, seeing the near impossibility of correcting the ills of white society, welcomed the opportunity to act like a missionary among enslaved persons, to be a pastor to an impressionable flock. "I receive from these unfortunates," Portier wrote of enslaved persons in New Orleans, "in spite of their bad treatment, always gaiety and singing."[66] Portier, desiring somehow "to be a St. Vincent," started a lay congregation of free and enslaved persons of color. Of the *jeunes gens*, he wrote,

> I have a dozen who are fervent, like angels; they teach the Blacks to pray, they catechize, they instruct. . . . Every night I am surrounded by about sixty. I read the Gospel to them. I explain it; they are attentive. . . . The members of my congregation are my consolation. They wear a red ribbon and a cross, they promise to fight daily like valiant soldiers of Jesus Christ. They assemble each Sunday; I preside usually; I regulate their practice and I have the happiness to see them as faithful as your seminarians.[67]

The slaveholders' lack of interest in the salvation of their slaves generated a high level of disappointment for missionary priests. They attributed this

[63]Etienne Richard to the Propagation at Lyon, New Orleans, 7 August 1825, Propagation of the Faith Collection, #2747, L65, AANO.

[64]Michel Portier to Cholleton, New Orleans, 15 April 1818, Propagation of the Faith Collection, #2724, L65, AANO.

[65]Michel Portier to Cholleton and Mioland, New Orleans, September 1820, Propagation of the Faith Collection, #2726, L65, AANO.

[66]Michel Portier to Cholleton, New Orleans, 15 April 1818, Propagation of the Faith Collection, #2724, L65, AANO.

[67]Michel Portier to Cholleton and Mioland, New Orleans, September 1820, Propagation of the Faith Collection, #2726, L65, AANO.

lack of lay cooperation to the depravity of slave societies like Louisiana and not to the institution of slavery in and of itself. Slavery was not the product of immoral society, but immoral society could corrupt the right practice of enslavement and the people involved in the slave system, both masters and slaves. "Religion," Blanc told his cousin in France, "is here [in Louisiana] as one would naturally suppose it to be in a population much mixed, with people of various mores meeting in the same area, with the chief and even sole purpose of making money."[68] Blanc did not express surprise at either the level of religious indifference in Louisiana or the lack of popular alignment with the moral standards of French missionaries. He linked existing social and economic conditions with the physical and spiritual mistreatment of enslaved persons by slaveholders.

Yet regardless of missionary interests in the treatment of enslaved persons, those bishops present at the Third Provincial Council of 1837 rearticulated the passive role of a missionary church in the political and social structure of the United States. Speaking for the conference of bishops in Baltimore, Bishop John England of Charleston explained why priests should downplay the role of Catholicism in the public domain:

> We are comparatively few amongst the millions of our fellow citizens; the greater portion of our flocks are in the humble, laborious, but useful occupations of life: we do not aspire to power, we do not calculate by what process we should be able, at some future day, to control the councils of the republic, neither do we combine to raise the members of our society to places of trust, of honor, or of profit . . . but, relying on the protection of God, we endeavor to live in peace with our brethren whilst we are occupied in our several appropriate duty.[69]

England's call for Catholics to disengage church interests from state affairs was a response to rising anti-Catholic and nativist sentiment in the United States. The most infamous episode occurred at Charlestown, Massachusetts, where a nativist mob set fire to an Ursuline convent. Such violence was due, at least in part, to a growing market for anti-Catholic literature and a popular understanding of Catholicism as a political threat to American independence.[70] England and the signatories of the conciliar statement recognized the minority status of the Catholic Church in a non-Catholic, if not anti-Catholic, country. Cautious

[68]Antoine Blanc to his cousin, Point Coupée, La., 17 November 1823, Propagation of the Faith Collection, #2735, L65, AANO, New Orleans.

[69]John England, Pastoral Letter of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, 1837.

[70]For studies of anti-Catholicism, see Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Francis Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999); and Francis D. Cogliano, *No King, No Popery: Anti-Catholicism in Revolutionary New England* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1995).

passivity was seen as the best approach to questions not directly related to concerns of the soul. But the question remains: to what extent did first- and second-generation French missionaries really act in alignment with England's position of political and social passivity? As the following sections will demonstrate, French missionaries, having lived longer and more closely with non-Catholic Americans than Irish and English priests, were more willing, first, to act upon what they perceived to be the social ills of slavery and, second, to support a reformed version of the institution of slavery.

III. Missionary Priests and the Evangelization of Slaves and Masters

In his 1839 apostolic letter *In Supremo Apostolatus*, Pope Gregory XVI "judged that it belonged to Our pastoral solicitude to exert Ourselves to turn away the Faithful from the inhuman slave trade in Negroes and all other men." He asked Catholics to live according to the Gospel message of charity, which in turn required that Catholics "should [not only] regard as their brothers their slaves and, above all, their Christian slaves, but that they should be more inclined to set free those who merited it." He then distinguished between European "Christian nations" and other "lonely and distant countries" in their practice of enslavement. In fact, the pope praised European nations for abolishing slavery and indicted Catholics in the Americas for "acting as dangerous for the spiritual welfare of those engaged in the traffic and a shame to the Christian name." To conclude, Pope Gregory extended his criticism of "that inhuman traffic" of slaves, imploring "Christians of every condition that no one in the future dare to vex anyone, despoil him of his possessions, reduce to servitude, or lend aid and favour to those who give themselves up to these practices." His mandates applied to "any Ecclesiastic or lay person."[71]

Bishops attending the Fourth Provincial Council of Baltimore in 1839 read the apostolic letter and immediately identified the controversial implications of the document in their home dioceses. John England, in response to *In Supremo Apostolatus*, assured both Catholic and non-Catholic readers of his South Carolina newspaper that the pope's ideas about slavery referred to the international slave trade and not to the legal system of unfree labor in the United States. He was eager to note that "the pope neither mentions nor

[71]Pope Gregory XVI, *In Supremo Apostolatus*, read during the Fourth Provincial Council of Baltimore, 3 December 1839, www.papalencyclicals.net/Greg16/g16sup.htm. See also John F. Quinn, "'Three Cheers for the Abolitionist Pope!': American Reaction to Gregory XVI's Condemnation of the Slave Trade, 1840–1860, *Catholic Historical Review* 90:1 (January 2004): 67–93.

alludes to [domestic slavery]." He also maintained that the Catholic Church "has always observed this distinction" between domestic slavery and the international type made illegal by the United States in 1808.[72] This distinction, as far as England was concerned, also applied to the church's role in the legalization of slavery by the state. "I have been asked by many a question," England pondered rhetorically, "whether I am friendly to the existence or continuation of slavery?" He answered, "I am not, but I see the impossibility of now abolishing it here. When it can and ought to be abolished, is a question for the legislature and not for me."[73] Here, England expressed the dilemma facing Catholic bishops in the United States. On the one hand, England articulated his "disgust with the conditions of slaves, brought into my diocese under a system which perhaps is the greatest moral evil that can desolate any part of the civilized world."[74] On the other, he believed that "it is impossible that [slavery] should be abolished for a considerable time to come, without the most injurious results, not merely to property but to society."[75]

Bishop Francis Patrick Kenrick of Philadelphia took a more theological approach to the question of slavery in his 1843 tract *Theologia Moralis*, still demonstrating the in-between status of Catholic thought in a slave society. He reasserted Thomas Aquinas's position that "as all men are by the law of nature equal, no one is by nature a master of another."[76] In applying natural law to social circumstances, Kenrick stipulated that natural law protected the institution of slavery when a slave willfully consented to give his or her labor to a master in exchange for proper care and maintenance. In this idealistic scenario, Kenrick insisted that a master owned a slave's labor, not a slave's body and soul. He also stated that "since such is the state of things [in the United States], nothing should be attempted against the laws nor anything be done or said that would" disrupt the order of society.[77]

The episcopal rhetoric of passivity, though integral to the formation of an official Catholic position, did not translate into an inert approach to the problem of slavery. French missionaries, in fact, appear in the documentary evidence as more willing to challenge the canonical, sacramental, and moral

[72]John England, *Works*, ed. Sebastian G. Messmer (Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur H. Clark, 1908), 189.

[73]John England, *U.S. Catholic Miscellany* (Charleston, S.C.), 25 February 1841.

[74]Rice, *American Catholic Opinion in the Slavery Controversy*, 132.

[75]John England, *U.S. Catholic Miscellany* (Charleston, S.C.), 14 March 1840.

[76]Francis Patrick Kenrick, *Theologia Moralis*, in *American Catholics and Slavery*, ed. Zanca, 200.

[77]Ibid. Joseph Brokhage, in his theological biography of Kenrick, stated that "Kenrick intimated that the rights of slaves to their liberty might be limited for the sake of the common good": Brokhage, *Francis Patrick Kenrick's Opinion on Slavery* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 149.

impediments to their collective understanding of a well-functioning slave society after the statement of Pope Gregory and the resultant arguments of England and Kenrick during the early 1840s. It was not until after prominent Catholic leaders started answering the slave question in public that missionary priests at the geographic margins of the United States rejuvenated their plan to implement Catholic practices and beliefs in slave communities. From the beginning of their evangelistic endeavors in the early nineteenth century, French missionaries identified an insufficient effort on the part of both priests and masters to improve the religious welfare of enslaved persons. An amendment to this lapse in religious care, they believed, had the potential to reform society to its ideal order, an order that still included slavery in its ideal form. So, instead of working against all of the ideas of *In Supremo Apostolatus*, missionary priests took the pope's message of Catholic charity seriously. They recognized enslaved persons as the targets of religious persecution at the hands of white masters within a white supremacist society. The solution to this problem, however, was not one of legal freedom, but of religious freedom. Catholic charity, from this perspective, would lead to the reformation of slavery, not the abolition of slavery. This revised approach to the religious treatment of enslaved persons was different from initial responses to the circumstances of slavery in that missionaries started to actively work for change on a larger social level rather than devoting so much attention to the insular concerns of missionary formation in a foreign, inhospitable, antagonistic place like the American South. The willingness of French missionaries to begin to question the southern status quo marked a turning point in the ways in which missionaries understood their position in America. They were beginning to feel at home in the slave states of the South.

Part of living in the slave states of the American South was getting along with white slaveholders. The interest of French priests in establishing slave missions complicated this relationship. John Joseph Chanche, bishop of Natchez, Mississippi, lamented the lack of attention given to the religious welfare of slave communities, a segment of the southern population that was "thus far absolutely abandoned" by the church.[78] One reason for the lack of missionary contact with enslaved persons, according to Father Beaugier of Ville Platte, Louisiana, was the rural isolation of slave missions. This isolation did not prevent Beaugier from believing that "though their skin remains brown, I hope their souls will soon be white."[79] Even when

[78]John Joseph Chanche to Antoine Blanc, Natchez, Miss., 31 January 1842, V-4-m, UNDA; and John Joseph Chanche to Antoine Blanc, Natchez, Miss., 21 February 1846, II-4-j, UNDA.

[79]A. Beaugier to Antoine Blanc, Ville Platte, La., 10 May 1855, VI-1-I, UNDA: "Ils sont jusque tous gens de couleur, mais si leur peau reste brun, leur âmes sera je l'espère bientot blanche."

missionary priests overcame the obstacles of geographic seclusion, there still remained the problem of receiving the approval of Catholic and non-Catholic slaveholders to instruct their slaves in the Catholic catechism and to administer the sacraments. Some slaveholders permitted missionaries to visit their plantations on occasion, but always with the understanding that religious education was not a means of criticizing the institution of slavery.[80] Emily Archinard of Bayou Rapide, Louisiana, thanked Bishop Antoine Blanc for allowing Father Francis Mazzuchelli to teach her seventy slaves twice a month. She did not appreciate the unwillingness of her husband to allow her to teach her slaves after Mazzuchelli moved to another mission. She was confused about how best to uphold "the duties of a mistress to her slaves, on which subject I have received many and varied advice." She continued, "Some tell me I can do nothing but pray for them, others to preach by example, but all unanimously say I will be as responsible before God for them as I should be for my children."[81] Such ad hoc methods and sporadic meetings did not make it any easier for missionary priests to persuade masters of their religious responsibility for the souls of those they enslaved. Father J. E. Blin, a missionary in Charenton, Louisiana, wanted to "give some instructions to the *nègres*," but he could not persuade slaveholders to allow him regular access to their plantations.[82] The unwillingness of masters to cooperate with priests was just one sign of the white laity's general "indifference," "impiety," and "negligence in receiving our instructions," which Blin believed they learned from "Voltairians who have surrounded us."[83]

The administration of the sacraments became a special source of concern for slaveholders interested in maintaining the behavioral prescriptions of slave societies and for French missionaries interested in providing enslaved persons with the sacraments of Catholicism. Adrien Dumartrait, a layperson writing on behalf of the parish council of St. Martin's Church in St. Martinsville, Louisiana, demanded that priests respect the legal distinctions between free and enslaved persons of color and free whites during the sacrament of the Eucharist. White parishioners, by law, had the right to receive communion before free people of color, and free people of color had the right to receive communion before enslaved persons.

[80]Francis Xavier Leray to Antoine Blanc, Jackson, Miss., 2 January 1857, VI-1-I; Auguste Marie Martin to Antoine Blanc, Natchitoches, La., 3 April 1856, VI-1-j, UNDA; Julius J. O'Dougherty to Antoine Blanc, Monroe, La., 4 April 1853, VI-1-e, UNDA; and Julius J. O'Dougherty to Antoine Blanc, Monroe, La., 29 July 1853, VI-1-e, UNDA.

[81]Emily Archinard to Antoine Blanc, Bayou Rapide, La., 14 December 1849, V-5-1, UNDA.

[82]J. E. Blin to Antoine Blanc, Charenton, La., 25 February 1850, V-5-m, UNDA: "je donnes des instructions aux nègres."

[83]Ibid.: "comment donc expliquer leur indifference en leur impiété sinon sur leur negligence à recevoir nos instructions, en par celle qu'ils recoivent des voltairiens qui nous environment."

Moreover, only slaveholders had the authority to decide whether their slaves could receive the sacraments. The responsibility of the priest, according to the *marguilliers*, was "only to preach the teachings of the Evangelist" and to follow "the regulations of the Catholic Church," not to challenge the laws of the state.[84] Seven years later, the pastor of St. Martin's complained to Blanc about a new parish council requirement "to put two cloths on the communion table, in order to establish a separation between people of color and whites."[85] The pastor, Father James Fontbonne, refused to abide by their order and instead recommended that all parishioners approach the altar with equal humility. In areas with large multiracial populations—places like New Orleans and Natchitoches—the rules of racial integration also depended on the cooperation, or lack thereof, of *maguilliers* and parish priests.[86] Priests struggled to balance the prescriptions of church and society. They tried to ensure the theological and ritualistic integrity of Catholic traditions without alienating the most powerful segments of their lay constituency. Despite the efforts of French missionaries, liturgical rituals often created atmospheres of racial contention.

Outside the largely Catholic confines of church parishes, French missionaries conducted masses and administered the sacraments to congregations segregated by race and slave status on plantations. They pressured slaveholders to permit them to administer the sacraments of baptism and marriage to their slaves. Some slaveholders acquiesced to their demands in accordance with the lasting influence of the Code Noir of the eighteenth century which required that all slaves receive a Catholic baptism and marriage. Baptisms and marriages often occurred on a group scale with masters ordering adult slaves to receive the sacraments.[87] The improvised administration of baptismal and marriage rituals among slave communities troubled many priests who worried about canonical regulations. Father Charles Dalloz asked Blanc for advice concerning a situation in which

[84]Desire LeBlanc and Adrien Dumartrait, "Eglise St. Martin," newspaper clipping, 29 June 1843, enclosed with the letter from Adrien Dumartrait to Antoine Blanc, St. Martinville, La., 10 July 1843, V-4-o, UNDA: "il devra seulement preacher la morale de l'Evangile, suivant les réglemens de l'Eglise catholique." See also Adrian Dumartrait to Etienne Rousselon, St. Martinville, La., 10 July 1843, V-4-o, UNDA.

[85]James Fontbonne to Antoine Blanc, St. Martinville, La., 15 July 1850, V-5-n, UNDA: "mon sacristain recu ordre de la fabrique de St. Martin de mettre deux nappes à la table de la communion, afin d'établir une separation des gens de couleur avec les blancs."

[86]See John Gillard, *Colored Catholics in the United States: An Investigation of Catholic Activity in behalf of the Negroes in the United States and a Survey of the Present Conditions of the Colored Missions* (Baltimore, Md.: Josephite Press, 1941); and Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana*.

[87]James Fontbonne to Antoine Blanc, St. Martinville, La., 1849, V-5-k, UNDA; Pitrait to Antoine Blanc, Milliken Bend, La., 18 February 1850, V-5-m, UNDA; and Francis Rene Pont to Antoine Blanc, Vicksburg, Miss., 2 January 1857, VI-1-I.

several enslaved persons received catechetical instruction on a regular basis but also claimed to live in wedlock without being married by a priest. Not only did Louisiana law prevent enslaved persons from marrying each other, but white masters customarily allowed for the separation of married couples, a practice that priests looked upon with dissatisfaction.[88] The practice of selling and thus separating married enslaved persons bothered French missionaries less for reasons of human dignity and more for the difficult implementation of canon law. As late as the 1860s, Father Francis Abbadie wondered which marriage of an enslaved woman he should bless: her first marriage, which was required by her master, or her second marriage, to a person of her choice.[89] The cardinal prefect of the Propaganda Fide also expressed concern, and some confusion, over the canonical administration of marriages between people of different races.[90] Father John Andrew Fierabras, while visiting a large plantation in Port Gibson, Mississippi, waited for the approval of Blanc to re-baptize a group of enslaved persons baptized three years earlier by a Methodist minister.[91] Fontbonne commented on the thrift of baptizing enslaved children and the subsequent inability to register such baptisms in parish records. He also lamented the inability to catechize children after baptism and to counteract the consequent hostility toward the proper administration of Catholic rituals.[92] Father Amadee Beccard expressed similar concerns about insufficient catechesis and the abusiveness of white masters, both of which often resulted in enslaved persons employing Protestant-derived beliefs and practices despite Catholic missionary visits.[93] "Once they become adults, all these *nègres* consider themselves Protestant," Father Augustine Marechaux said of his parishioners in Assumption, Louisiana. They "stop coming to church, since, at base, they are nothing."[94]

IV. Missionary Priests and the Public Defense of Slavery

In 1852, after decades of relatively quiet attempts to reform the institution of slavery, French missionaries found in Antoine Blanc an archbishop who was

[88]Charles Dalloz to Antoine Blanc, Avoyelles, La., 23 May 1845, V-5-c, UNDA.
[89]J. Francis Abbadie to Stephen Rousselon, Grand Coteau, La., 18 March 1861, VI-2-d, UNDA.
[90]Alexandro Barnabo to John Mary Odin, Rome, Italy, 10 September 1861, VI-2-e, UNDA.
[91]John Andrew Fierabras to Antoine Blanc, Port Gibson, Miss., 29 June 1852, VI-1-c, UNDA.
[92]James Fontbonne to Antoine Blanc, St. Martinville, La., 1849, V-5-k, UNDA.
[93]Amadee Beccard to Antoine Blanc, Lafourche, La., 1854, VI-1-g, UNDA.
[94]Father Augustine Marechaux to Stephen Rousselon, Assumption, La., 20 October 1858, VI-1-0, UNDA: "Devenus adultes, tous ces nègres se déclarent Protestans, & cela pour ne pas venire à l'église, car, au fond, ils ne sont rien."

willing to issue a pastoral letter on "Slavery and True Freedom" and thus join the public debate over slavery and abolitionism. It was the first official pronouncement on slavery made by a Catholic cleric in Louisiana. He premised his argument on the point that "true civilization is based on order which is essential in society; it consists in obedience to laws and respect for authority, in the mutual sentiments of deference and benevolence which should unite inferiors and superiors, and other social virtues which ensure peace and tranquility." Individual liberty, in the context of Blanc's understanding of social and religious order, was severely limited. "True liberty," he wrote, "is the 'glorious liberty of the children of God' by which Christ has made us free 'when we were delivered from sin.' This liberty is the only foundation of all liberty." For "does not daily experience teach us that whatever be our position in life, we stand in mutual need of each other, and that both our individual and social relations imperatively demand this mutual dependence!" In addition to his corporate model of independence, Blanc urged his readers and listeners to find perfect freedom in their "Christian souls." With this Christian sense of independence in mind, Blanc ended his letter: "Would to God that all men were to acquire, by the practice of religion, that true independence, and not be miserably lost in the pursuit of an empty phantom bearing the name of liberty. Then, indeed, they would be truly free."[95]

Blanc was writing to white Catholic laypeople, women religious, fellow French missionaries, an American episcopal hierarchy, and southern Protestants. Blanc's statement reflected the attitudes of a missionary bishop that were consistent with the ideas expressed by most priests in the American South at mid-century. His pastoral letter also reflected the sentiments of southern nationalists, sentiments that were consistent with the ideas expressed by Protestant ministers throughout the southern slave states. This similarity, at least by 1852, did not involve an intentional coalition of interests on the part of Catholic and Protestant leaders in the South. The commonalities of southern Protestant and Roman Catholic social ethics hinged on a conservative understanding of the construction of a Christian social order. Despite their common conclusion, Protestant ministers and missionary priests developed their proslavery ideologies in different places and for different reasons. With the sectional conflict of the 1850s and 1860s, evangelical Protestantism and southern conservatism combined to produce an unintentionally common bond based on Christianity and slavery.[96]

[95]Antoine Blanc, "Pastoral Letter on Slavery and True Freedom," New Orleans, 2 February 1852, Pastoral Letters Collection, AANO.

[96]For more on the Protestant defense of slavery and sectionalism, see Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987); C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schism and the Coming*

Historian John McGreevy has shown how Catholic clerics in the United States formed their ideas about freedom and slavery in conjunction with Catholic debates in France and Rome.[97] The experience of exile and anticlericalism after the French Revolution compelled many French priests to embrace an ultramontane approach to religious and political authority, which in turn reified their pre-revolutionary stand for a form of social conservatism that still made room for slavery. Many other French priests embraced the Revolution's liberal ideas of humanitarianism and individual liberty, which in turn compelled some Catholic leaders to endorse the separation of church and state and the abolition of slavery. The thoughts and actions of missionary priests in the United States, and particularly in Louisiana, demonstrated the broad middle ground between the ideological confluence of French, Roman, and American ideas about society and slavery. French missionaries, in accordance with the majority of Catholic clerics in the entire United States, believed that the abolition of slavery would be detrimental to the ordered structure of American society. They believed this despite the 1839 pronouncement of Pope Gregory against the trade of enslaved persons and despite the growing number of ecclesiastical intellectuals in France promoting worldwide abolition. French missionaries then applied the idea of freedom to their mission in order to save individual souls while avoiding the application of legal freedom to enslaved persons. The maintenance of their distinction between soul freedom and legal freedom, however, involved an understanding of the current slave society as outside the ideal parameters of a Christian social order, which meant that they still wished to reform the imperfections of society through the Catholic means of personal salvation in the church.

Blanc's public defense of slavery marked a reorientation in the missionary approach to social reform and political activism in the United States while still maintaining a distinctively Catholic mode of theological argumentation and ritualistic rigor. By the end of the 1850s, as the possibility for civil war grew nearer, the Catholic hierarchy of New Orleans became more strident in its defense of southern sectionalism and more willing to equate its "new" nationalism with its "old" Catholicism. The most obvious example of this ideological merger was Bishop Auguste Martin's 1861 pastoral letter on slavery and the Civil War, as cited at the beginning of this article. Father

of the American Civil War (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985); and Eugene Genovese, "Religion and the Collapse of the American Union," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 74–88.

[97]McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 43–90.

Napoleon Joseph Perché, coadjutor to Archbishop Jean Marie Odin and editor of the archdiocesan newspaper *Le Propagateur Catholique*, reinforced Martin's proslavery statement with a plethora of articles on the threat of Northern "fanaticism" and the justification of enslavement. Northerners "have offended our sentiments, they have stolen from us our property and trampled our most holy rights," one article read. "The only excuse that they propose for this offense is that they are not satisfied with our domestic institutions: that slavery is evil and that it must be abolished."[98]

Perché responded to such "threats" by supporting Bishop Augustin Marcellin Verot's proslavery pamphlet, *A Tract for the Times*.[99] Verot, the bishop of Savannah, Georgia, identified slavery as "the origin of the present disturbances" between the North and the South. Such a reason for war, however, was unjustified, since nothing could be "more unscriptural than Abolitionism; and if this country be the country of the Bible, as some have asserted, Abolitionism must then be of exotic growth." Yet like those French missionaries who preceded him, Verot insisted that southern masters not treat their slaves with cruelty. He went further: "I must say for conscience sake—who knows whether the Almighty does not design to use the present disturbances for the destruction of frequent occasions of immorality, which the subservient and degraded position offers to the lewd."[100] Such a carefully articulated argument for slavery in its ideal form but against the religious and physical abuses associated with the actual practice of

[98]"Lettre de l'honorable C. M. Conrad," *Supplement du Propagateur Catholique* (New Orleans), 37:948, 5 January 1861: "Ils ont outragé nos sentiments, ils nous ont volé notre propriété et ont foulé aux pieds nos droits les plus sacrés. La seule excuse qu'ils presentment pour ces outrages, c'est qu'ils ne sont pas satisfaits de nos institutions domestiques; que l'esclavage est un mal et qu'il devrait etre aboli." Archbishop Odin approved of Perché's public support for Martin's pastoral letter. Napoleon Joseph Perché to Jean Marie Odin, New Orleans, 21 September 1861, VI-2-e, UNDA; and Auguste Marie Martin to Stephen Rousselon, Natchitoches, La., 20 September 1861, VI-2-e, UNDA. Perché immigrated to the United States in 1836 with Bishop Benedict Joseph Flaget of Kentucky.

[99]"Esclavage et Abolitionisme, Sermon de Mgr. Verot, sur les Droits et les Devoirs des Naitres," Advertisement, *Propagateur Catholique*, 39:999, 28 December 1861, and 19:8, 4 January 1862; "De la Source Legitimè de l'Esclavage," *Propagateur Catholique*, 18:10, 18 January 1862. Verot gave Perché permission to reprint the tract. See Augustin Verot to John Mary Odin, Savannah, Georgia, 9 November 1861 VI-2-e, UNDA. Perché would later be arrested by General Butler for his belligerent position against the Union occupation. See Unknown to James Alphonsus McMaster, New Orleans, 21 January 1863, VI-2-g, UNDA. Verot visited the missionaries of Mississippi, where he gave retreats and preached about slavery and the Civil War. See William Henry Elder to John Mary Odin, Natchez, Miss., 4 November 1861, VI-2-e, UNDA; and William Henry Elder to John Mary Odin, Natchez, Miss., 20 December 1861, VI-2-e, UNDA.

[100]Augustin Marcellin Verot, *A Tract for the Times. Slavery and Abolitionism, Being the Substance of a Sermon Preached in the Church of St. Augustine, Florida, on the 4th Day of January 1861, Day of Public Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer* (Baltimore, Md.: John Murphy and Co., 1861). See also Michael Gannon, *Rebel Bishop: Augustin Verot, Florida's Civil War Prelate* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1967).

enslavement would later provide Verot and other French missionaries with the will, however grossly inadequate, to engage in the evangelization of free blacks after the Civil War.

The public statements of Blanc, Martin, Verot, and Perché did not pass without hesitancy on the part of some French missionaries who feared for the reputation of the southern missions in both the United States and Europe. They still cared about maintaining strong ties with their *confrères* in the northern states, as well as in France and Italy. It was for this reason that Father Augustine Gaudet commended Perché for his devotion to the Confederacy but questioned whether or not it would be more advisable for a layperson to make such political statements. Moreover, he admitted that "Catholics of the North do not lack the talents to demonstrate the justice of their cause and the equity of their proceedings any more than the Catholics of the South."[101] Father Victor Jamey was more emphatic than Gaudet in his insistence that Odin prevent Perché from "speaking about the abominable question of slavery" in the "anti-canonical" *Propagateur Catholique*, or else jeopardize the goodwill of their European colleagues. What was more, Perché's "unintelligible nonsense" contradicted what "we conservatives" recognize as the "only spiritual right," namely, "the attainment of one's spiritual end by knowing, loving, and serving God." Jamey went on to criticize Verot's sermon on slavery, ending with an admission that Catholicism "indirectly" condemned slavery and an imploration that priests remain silent on the matter of slavery.[102]

Missionaries like Father Stephen Rousselon responded to the perturbation of missionaries like Gaudet and Jamey by insisting that "it is a pity to hear [antislavery Catholics] speak on the question of slavery" since they are "blind men who wish to speak of colors." Rousselon went further in urging Odin to "open their eyes," and especially the eyes of Bishop Felix Antoine Dupanloup, while traveling throughout France in 1862.[103] Of course, Odin did not settle the dispute with one trip to France. Instead, as the historian Stephen Ochs has demonstrated in *A Black Patriot and a White Priest*, Odin left the Archdiocese of New Orleans in a state of racial and religious turmoil

[101]Augustine Gauget, O.M.I, to John Mary Odin, Brownsville, Texas, 26 June 1861, VI-2-d, UNDA: "Les talents ne manqueront pas aux catholiques du Nord non plus qu'à ceux du Sud, pour faire valoir la justice de leur cause et l'équité de leurs procédés."

[102]Victor Jamey to John Mary Odin, Convent, La., 3 February 1862, VI-2-f, UNDA: "priez donc Mr. Perché ne plus parler de cette exécrable question de l'esclavage avec son titre, anti-canonique, de journal officiel du Diocese."

[103]Stephen Rousselon to John Mary Odin, New Orleans, 23 August 1862, VI-2-f, UNDA: "C'est une pitié de les entendre parler sur la question de l'esclavage, ce sont des aveugles qui veulent parler de couleurs, même Mgr. Dupanloup, ouvrez leurs donc les yeux." See also Stephen Rousselon to John Mary Odin, New Orleans, 15 October 1862, VI-2-f, UNDA. For more on Dupanloup, see McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 50, 53.

with formerly enslaved persons and those persons of color who were already free exhibiting a loosely organized front against the racist policies of some white Catholics.[104] In recognition of the social disorder of post-emancipation Louisiana, Odin and other priests expressed more concern about the internal problems of the archdiocese and less concern about the external oversight of the Propaganda Fide; the urgency of circumstances simply did not always allow for missionaries to consult the Propaganda Fide on issues requiring immediate action. For example, Father E. J. Foltier agreed with Odin's recommendation that he free his slaves in Vermillionville, Louisiana, though he worried about how "the civil law does not allow for the dispensation of freedom."[105] Sister A. Shannon of St. Michael, Louisiana, informed Odin of her fear of being "exposed to the dire effects of negro insurrection," while Rousselon reported that "we are ready for a St. Domingue" on account of *toute esclaves* forming armed regiments on the outskirts of New Orleans.[106]

News of the Emancipation Proclamation only added to the consternation of priests intent on defending their adopted homes. Rousselon believed that the emancipation of enslaved persons marked "the total destruction of the South and the signal for a cataclysm."[107] Mother Columba Carroll of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth exhibited similar concerns in Kentucky, where "there has been another great excitement among the Negroes" and where "six more of ours [slaves] left the first of this week."[108] Martin John Spalding—the bishop of Louisville and protégé of Flaget—spoke with more vitriol on the subject of emancipation:

> Ab[raham] Lincoln coolly issues his Emancipation Proclamation, letting loose from three to four million of half-civilized Africans to murder their Masters and Mistresses! And all of this under the pretense of philanthropy! Puritan hypocrisy never exhibited itself in a more horrible or detestable attitude. Puritanism, with its preachers and Common Schools, has at length ruined the Country, as we all foresaw and predicted it would. May God grant that at length the eyes of America may be opened to its wickedness, and may see that their only salvation is to be

[104]Stephen Ochs's study of racial and religious relations between white and black Catholics in New Orleans during the Civil War is an excellent source of insight into the practical responses of Catholic missionaries to the post-emancipation South: Ochs, *A Black Patriot and a White Priest*.

[105]E. J. Foltier to John Mary Odin, Vermillionville, La., 3 December 1861, VI-2-e, UNDA: "Les lois civiles ne permettens pas de donner une liberté."

[106]Madame A. Shannon, R.S.C., to John Mary Odin, St. Michael's, La., 15 March 1862, VI-2-f, UNDA; and Stephen Rousselon to John Mary Odin, New Orleans, 23 August 1862, VI-2-f, UNDA: "On nous prépare un St. Domingue." Rousselon made the same observation a month later. See Stephen Rousselon to John Mary Odin, New Orleans, 18 September 1862, VI-2-f, UNDA.

[107]Stephen Rousselon to John Mary Odin, New Orleans, 15 October 1862, VI-2-f, UNDA: "Mais c'est aussi la destruction totale du Sud. C'est le signal d'un cataclysme."

[108]Mother Columba Carroll to Mary Ann, Nazareth, Ky., 27 August 1864, NAZ, UNDA.

found in Conservative Catholicity! This may be the result of this unhallowed war, thus, in God's Providence, bringing good out of evil.[109]

Most missionary priests responded with fear and anger at the Emancipation Proclamation because of their strong interest in the maintenance of a southern social order and the hope for a Catholic order. During the early nineteenth century, they recognized the need to evangelize enslaved persons and thus forced themselves to engage the ills of a society that was previously not their own. The perpetuation of a conservative Catholic ideology, however, ensured that missionaries would not challenge the fundamental belief that slavery could be good for society if implemented properly. By the 1860s, the alignment of Roman Catholic conservatism and southern Protestant conservatism, combined with the missionary obligation to actively pursue the salvation of others, allowed foreign priests to consider themselves in line with southern proslavery arguments. Interestingly, French missionaries came to feel at home in parts of the American South less because of cultural pressure from a solid Protestant region and more because of what they considered to be their Catholic obligation to reform souls and society. In other words, the more some French missionaries acted according to their understanding of Catholicism, the more they identified with southern culture and defended the institution of slavery.

V. Conclusion

Spalding was a native of Bardstown and a Roman Catholic priest at home in the American South, a position that would have been untenable, if not unthinkable, were it not for the assimilative decisions and institutional growth that French missionaries made over the course of practicing the priesthood in Maryland, Kentucky, and Louisiana throughout the antebellum period. French missionaries, dead or alive, made it possible for many priests living in the Confederate States of America to identify with distinctively southern ideologies despite the perpetuation of transnational pressure coming from the canonical mandates of the Propaganda Fide in Rome and the missionary discourse of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in France. Priests defended slavery on Catholic grounds. They found ways to incorporate their Catholicism into local, regional, and national contexts throughout the United States and particularly in the American South. These changes in the practice

[109]Martin John Spalding was born in Bardstown, studied in a Kentucky seminary, and later entered the Propaganda Fide in Rome. He wrote a hagiographic biography of Flaget and served as his coadjutor for a time. Later, during the First Vatican Council, Spalding strongly supported the doctrine of papal infallibility. See Journal of Martin John Spalding, 1 January 1863, BCA box 6, CCOP 10, UNDA.

of the priesthood were hardly willful; French missionaries did everything in their power to institute a seamless transfer of canon law to the foreign missions of North America. But these changes were nonetheless obvious when viewed over the course of the early American republic and through the collective thoughts and actions of French missionaries. By actively engaging in public debates over slavery and by personally interacting with enslaved persons as both master and pastor, French missionaries made an important collective step toward the formation of a culturally and politically engaged church in the United States, a church that was much more conservative in outlook than its republican Catholic predecessor but equally connected to a place they called home.