

The first Presbyterian church for Negroes was organized in Philadelphia. It grew out of the interest of a white Presbyterian minister, Dr. Archibald Alexander, and the labors of an ex-slave, John Gloucester. Gloucester had been a slave of Gideon Blackburn, the Presbyterian apostle to the Cherokees. Blackburn had owned several slaves, but as his views on slavery became more liberal, he emancipated several of them and sent them to Liberia. Gloucester came to the attention of Alexander, who had founded the Presbyterian Evangelical Society of Philadelphia in 1807. This organization, which was involved in missionary work in the city, had as one of its projects, a campaign to aid the Negro population of the city, which numbered between 7 and 10,000. At the request of Alexander, Blackburn released Gloucester for such missionary work in Philadelphia. There is no information on Gloucester's training for the ministry, but it can be assumed that he gained most of it through his association with Blackburn.

Gloucester managed to collect a group of followers, and in 1807, organized a church called the First African Presbyterian Church with a membership of 22. Gloucester, being an ambitious worker, steadily built his church, that when it was formally received by the Presbytery in 1811, it reported 123 members. Although Gloucester succeeded in winning to his church some 300 members during his 15-year career, the First African Church failed to grow as rapidly as did other Negro churches in Philadelphia. In addition to Gloucester's church, there were three other Negro churches established in Philadelphia during this time.

In addition to his pastoral duties, Gloucester was active in educational work for his people. Samuel Mills, the industrious organizer of benevolent and missionary enterprises in the early 19th century, became interested in Gloucester's school. Gloucester replied by writing to him that he was conducting a school at Augustan Hall to provide a liberal education for Negro youth. Five young men had enrolled and were supported by members of the First African Church, but funds were limited, and Gloucester was forced to turn to white friends for assistance.

Gloucester had three sons who all entered the Presbyterian ministry. Jeremiah Gloucester was trained in the African School of the Synod of New York and New Jersey, which was under the care of the Rev. John Ford of Parsippany, New Jersey, and succeeded his father at the First African Church in 1824. His brother, James Gloucester, was the organizer of the Siloam Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, New York, and served as its pastor from 1847 to 1851. The third brother, Stephen Gloucester, who was bought by his father from slavery, took charge of a school in Norris Alley after the death of his brother Jeremiah.

A second and third African church grew out of John Gloucester's original church and several other Negro churches appeared throughout Pennsylvania, as an outgrowth of Gloucester's example.

Negro Presbyterianism in New York originated from the educational work that had been carried on there for Negroes.

As early as 1794, a Sunday school for Negroes was begun by Katy Ferguson, who was a Negro member of the Scotch Presbyterian Church. There seemed to have been some adverse feeling to Katy Ferguson in the Scotch church, for the Pastor, Dr. John W. Mason, found it necessary to escort her to the communion table¹ because of the prejudice of some of the white members.

In the summer of 1816, Samuel Mills, the pioneer in Protestant foreign missions, suggested the establishment of an African school, and the project was adopted by the Presbyterian Synod of New York and New Jersey. A four-year course was projected for the school, and it was opened under the care of the Rev. John Ford of Parsippany, New Jersey. In 1817, Jeremiah Gloucester and William Pennington, students for the ministry, were enrolled in the school. During the winter of 1816-1817, Mills devoted his efforts to raising money for the school. Although he succeeded in raising some \$800 in churches in Baltimore and Washington, it was not without difficulty. "It was a very unpropitious time to attempt collection," he reported, "I had sometimes to thrust my subscription paper over the heads of half a dozen miserable beggars; and still I was generally successful. I received aid from slaveholders." Mills admitted that some of the givers were attracted to the school because of its goal of training teachers to serve the Negroes who might join the colonization

¹ Clcott, T. W., "Recollections of Katy Ferguson," SW, 52:463, Savage, T.F., The Presbyterian Church in New York City, p.58.

movement to Africa. Mills himself was an advocate of colonization and believed that Negroes would ultimately be grouped by themselves, either in Africa or in the United States. Further dialogue on this aspect follows herein.

U The school was also aided by New Jersey Negroes, a group in New Brunswick, under the leadership of Peter Upshur, an ex-slave, having raised \$48.70 for the school. The African school of Parsippany enrolled seven pupils by 1819, but it never flourished, and in 1825 its work was transferred to the African Education Society. One objection of the students in the school was that they were required to perform certain menial tasks around the school.

Attached to this paper is a copy of a pamphlet by the Synod of New York and New Jersey on the subject of the African School presented in Newark, New Jersey on October 29, 1816. Also attached are handwritten copies of letters and minutes by participants of the Parsippany African School in which the name of Peter Upshur appears.

U Particularly interesting is a copy of the handwritten minutes of the regular meeting of the standing committee of the African Association of New Brunswick held on February 3, 1821. The secretary set down a copy of a letter read from one Gustavus V. Caesar, one of the first black ministers and an alumnus of Rev. Ford's school in Parsippany. Aside from his remarkable writing ability and substantial command of the English language, which seems unusual based upon his training which at best must still have been crude and rudimentary at the time, it is his strong convictions on the coexistence of the Negroes and Whites that makes this writing so

noteworthy. In this same vein, a pamphlet (~~not attached~~) on a sermon delivered by the Rev. Samuel Miller, D.D., Professor in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, before the Synod of New Jersey for the benefit of the African School on October 22, 1823, also reveals Miller's liberal viewpoint towards the slavery issue. In it, Miller outlines his interpretation of the slavery question and his proposed course of action to rectify and alleviate the problem.

His first point stresses that there should be no animosity toward the Southern States. He does not blame them, but rather shows an understanding and hypothesizes just what the Northerners would have done if faced with the same situations as the Southerners were exposed to. He even goes so far as to state, "For it was perhaps chiefly by the enterprise of Eastern navigators that the slaves were transported from Africa and landed on their territory." He contends that the evil referred to as slavery is a national evil and there ought to be a national feeling and a national effort respecting it.

In expressing his second viewpoint, he is extremely emotional and given to morbid sentimentality pertaining to white guilt. He also is of the belief that if the slaves were suddenly liberated without being prepared for it, the result would be an accumulated curse under the name and guise of a blessing. Therefore, he is opposed to complete emancipation, but rather favors a gradual

increase of intellectual and moral culture, and at the same time with a gradual extension of privilege to prepare them for the comfortable enjoyment of freedom. This is clearly a rational approach to a passionate issue at the time.

The third and final remark, shows Rev. Miller further descending into a sentimental approach and reflects a completely religious bent in that he contends that the "yoke" can only be "broken by the power of blessed religion." This, of course, is understandable in view of his theological background.

He then commences to outline his two-part plan as a solution. First, he is sure that everything that is done to elevate the intellectual, moral, and religious character of Africans and their descendants is so much toward the abolition of slavery. He feels that one of the most serious obstacles to the immediate emancipation of slaves in this or any other country is that they are not prepared for the enjoyment of freedom.

His second proposal is baffling in view of his rather lucid earlier arguments. He advocated an American Society for the colonization of all free blacks and people of color in Africa, which at best seems ludicrous. However, his reasoning for this position seems to reflect the feelings of the times and leads me to conclude that such a belief most likely was the position of the church and the crux of the ultimate failure of the African schools and churches.

follows: "I shall here, take for granted, that the Africans and their descendants, in our country, even if they were all at this hour liberated, could never be either respectable or happy in the midst of a white population. They can never, while public sentiment remains what it is, associate with the whites on terms of equality. They may be industrious, and regular; they may be enterprising, successful in business, and exhibit talents, knowledge and wealth; but after all, they can never associate with the whites on terms comfortable to either. They will be treated and they will feel as inferiors. They cannot live under the influence of that sense of character, of those excitements to aim at a high standing in society, which operate upon a corresponding number of white people. And as they cannot fail to have a degraded standing, so this will confer upon them, in a greater or less degree, a degraded character. Place any number of human beings, of whatever complexion, in a situation in which they can never aspire to an equality with those around them, and you take away from them one of the main excitements to industry, to honorable enterprise, and to emulation of excellence. They will lose their own respect; and when that is gone, all is gone."

I personally find this to be not only an eloquent but remarkable insight into the black problem, a problem as Rev. Miller stated in 1823, has come to pass and in our time. That is perhaps why I find his colonization approach so baffling; it just does not seem a logical conclusion to so logical an interpretation. However, the prejudice of the time and environment had to have some effect

on even the most liberal of thinkers.

Subsequent to this period, numerous Negro Presbyterian churches were established throughout the northeast, in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and even as far south as Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. However, these reflected the tendency of white Christians to encourage their Negro brethren to form separate organizations. In spite of early restrictions on separate Negro religious activities, the free Negroes of Baltimore had thirteen Negro churches, of which ten were Methodist. On the eve of the Civil War there were 6,400 Negro Protestants in Baltimore, which was about one-fourth of the total free Negro population there. In 1853, the Rev. Robert L. Galbreath, a white Presbyterian minister, encouraged the formation of a separate Negro Presbyterian church, which was called the Madison Street Church. Shortly before the Civil War, this church was served by the Rev. Hiram Revels, who played an important part in the political life of the Reconstruction era.

The problems of the Negro in a predominantly white denomination are revealed in the experiences of the first Negro Presbyterian ministers. The ministry was the first professional field open to Negroes and attracted those who were able and ambitious; but the main difficulty was to obtain the education required to meet the standards of the church. Another perennial problem for the Negro ministry was the problem of economic support. The pattern of dependence was upon white support which was perhaps inevitable due to the economic disparity between the white and Negro communities; however, it could lead to an unwholesome paternalism on the part of the whites and flattery and begging on the part of the Negro ministers.

By far, of course, the greatest problem facing the Negro ministers was prejudice. He not only faced it in his daily life and social standing in the community, but also these Negro Presbyterian ministers endeavored to combat prejudice in the church itself.

William Pennington, a negro minister whose training was obtained from Rev. Ford's African School in Parsippany, felt that the worst hypocrisy was practiced by those who carried prejudice into the church. He asked, "Who has authorized the division of the church of God into white and black divisions?" He also reported that he had sometimes stood in the aisles in churches rather than be compelled to use the segregated Negro pew.

Even liberal white ministers were not free from the subtle influences of racial prejudice. Dr. Samuel Cox, one of the founders of Union Seminary and New York University, whose house had been stoned in 1835 because of his association with the antislavery movement, incurred the wrath of Frederick Douglass, the Negro leader. Cox, in a letter to the New York Evangelist, had attacked a speech Douglass had made in England, which Cox felt, had been too critical of the United States before a foreign audience. Douglass' opinion was that Cox had attacked him because it had hurt his pride to have a Negro speak to an audience on equal terms with a white man. In his speech in England, Douglass had attacked the hypocrisy of the American temperance movement towards Negroes, and referred specifically to an attack made on Negro temperance societies in Philadelphia when they had gathered to celebrate West Indian emancipation. Douglass felt that when Cox attacked him for telling the truth he had only

revealed his own insincerity: "This, sir, tells the whole story of your abolitionism, and stamps your pretensions to abolition as brazen hypocrisy or self-deception." ² It is impossible, of course, to evaluate these feelings, but it does show how one Negro leader felt about a liberal white Presbyterian minister.

By the time of the Civil War, Presbyterian churches had been established in many of the free Negro communities in the north. Why then were these first Negro churches, under the auspices of the Presbyterian church - the first such sect to do so, never really successful and why too did the Negro school sponsored by the church fail? Perhaps because many of the Negro Presbyterian churches in the north were organized in this period as a result of the feeling on the part of white Presbyterians that separate churches would be best for Negroes and whites. This view is substantiated by Rev. Miller's sermon to the Synod in which he puts forth humanitarian programs and decries the institution of slavery as a "national evil", but by the same token feels that the ultimate kindness that the whites can do for their black brethren is to set up colonies for them in Africa, or in essence to separate them from the white society.

On the supposition that this may have been a universal feeling among the church members at the time and in view of its ultimate failure, this may have been the reason for the absence of this fact in the history and writings of the Parsippany church.

² See Journal of the Proceedings and Writings of Frederick Douglass, 1845-1846, published originally to the Rev. S. H. Cox, Oct. 30, 1846.

Some may consider this a hypocritical approach or a feeling of hidden shame or guilt, but one must always bear in mind the times and the environment. Perhaps if we today were faced with a similar situation and internal strife, we may just feel that the best course of action could well be along the lines of that course of action proposed by Rev. Miller. Whatever mistakes or miscalculations that were fostered by the people during this time, whether they were for or against slavery, must be viewed with the understanding that this was a unique problem and any attempts made were first attempts and any action thereafter could be adjusted and refined as measured against the success or failure of these actions.

Of course in the final analysis, the following cannot be diminished or disregarded in this evaluation and that is the fact that the Negro ministry reflected the Negroes desire for more independence in conducting his own institutions. Since the independent Negro denominations offered more opportunities for the talented and ambitious minister, these Negro churches grew more rapidly than did the Negro Presbyterian churches.

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