

THE FEMALE APOSTLES OF THE SOUTH
PROTESTANT WOMEN'S PUBLIC ACTIVISM IN THE
ANTEBELLUM GULF SOUTH

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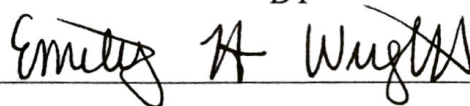
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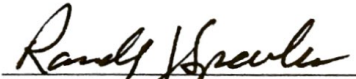
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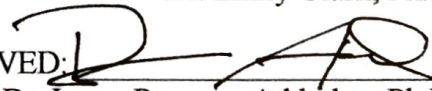
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INTRODUCTION

In 1854 Thomas Savage, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in the Gulf Coast town of Pass Christian, Mississippi, submitted two items to the national Episcopal Board of Missions: a sketch of their new Gothic-style church drawn by his wife Elizabeth (Figure 1) and a report which credited a group of churchwomen with its construction and furnishing. When a guest preacher from Natchez, William Giles, visited Pass Christian in 1848, he called together a meeting of citizens interested in erecting a church building, but only, as Savage explained, “at the suggestion of a few pious ladies.”¹ Over the next few years, while the male members of the congregation elected a vestry and collected a meager sum of subscriptions, the women of the church formed themselves into a church aid sewing society. The sewing society raised over \$2,000 for church construction—almost the entire cost of the building—as well as \$580 for a new organ, all by selling their sewing projects and collecting donations. As Savage explained it, “To woman, first and foremost in every good work, we are indebted under God, for the origin, progress and completion of this enterprise,” and “nor will they stop till a parsonage shall have been erected and the destitute places of the earth shall feel the benefit of their efforts.”² These women prompted the initial discussion to build a church, organized their own church aid society, fundraised, made furnishing decisions and purchases, and continued to support

¹ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 19 (New York, 1854), 5.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

the physical expansion of their denomination in Mississippi and in missions abroad. Several churchwomen, including Elizabeth Savage, also taught at the church's Sunday school and female academy, preparing the next generation of women for public service in the church.³ Women brought the institutions of modern, mainstream Protestantism to Pass Christian.

This picture of late antebellum public female activism challenges the prevailing historical narrative of southern Protestant development. Women were the majority in congregations throughout nineteenth-century America and yet southern scholarship continues to locate antebellum women's religious roles within the domestic sphere and treat public religion as equivalent to the male-controlled spaces of ordained pulpits and elected church offices.⁴ Using Mary Kelley's more inclusive definition of the *public* as the "social space between the family and nation state," this project rejects a male-public and female-private binary, one that privileges male authority.⁵ It maps a broader cultural geography of Protestant "lived religion" beyond the family circle and the church pew and

³ "Episcopal Female Seminary, Pass Christian, Mississippi," *Church Herald* (Vicksburg, MS), December 23, 1853; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1858), 69-70.

⁴ Donald Mathews has argued that in nineteenth-century America, "churches were organizations of women and for the South, in the particular, "whether in Alabama or South Carolina or Virginia, about 64 percent of each congregation was female," in "Women's History/Everyone's History," *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, vol. 1, ed. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 42, 31. For more on women as the church majority, see Suzanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: Norton, 1984), 213. Richard Rankin argues that this is true even for the Protestant Episcopal Church in the South in *Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen: The Religion of the Episcopal Elite in North Carolina, 1800-1860* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1993), xiii. For black women as the majority in most black and biracial antebellum churches, see Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 162.

⁵ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 3.

highlights where white women and free and enslaved women of color found purpose, identity, and power through religious duty.⁶

This project looks closely at the often-ignored Gulf South of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana from the late 1820s to the eve of the Civil War—the period in which mainstream Protestant denominations including Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal churches established themselves permanently in the region.⁷ In this new map of the Protestant landscape of the Gulf South, women’s public religious practice and leadership appears in the female academy and the Sunday school class; the revival and the plantation mission to the enslaved; the choir practice and the temperance rally; and the meetings of female benevolent, church aid, and missionary societies. The female sewing society of Trinity Episcopal Church, Pass Christian was not exceptional; throughout the Gulf South women served as modern Protestant apostles and activists. Like the early apostles of the New Testament, they responded to calls to evangelize and expand denominational presence through their schools, churches, and societies.⁸ Ultimately, the public religious activism of white women and women of color

⁶ David Hall introduced the term “lived religion” in 1997 to describe religious practice as something not separate from, but intricately connected to secular everyday experiences and social structures. It replaces the older phrase “popular religion” which Hall argues brings up negative connotations like folklore and superstition and implies an antagonistic relationship with elite or official religious culture. See David D. Hall, introduction to *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), vii-xiii.

⁷ The author uses the term “Gulf South” to refer specifically to Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. This project focuses on the four largest Protestant denominations in the South at the time—Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians—and does not address in detail dissenter sects like the Primitive Baptists, Cumberland Presbyterians, and Disciples of Christ.

⁸ In its broadest definition, “apostle” refers to an “ardent supporter” of a cause or a person “sent on a mission” and in its narrowest, to the twelve original disciples and early followers of Jesus (namely, Saint Paul the Apostle) who first spread the Gospel. See *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “apostle,” accessed December 7, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apostle>.

transformed the region from a frontier missionary field into the home of established, mainstream Protestant denominations.

Women and Southern Religion – Historiography and New Directions

The idea of men and women’s “separate spheres” has shaped scholarship on religious practice in nineteenth-century America since the 1960s. Barbara Welter’s work on prescriptive literature in New England identified “The Cult of True Womanhood,” which idealized female “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity,” and placed a woman’s religious role firmly within her “proper sphere,” at home as passive moral influence over her husband and religious teacher to her children.⁹ Other scholars began to make similar conclusions about women’s religious lives in the antebellum South, confined to the domestic circle and underpinning a general patriarchal suppression of women.¹⁰ In the 1970s and 1980s, the doctrine of separate spheres continued to dominate but some scholars began to argue that women’s domestic religious lives helped create a separate female consciousness (the roots of the women’s rights movement). This allowed women to justify influential extra-domestic religious roles through the rhetoric of “public motherhood” and woman’s moral duty to make the world more like home.¹¹ Southern

⁹ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18. (Summer 1966): 152-153.

¹⁰ Anne Firor Scott argues that “for most southern women the domestic circle *was* the world” and “the image of the submissive woman was reinforced by evangelical theology,” in *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 42, 7. See also Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Women's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 162.

¹¹ These arguments began as before with scholarship on women in New England, paying particular attention to women’s benevolent societies and reform movements: Susan Dye Lee, "Evangelical Domesticity: The Woman's Temperance Crusade of 1873-1874" in *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 293-309; Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), xxv, 149-159; Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle*

historians split over the power of women's religious domestic sphere, whether it ever seriously challenged the power of the patriarchy within a slave society or even existed at all.¹² It was not until the 1990s that a few scholars began to question the explanatory power of the language of separate spheres in religious history and argue that it should be treated as a rhetorical device constructed both by and for nineteenth-century women and not as a given historical reality.¹³ Even today, however, separate spheres rhetoric

Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 98-104; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in America* (Knopf: New York, 1985), 109, 130, 156.

¹² For scholars who argue that rural isolation and a patriarchal slave society kept women from creating a separate female consciousness or exercising moral or religious influence over men in the South, see Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 6; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 44; Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 8; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 173-174. In contrast, see Suzanne Lebsock's study of antebellum Petersburg, Virginia where she argues that "the Cult of True Womanhood was sufficiently elastic" and women's "claim to superior virtue and piety could be used to justify the creation of new spheres of activity outside the home," *Free Women of Petersburg*, 233. See also Cynthia Kierner who argues that even though the South lacked a separate women's religious culture, some were able to find influential roles at home and in public by claiming motherhood and submission to divine will as sacred duties, in "Women's Piety within Patriarchy: The Religious Life of Martha Hancock Wheat of Bedford County," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 100 (January 1992): 79-81. In 1998, Kierner argued that "the ideals of domesticity and the proselytizing impulse of Protestant evangelicalism" were the "key loophole" that allowed women the exercise public roles. See Kierner, *Beyond the Plantation Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 6. Randy Sparks argues that contradictory views of women's religious roles outside of the home were at play by the 1830s, and the idea of separate spheres was both confining and empowering in *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1778-1876* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 58.

¹³ See Linda Kerber who argues that historians' use of "separate spheres" caused them to underestimate women's activity in "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History" in *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 9-39. Other works which question the field's reliance on the language of separate spheres include, Angela Boswell, "The Meaning of Participation: White Protestant Women in Antebellum Houston Churches," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 99 (1995), 28-29; Beth Barton Schweiger, "Max Weber on Mount Airy, Or, Revivals and Social Theory in the Early South," in *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, ed. Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 48; Catherine Brekus, "Introduction: Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History," in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A.

continues to shape research on antebellum southern Protestantism.¹⁴

This rhetoric remains influential largely due to the long-standing power of the declension thesis in southern religious history, first made popular by Donald Mathews. According to this narrative, in the early, more radical years of the Second Great Awakening, evangelical women held religious power in the public sphere by exhorting, advising itinerant preachers, and evangelizing to both men and women in their communities. As ministers settled down and built churches and evangelical sects became mainstream denominations, however, they adopted patriarchal church structures and women's spiritual power was "domesticated," moved into the private sphere and over her children instead of over her community.¹⁵

Cynthia Lyerly in *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (1998), describes the specific repercussions for women's religious roles by tracing the changing meaning of the term "Mothers in Israel," a label used by evangelical ministers to describe ideal Christian women in the antebellum South. She argues that while early Mothers in Israel were "assertive, commanding, strong, and at times fearless" evangelizers whose spiritual "children" were in fact adult men and women she had brought to the church, by

Brekus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 16; Randy Sparks, "The Good Sisters: White Protestant Women and Institution Building in Antebellum Mississippi," in *Mississippi Women: Their Histories, Their Lives*, vol. 2, ed. Elizabeth Anne Payne, Martha H. Swain, and Marjorie Julian Spruill (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 40, 52.

¹⁴ See Scott Stephan who argues that women's "devotional authority remained firmly rooted in the household . . . a site of both unique spiritual nourishment and intense spiritual struggle" in *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 24. See also Christopher A. Graham, "Evangelicals and 'Domestic Felicity' in the Non-Elite South," *Journal of Southern Religion* 15 (2013): <http://jsr.fsu.edu/issues/vol15/graham.html>.

¹⁵ As Donald Mathews explains, by 1830, "The home supplanted the church as the essential Christian community" and "It was almost as if men willingly conceded the moral superiority of women in order to prevent active female participation in worldly affairs," *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977), 112-113, xvi.

1810 this motherhood was no longer metaphorical. Methodist women moved out of the public sphere and into the home, concentrating on converting their children and being modest and self-sacrificing examples for their husbands.¹⁶ While scholars have debated when this “decline” began, most agree that by 1830 the cult of domesticity was clearly in place in the Protestant South.¹⁷

Although a few scholars have questioned how complete this loss of public religious roles really was for southern women and offered scattered examples of continued public speaking for women at camp meetings, for example, no one has presented a comprehensive picture of the geography of religious practice for late antebellum women beyond the domestic sphere.¹⁸ Not only have most scholars failed to

¹⁶ Cynthia Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 96-98, 180-181.

¹⁷ For the declension model and the “domestication” of Protestant women in the antebellum South, see: Gregory A. Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), xxviii, 194; John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 109-110; Catherine Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America: 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 66; Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 16. Stephan adopted the declension thesis, while qualifying it further, arguing, “women’s comfort level with proselytizing decreased the farther they moved away from their own homes,” 159. For evangelical declension within the Episcopal Church in the South, see Rankin, *Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen*, xiii. For Mississippi in particular, see Sparks, *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks*, who argues that “the period up to the 1830s was one of flux and change in which the boundaries for women were less rigid than they would later become,” 59. Christine Leigh Heyrman argues that evangelicalism was never very popular when socially radical and only took hold when they appealed to “white male heads of household” by the 1830s, in *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 200. Other scholars have claimed that southern Protestantism never declined because it was never particularly liberating for women in the first place. Even in the early antebellum South, both churches and homes reinforced the patriarchal order of a slave society for white women. See Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 5; Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 8; McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 181. McCurry argues that although white women did gain recognition as “morally sovereign individuals,” they did not exert religious influence over their families or communities, 181.

¹⁸ Based on a few examples, Randy Sparks (2010), Julia Nguyen (2003), and Cynthia Lyerly (1998) argue that camp meetings remained a space for women to speak publically, but qualify their claims saying it was now more difficult for them to do so. For example, even though Lyerly claims camp meetings “remained one of the areas where . . . white mothers in Israel still had influence over seekers and mourners,” she still argues that their roles as evangelists were more “diffuse and hidden” than before, and

look adequately beyond the family circle but also, as Janet Moore Lindman argues, they have not looked “beyond the meetinghouse,” beyond attendance at Sunday worship, which she argues is essential “to fully understand the spiritual experience of white women in early America.”¹⁹ Lindman offers one solution, looking at women’s interior spiritual lives expressed in journals and letters.²⁰ This project offers another solution: focusing on the public physical spaces where women continued to speak, lead, teach, counsel, fundraise, and reform within their spiritual communities, well beyond 1830.²¹

that they no longer received credit for conversions that happened. See, Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 181; Sparks, “The Good Sisters,” 42; Nguyen, “Active Faith: The Participation of Louisiana Women in Antebellum Religious Services,” *Searching for Their Places: Women in the South Across Four Centuries*, ed. Thomas H. Appleton and Angela Boswell (Columbia, MO: Missouri University Press, 2003), 118-120. Gregory Wills (1997), Christopher Owen (1998), and Charity Carney (2011) do not explore exactly what this rejection of patriarchal authority only “in matters of faith” looked like for women beyond simply saying that wives and daughters joined churches without their father or husband’s permission. It is unclear whether this also included public speaking, advising, or church leadership positions, for instance. Quotation from Charity R. Carney, *Ministers and Masters: Methodism, Manhood, and Honor in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 140; Gregory Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59; Christopher Owen, *Sacred Flame of Love: Methodism and Society in Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), xix. See also Kierner’s exceptional example of public evangelizer, Martha Hancock Wheat, in Virginia in “Women’s Piety within Patriarchy.” Angela Boswell limits her conclusions about Protestant women’s public roles to the city of Houston, Texas, in “The Meaning of Participation, 28.

¹⁹ Janet Moore Lindman, “Beyond the Meetinghouse: Women and Protestant Spirituality in Early America,” in *The Religious History of American Women*, 143-144.

²⁰ Other works that highlight the literary space for religious identity formation and self-consciousness in southern women’s private writings include: Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 256-261; Lebsack, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 213; Kierner, *Beyond the Plantation Household*, 143. For antebellum Louisiana, see Julia Huston Nguyen, “Active Faith,” 121. Others point out women’s role in writing and reading religious press articles, religious practice that includes both public and private spaces: Sparks, *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks*, 58; James L. Leloudis II, “Subversion of the Feminine Ideal: The *Southern Lady’s Companion* and White Male Morality in the Antebellum South, 1847-1854,” *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, vol. 2, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller, Louise L. Queen, and Hilah F. Thomas (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 60-75.

²¹ Linda Kerber has argued that recently, “historians are paying considerable attention to the physical spaces to which women were assigned, those in which they lived and those they chose for themselves,” in “Separate Spheres,” 31. See also Sparks, “The Good Sisters,” 40. This dissertation is an extension of that trend in the context of religious practice.

This is not to say that the rise of mainstream church denominations and stronger ministerial authority failed to bring increased restrictions on women's public roles. Certainly by the 1820s and 1830s Protestant communities throughout the South were constructing church buildings and denying women the right to "preach" in a very spatial way by barring them from what Catherine Brekus has called "the sacred space of the pulpit."²² While men, white and black, served as licensed preachers in the South, no southern woman of any race was ever licensed in this official role before the Civil War.²³ A key part of the standard declension narrative of southern evangelicalism is that by building churches, ministers created more structured, patriarchal spaces that no longer needed female hosting nor encouraged female leadership during the services. The declension and domestication of women's religious roles, however, were never all encompassing. As Cynthia Kierner has argued, "although southern men may have been increasingly vigilant of women's public activities [by 1830], their patriarchal rhetoric did not obliterate the reality of women's public lives;" the boundaries between public and private space "solidified, but they remained nonetheless permeable . . . overlapping and even interdependent."²⁴ Women continued to turn their private parlors and dining rooms into public religious spaces for prayer meetings and worship services and adapted them for more modern church institutions like Sunday school classes and foreign mission and

²² Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 130.

²³ While scholars including Cynthia Lyerly have argued that some men described certain kinds of female exhorting with the term "preaching," there is no record of any woman in the antebellum South being given a license to preach. See Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 95; Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 167.

²⁴ Kierner, *Beyond the Plantation Household*, 217-218. See also Brekus, "Introduction," in *The Religious History of American Women*, 16: "Despite the ideology of feminine domesticity, the reality is that women have never been entirely confined to the home."

benevolent society meetings. As at Trinity Church, Pass Christian, even the construction and furnishing of new church buildings—spaces that excluded women as hostesses and public speakers—depended specifically on the public fundraising efforts of women.

In 2016 Beth Barton Schweiger argued that the new history of American slavery—which recognizes slavery and southern antebellum society as modern, global, and capitalist—requires acknowledging that southern antebellum churches were modern, global, and capitalist as well.²⁵ Scholars need to revisit how male church leaders raised and spent money, how they built modern institutions like local and international missions, schools, and reform societies through money earned on the backs of enslaved laborers. But scholarship needs to extend that investigation further: we also need to recognize where and how female church members were active contributors to and beneficiaries of this system. In the Gulf South, women and women's organizations were some of the most successful fundraisers for church projects. This also means including the Episcopal Church, which had some of the wealthiest and most active female patrons in the country, in the conversation which previously has been dominated by scholarship on evangelical denominations. Unlike on the East Coast, the Episcopal Church had no history of colonial establishment in the Gulf South; its antebellum story in this region closely tracks that of the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, as all were trying to establish themselves at the same time and all relied on women's public religious activism to do so. The creation of modern Protestant institutions including church buildings, schools, benevolent societies, and foreign missions depended fundamentally on both public female advocacy

²⁵ Beth Barton Schweiger, "New Histories of Slavery and Religion in the Old South," *Journal of Southern Religion* 18 (2016): jsreligion.org/vol18/schweiger.

and enslaved female labor.

As with scholarship on the white Protestant experience, previous work on African American Protestantism in the antebellum South has focused largely on the experiences of men and also followed a declension theory: while early evangelical churches preached spiritual equality and allowed free and enslaved black men to serve in leadership roles as ministers and deacons, sometimes even in independent black churches, Nat Turner's rebellion and anxieties over abolitionism pushed evangelicals by the 1830s to abandon their earlier egalitarian principles and crack down on black leadership and gatherings away from white supervision.²⁶ Of the scholarship that has addressed the religious experiences of black Protestant women in the antebellum South, most also follows a declension narrative.²⁷ In a parallel argument to her white female "Mothers in Israel"

²⁶ For the declension narrative of black Protestantism see: Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*; John Boles, ed., *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988); Nathaniel Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 16; Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, ch. 4, 7, 8; Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*; Timothy Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia 1750-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 161; Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 254; Randolph Ferguson Scully, *Religion and the Making of Nat Turner's Virginia: Baptist Community and Conflict, 1740-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 12, 237; Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 43-45. For Episcopal churches in Alabama, see J. Barry Vaughn, *Bishops, Bourbons, and Big Mules: A History of the Episcopal Church in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 23-27. For scholarship that finds continued evangelical spiritual equality even with the rejection of social equality after 1830 but still focuses on male experiences, see: Wills, *Democratic Religion*; Owen, *Sacred Flame of Love*, xix; Charles Irons, *The Origins of Pro-slavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Carney, *Ministers and Masters*, 140. Scholarship on "hush harbors" and enslaved religious practice outside of the church also tends to focus on men, see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Religion" in the American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Ras Michael Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For the Gulf South see: Anthony Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1, 21, 39-41.

²⁷ See Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 58, 157, 176-180. See also Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, xii, 210-211. Frey and Wood discuss free and enslaved black women as visionaries

transition, Cynthia Lyerly compares early southern evangelicalism when black women could “evangelize, testify, reprove, pray, shout, and exhort” to post-1810 evangelicalism when white men restricted black women from speaking in public.²⁸ For the late antebellum period most scholars have focused either on black women’s roles as spiritual healers or conjurers or the ways in which women used religion to make a claim for virtuous Christian womanhood and reject the black female stereotype of “jezebel.”²⁹ Still, as with white women, the focus has been on the space of the plantation and the role of pious mother or “mammy.”³⁰

As for the Gulf South, Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood argue that scholars have left out “the part played by black migrants in shaping the sacred landscape of the West,” especially by bringing black Protestant traditions with them through the internal slave trade: “despite the social dislocation and the religious disarray caused by forced migration, black migrants stamped their own religious identity on the landscape of the

and prophetesses, as well as key players in the development of biracial revival culture in the antebellum South, but their coverage ends in 1830 and also follows the declension narrative.

²⁸ Lyerly, 58, 157, 176-180.

²⁹ For scholarship on Protestant women of color as conjurers and spiritual healers, see: Sharla M. Fett in *Working Cures: Healing, Health and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Theophus Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; Yvonne Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Jeffery E. Anderson, *Conjure in African American Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2005). For enslaved women claiming identities as virtuous Christian women, see: Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I A Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985) 56-61; Brenda E. Stevenson, “‘Marsa Never Sot Aunt Rebecca down’: Enslaved Women, Religion, and Social Power in the Antebellum South,” *The Journal of African American History* 90, no. 4 (Autumn, 2005): 345-367. For the early antebellum South, see: Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 67.

³⁰ White, *Ar’n’t I A Woman*, 56-61; Stevenson, “Marsa Never Sot Aunt Rebecca down,” 353-355.

developing West.”³¹ Still, their work divides the public religious roles of black men from the domestic and maternal religious roles of black women.³² Likewise, free women of color, especially in Louisiana, play key roles in scholarship on Catholic public religious practice, but are largely missing from Protestant stories.³³ This dissertation argues that the religious experiences of Protestant women of color in the Gulf South not only confirmed but also challenged stereotypes of domestic Christian womanhood and white perceptions of ideal slave behavior. Looking at biracial and segregated spaces, mixed gender and female-only spaces, on and off plantations, this project adds religious context to Stephanie Camp’s argument that “bondpeople created a ‘rival geography’— alternative ways of knowing and using plantation and southern space that conflicted with planters’ ideals and demands,” even as slaveholders continued to exert control over these spaces through “geographies of containment.”³⁴ It explores the religious spaces which,

³¹ Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 161, 162.

³² *Ibid.*, 95, 109, 164.

³³ 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); Emily Clark, “Felicité Girodeau: Racial and Religious Identity in Antebellum Natchez,” in *Mississippi Women: Their Histories. Their Lives*, ed. Elizabeth Payne, Marjorie Spruill, and Martha Swain (University of Georgia Press, 2003), 4-20; Emily Clark and Virginia Meacham Gould, “The Feminine Face of Afro-Catholicism in New Orleans, 1727-1852,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (April 2002): 409-448. Some examples of Protestant women of color in Louisiana exercising religious roles on and off the plantation can be found in Nguyen, *Active Faith*. Episcopal churches are almost always left out of the conversation. A few references to free women of color attending Episcopal services in Louisiana can be found in Michael Goldston, “The Gospel of the Rich as ‘the Property of the Poor’: the Slaveholding Elite of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana and their mission to the slaves, 1805-1870,” (PhD diss., Tulane University, 2010), 76.

³⁴ Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 7, 16. As Camp explains, “‘rival geography’ was coined by Edward Said and has been used by geographers to describe their resistance to colonial occupation. I have adapted the term for the slave South, where the challenge for enslaved people was not one of repossession of land in the face of dispossession but of mobility in the face of constraint,” in *Closer to Freedom*, 7. See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 7, 58.

even after Nat Turner's rebellion, allowed Protestant women of color to speak, teach, and lead as well as those which permitted white women but remained racially exclusive.

Like antebellum northern women, Protestant white women and women of color in the Gulf South repeatedly justified their public religious activism by drawing on a combination of socially acceptable ideals including public motherhood, Christian benevolence, and the evangelizing duty of missionary Protestants. At the same time, however, the women of this study did not claim to be abolitionists or feminists like their northern counterparts, nor did they actively challenge the patriarchal structures of a slave society. Roles that were empowering to individual women continued to support a culture of "respectability" and female domesticity and a social order based on existing gender, class, and racial hierarchies.³⁵ This was especially true for white women who claimed to be acting as Christian mothers when they served as missionaries and Sunday school teachers for enslaved men and women. While Thavolia Glymph has argued that for enslaved women of color the plantation home was a politicized workplace, a *public* site of white female power and violence, this study adds necessary religious context to the roles white women claimed were benevolent.³⁶ Spaces like slave missions, plantation chapels, and slaveholder households were not just family or domestic spaces; they offered powerful and paradoxical identities for white women as benefactors, teachers,

³⁵ Rosemary Skinner Keller notes that often "habits and minds and rules of propriety have formed women's own consciousness and led them to war with themselves," in "Introduction," *Women in New Worlds*, vol.1, 16.

³⁶ Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 29-35.

and oppressors.³⁷

Nevertheless, by working within social hierarchies and justifying their actions with the language of women's religious duty, both black and white Protestant women in the Gulf South were able to claim public identities unavailable to them otherwise. Religious duty remained the most, and in some cases, the only acceptable way for Gulf South women to lead, speak, vote, organize, and control funds with other women in spaces outside of the domestic sphere.

Focusing on the Gulf South

In order to explore in detail the physical spaces of women's religious practice, the geographic scope of this project is limited to the Gulf South—a region consistently ignored by scholarship on religion in the antebellum South or lumped together in conclusions about the entire South generalized from East Coast sources. Only a few of the scholars who have covered religious practice in the region have actually discussed women's roles, and they tended to focus on one state or denomination and follow the declension narrative of women being forced into the domestic sphere by 1830.³⁸ Other

³⁷ While early scholars like Ann Firor Scott and Catherine Clinton claimed white and black women were allied through mutual oppression by white men and that plantation mistresses were benevolent Christian evangelizers, most scholars now agree with Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Thavolia Glymph: Fox-Genovese, *Within the Planation Household*, 30, 35; Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 29-35. For earlier scholarship see, Scott, *The Southern Lady*; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 161. For other works that highlight pro-slavery female missionaries to slaves and show how they confirmed a patriarchal system, even while describing themselves as maternal and their slaves as their children, see: Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 116; Louis B. Gimelli, "Louisa Maxwell Cocke: An Evangelical Plantation Mistress in the Antebellum South," *Journal of the Early Republic* 9, no. 1 (Spring, 1989): 53-71; Nguyen, "Active Faith," 110-111; Vaughn, *Bishops, Bourbons, and Big Mules*, 23-25. For scholarship that focuses on male missionaries to slaves, see: Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 126-131; Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 99-102.

³⁸ The following scholarship on religion in the Gulf South fails to discuss women in any meaningful way: Walter Posey, *Frontier Mission: A History of Religion West of the Southern Appalachians to 1861* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1966); Posey, *The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest, 1778-1838* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1952; Posey, *Religious strife on the Southern*

studies, specifically of Louisiana and New Orleans, have focused on the Catholic story of thriving female religious practice, some laywomen but mostly nuns living in convents—consecrated female communities and spaces for religious activism unavailable to their Protestant counterparts.³⁹ While Catholicism certainly remained the dominant denomination in lower Louisiana during the nineteenth century, there were also thriving Protestant congregations here and in the northern part of the state. The women who took on public roles in these Protestant congregations and interacted (at times, clashed) with Catholic women through schools and benevolence organizations, have been left out of the

Frontier (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965); Glenn Lee Green, *House Upon a Rock: About Southern Baptists in Louisiana* (Alexandria, LA: Louisiana Baptist Convention, 1973); William A. Poe, "Religion and Education in North Louisiana, 1800-1865," *North Louisiana Volume I: To 1865, Essays on the Region and Its History*, ed. B.H. Hilley (Ruston, LA: McGinty Trust Fund Publications, 1984); Paul M Pruitt, Jr., A "Nineteenth-Century Southern Parson: The Reverend James F. Smith of Alabama," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 57, no. 4 (December 1988): 427-454; Malcom J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). David Bailey only mentions women during what he calls the "pioneer generation" arguing that the reason ministers were not paid well was because in the early years of the nineteenth century, "religion was primarily the business of women," 52. He leaves women out of his analysis of the rest of the nineteenth century, in Bailey, *Shadow on the Church Shadow on the Church: Southwestern Evangelical Religion and the Issue of Slavery, 1783-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1985). These works include women but focus on a specific state and/or denomination: Sparks, *Jordan's Stormy Banks*; Labbé, "Helpers in the Gospel;" Clement, "Children and Charity;" John Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*; Vaughn, *Bishops, Bourbon, and Big Mules*; Nguyen, "Active Faith." Randy Sparks gives several examples where women in late antebellum Mississippi continued to exercise public religious roles, but concludes that they turned to homosocial settings and women "forged a separate religious culture," in "The Good Sisters," 52-53.

³⁹ For previous scholarship on Catholic women and religious authority in this region, see: Nguyen, "Active Faith," 101-121; Clark, "Felicité Girodeau," 4-20; Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*;" Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); *Voices from an Early American Convent: Marie Madeliene Hachard and the New Orleans Ursulines, 1727-1760*, ed. Emily Clark (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2007); Priscilla Ferguson Clement, "Children and Charity: Orphanages in New Orleans, 1817-1914," and Dolores Egger Labbé, "Helpers in the Gospel: Women and Religion in Louisiana, 1800-1830," both in *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History, Vol. XIX Religion in Louisiana*, ed. Charles Nolan (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2004), 213-226; 251-266. For less extensive coverage of this region within the larger context of Catholic women in America see: Karen Kennelly, ed., *American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration* (New York: Macmillan, 1989); Barbara Misner, *Highly Respectable and Accomplished Ladies: Catholic Women Religious in America, 1790-1850* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988); Mary Ewans, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America* (Salem, NH: Ayer, 1984).

region's narrative. This project addresses this oversight and connects the experiences of Protestant women in Catholic-majority areas to a larger story of Protestant development across the region.

Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana also shared religious, cultural, and economic ties during the antebellum period. All three were on the receiving end of the massive migration of settlers and enslaved laborers when the cotton boom accelerated in the 1820s and farmers moved south and west to find cheap, available, and profitable farmland. Many of these new settlers came from the North, including women who were already involved in benevolence organizations, female academies, and religious communities—a factor that has not been explored adequately in any religious history of the region.⁴⁰ Protestant denominations from the East Coast that sent missionaries to these newly settled regions also established conference boundaries that overlapped Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana state lines, creating shared religious experiences in the region, sometimes with the same itinerant ministers and annual meetings.

This project also takes into account similar geographic divisions that shaped different spaces for religious practice like divides between cities—Mobile, New Orleans, and Natchez, in particular—and more rural settlements. Similar divides include between the piney hills and river plantations in Mississippi, the hill country and plantation Black Belt in Alabama, and north Louisiana hill country and the Florida parishes and plantations along the Mississippi River in southern Louisiana. Rather than declaring

⁴⁰ Nguyen notes that some immigrants to Louisiana, most notably a visiting northern Quaker named Rachel Barker, were female preachers in New Orleans, but does not take the analysis any further, in “Active Faith,” 113. Christie Anne Farnham discusses evangelical northern women in the Gulf South but only within the context of female educational institutions, in *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 97-107.

urban or rural spaces as more liberating to Protestant women than the other, however, this project shows how geography, immigration, and settlement patterns led to different kinds of opportunities for public religious activism throughout the region.⁴¹ At the same time, by narrowing the focus to the Gulf South, the project takes into account how other features of the religious geography—whether a space was formal or informal, mixed gender or homosocial, biracial or segregated, for children or for adults—shaped what different women could do in public.

The Gulf South needs its own separate study because unlike most of the East Coast and even with cities like New Orleans, Mobile, and Natchez, this region was still very much a frontier region even after 1830.⁴² This had distinct repercussions for where women claimed space for religious practice. While the closing of mission stations in the 1830s due to forced Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Cherokee removal meant women lost this pastoral space to be teachers and missionaries, the rapid migration of white settlers into these land cessions created new opportunities for white women as evangelizers and

⁴¹ Cynthia Kierner, Scott Stephan, and Julia Nguyen see rural, isolated areas as advantageous for women, allowing them to assert religious power (particularly in their homes) in areas where male clergy did not often visit, Nguyen specifically for northern and western Louisiana. Kierner stresses the religious leadership opportunities for women specifically in rural areas in North Carolina and Virginia. She highlights rural Sunday Schools and Bible and tract societies as organizations which “gave evangelical women a respectable and effective means of proselytizing in rural areas,” in *Beyond the Plantation Household*, 186, 194. See Nguyen, “Active Faith,” 117-118; Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 24. For scholarship that shows urban spaces offering more opportunities for female religious benevolence and scholarship, see: Lebssock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 196-199; Clement, “Children and Charity,” Labbé, “Helpers in the Gospel,” Boswell, “The Meaning of Participation,” 28, 44; Gail S. Murray, “Charity Within the Bounds of Race and Class: Female Benevolence in the Old South,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 96, no. 1 (January 1995): 54-70; Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*; 239-240; Timothy Lockley, “The Rise and Fall of Female Benevolence in Antebellum Savannah,” in *Women and Religion in the Atlantic Age - 1550–1900*, ed. Mary Laven and Emily Clark (London: Ashgate, 2013), 197-209.

⁴² For more on religion in the Gulf South following a later timeline than the East Coast, see: Samuel S. Hill, ed., *Religion in the Southern States: A Historical Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983).

church builders.⁴³ Protestants across the Gulf South still relied on itinerant ministers and part-time clergy to cover large parishes of dispersed congregants, which often meant depending on female lay leadership for most of the year and having spaces serve multiple purposes (both sacred and secular) such as private homes, schools, and courthouses. As Julie Roy Jeffery notes, wives of frontier clergy often found opportunities for “shared ministry” with their husbands which were unavailable to them in more settled regions, including filling pastoral counseling roles in their communities while their husbands were traveling to serve the needs of other congregations.⁴⁴ All four of the major Protestant denominations relied on women’s activism to direct religious practice in more recently settled spaces as well as to financially support and advise male church leaders as these areas transitioned to more permanent church structures and mainstream institutions.

Sources and Methods

The conclusions of this study are based on extensive archival research and a close reading of church records and histories, personal papers, benevolent association records, newspapers, narratives of the formerly enslaved, and prescriptive and religious tracts. Church records are one of the only existing sources where the religious experiences of Protestant women of color show up outside of the plantation. Even though, as Suzanne Lebsack notes, church records written by men are filled with silences, especially when it comes to women’s financial roles, some records, particularly from larger associational

⁴³ Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 176.

⁴⁴ Julie Roy Jeffrey, "Ministry Through Marriage: Methodist Clergy Wives on the Trans-Mississippi Frontier," *Women in New Worlds*, vol. 1, 145-148.

meetings within the denomination, still mention this important role for women.⁴⁵ Church records also indicate where services and meetings happened and which spaces allowed public female speech or leadership. Newspapers include prescriptive commentary on women's spiritual power in and outside the home; references to women's charities and schools; and obituaries of prominent laywomen. In the records of benevolent and missionary societies, women appear as donors, organizers, and even elected officials. Personal papers of preachers indicate that they continued to rely on women to be advisors and financial supporters well beyond 1830. Protestant women's diaries and correspondences, including from women of color when possible, are also an invaluable source as one of the only ways to get to the actual voices of these women. Memoirs of the formerly enslaved recorded right after the Civil War as well as in the 1930s present challenges well known to any scholar of American slavery, but as one of the few sources from the voices of enslaved people (albeit mostly mediated through white interviewers), they must be consulted and put in conversation with other types of sources.⁴⁶ Some women's accounts are particularly introspective, providing insight into the thoughts, desires, and prayers that justified a public religious identity. Others describe public religious activism itself, giving more detail into where this was possible. Their writings reveal women whose personal faith led them to play an essential part in the growth of Protestant churches in the region.

⁴⁵ Suzanne Lebsock argues that these financial roles for women were often the cause of male minister's "chronic embarrassment," who "coped in public by inflating the importance of their own efforts and by minimizing those of the women," in *Free Women of Petersburg*, 225-226. Even though women's fundraising efforts were essential, they were often not publically acknowledged or recorded in the church records kept by men.

⁴⁶ For more on using these narratives, see John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (1975): 473-492.

Each chapter of the dissertation maps a specific type of public religious space and explores what roles women claimed there and how that shaped the development of Protestant denominations in the region. Chapter one looks at over one hundred Protestant female academies founded in the antebellum Gulf South where white female students—as well as female school founders, principals, and teachers—claimed identities outside of the domestic sphere as fundraisers, mentors, exhorters, and school benevolent society members. Chapter two explores Sunday schools and the white and black women who served as their teachers and founders, including white Sunday schools held in churches, courthouses, and orphanages and Sunday schools for free and enslaved children and adults on and off plantations. Chapter three looks at the roles women claimed within the space of church meetings as exhorters, musicians, and hosts, not only at regular Sunday worship but also in revivals, prayer groups, and even congregational business meetings. This includes biracial churches as well as several separate black churches in the urban Gulf South. Chapter four addresses the many spaces where Protestant women acted as “stewards of the church,” fundraising and laboring (as was often the case for enslaved women) to build and furnish church buildings, pay clergy salaries and church debts, and prepare worship spaces for special occasions. Lastly, chapter five takes on the space of benevolent society meetings, whose causes included temperance, foreign and domestic missions, Bible and tract distribution, and orphanages—some male-run organizations with local female contacts and laborers, and some local and run entirely by women. All of these chapters explore how race, class, and location shaped what religious identities were available to different women.

Ultimately this study shows that female public religious activism was not just a

northern phenomenon in antebellum America. Protestant women of the late antebellum Gulf South were instrumental, not only in a public motherhood role of shaping the next generation of church members at academies and Sunday schools, but also as the frontline of pro-slavery propaganda in missions to the enslaved and as essential fundraisers and laborers in the construction of the institutions of modern Protestant denominations. This project expands our understanding of church development, sacred space, and the lived religious experiences of free and enslaved women, and will help move the field beyond a monolithic picture of the antebellum South and the women who lived there.

CHAPTER ONE

Preparing for Public Life in the Church: Religious Leadership and Benevolent Activism at Female Academies

At the 1849 meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, E.D. King presented the board of trustees' report on Judson Female Institute in Marion, the most prominent and successful Baptist female academy in the state. Hoping to encourage more Baptists to patronize this institution by sending both their donations and daughters, King highlighted the broad-reaching religious benefits of a Judson education for white women:

Every year, large graduating classes of well educated young ladies would go forth from the Institute, ornaments of their respective family circles, and blessings to society. These would be scattered among our churches, and would exert a highly salutary influence; encouraging the pastors in their labors, and promoting every interest of humanity, benevolence and piety.¹

The trustees were adamant that Judson prepared students to be model, influential Christian women, but what did this preparation look like? What exactly did these schools prepare Christian women to do once they left school? Previous scholarship on Protestant female academies in the antebellum North and even more so in the South has largely confirmed a narrative of teaching evangelical “republican motherhood.”² When religious culture is mentioned at all, the focus is on church attendance and a curriculum that

¹ E.D. King, “Report of the Trustees of Judson Female Institute,” *Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Alabama Baptist State Convention*, (Marion, 1849), Appendix B.

emphasized private spirituality and morality, which prepared young women for domestic life as Christian role models for their children.³ Northern schools might have prepared some women for a religious calling in teaching careers or benevolent societies, but southern schools avoided encouraging any kind of female public life that might upset the delicate gender and racial hierarchy of the plantation system.⁴ This existing scholarship on antebellum southern academies overemphasizes a rigid separation of spheres with men acting in public and women acting in private and thus contributes to a distorted, narrow view of lived religious practice and of female community outside the family circle.

The writings of students, teachers, and visitors tell a much different story: throughout the Gulf South these schools served as important *public* spaces for white female religious expression and leadership. White students and female teachers converted together and professed their faith at revivals; attended and spoke at Sunday school classes

² Linda Kerber coined the term “republic motherhood: in “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2, Special Issue: An American Enlightenment (Summer 1976), 187-205. See also Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 152-153.

³ For examples of this focus in scholarship on the Gulf South, see Frances Dew Hamilton and Elizabeth Crabtree Wells, *Daughters of the Dream: Judson College, 1838-1988* (Marion, AL: Judson College, 1989), 50; Sparks, *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks*, 55-57; Sarah Hyde, *Schooling in the Antebellum South: The Rise of Public and Private Education in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 156; Trey Berry, “A History of Women’s Higher Education in Mississippi, 1819-1882,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 53 (November 1991): 309. For a limited discussion of student religious conversions at southern schools, see Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 174; Anya Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 41-43, 172; Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 160. Episcopal female schools are left out of the conversation almost entirely. Sylvia D. Hoffert gives one example of an northern Episcopal female teacher in North Carolina encouraging students to join the church in “Earnest Efforts to Be Friends: Teacher-Student Relationships in the Nineteenth-Century South,” *Journal of Southern History* 86, no. 4 (November 2018): 824-828.

⁴ For this contrast between southern and northern schools, see Ann Firor Scott, “The Ever Widening Circle: The Diffusion of Feminist Values from the Troy Female Seminary, 1822-1872,” *History of Education Quarterly* 19 (Spring 1979), 3-9; Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 4, 48; Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 108-109; Virginia Lieson Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women’s Conversions, 1800 to the Present* (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1991), 36-37; Leonard Sweet, “The Female Seminary Movement and Woman’s Mission in Antebellum America,” *Church History* 54, no. 1 (March 1985): 41-55.

and temperance meetings; joined the school missionary society and the church choir; and founded their own prayer groups, turning to other women for religious advice and fellowship. Not only did female community exist in southern schools but also religious practice played a crucial role in its formation and in how these women engaged with their larger communities. Judson, along with over a hundred other Protestant female academies established in antebellum Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, did not simply prepare women to be good Christian wives and mothers, exemplars in their church attendance, morality, and private devotions. These schools provided an important space where white female students at a formative stage in their lives—as well as female school founders, principals, and teachers—could develop public religious identities outside the domestic sphere as exhorters, benevolent society members, fundraisers, and mentors. At the same time, as historians of southern religion have not fully acknowledged, the women connected to these schools played an essential part in ensuring the spread of Protestant churches' influence and physical presence across the Gulf South.⁵

The Rise of Protestant Female Academies⁶

Unlike the East Coast, where Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Episcopal churches were already settled and thriving by the 1830s, the Gulf South remained an active missionary field for Protestant expansion even up the Civil War. These denominations worked to establish churches among settlers in frontier regions and

⁵ Donald Mathews sees competition to build academies as key to the evangelical transition from sects to denominations, but focuses on the role of male clergy in their formation in *Religion in the Old South*, 92-93.

⁶ This chapter looks at female academies and seminaries (terms used interchangeably to describe higher grade schools that went beyond a primary education) as well as some female colleges and primary schools that identified with a mainstream Protestant denomination, including Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Episcopal churches. Some were directly sponsored by state and local denominational governing bodies and others received indirect patronage because they were directed by church members.

recently claimed Native American lands in the northern and central parts of these states, as well as challenge Catholic dominance along the Gulf Coast. In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, Protestants focused on sending itinerant ministers from the East to do the work of church formation in new territories, but by the late 1840s and 1850s, leading clergy in all four mainstream denominations began to prioritize higher education as the way to grow the church. At annual meetings across Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, representatives encouraged ministers to establish their own schools based on church principles and urged their governing bodies to build more schools under denominational control—both of which could serve as “nurseries” of piety, drawing younger generations and in turn, their families, into their churches.⁷ This was especially true in rural areas or places where no congregations of their denomination existed yet. At the Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1857, the committee on education reported that, “an extensive portion of our Conference Territory can be reached only through the instrumentality of our institutions [schools].”⁸ Schools would accomplish what individual missionaries could not.

White female higher education, in particular, became the priority. Not only were female academies easier and cheaper to supply with teachers and more likely to be self-supporting, but clergy also drew on the concept of Christian “republican motherhood,”

⁷ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-third Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention* (Marion, 1847), 12; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Ninth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1847), 20; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1860), 103; Reverend B. Wayne to Joseph S. Copes, November 8, 1855, Joseph S. Copes Papers, MSS. 733, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA (hereafter cited as LARC).

⁸ Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Eleventh Session of the Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (New Orleans, 1857), 30.

emphasizing women's moral and religious influence over future generations of potential church members.⁹ If young women were educated in denominational schools through adolescence and into adulthood, they would stay loyal to their church and later bring up church-going families.¹⁰ Alabama Baptists at their annual meeting in 1850 declared "the position of woman, so commanding and influential" that they had "to consider her education as a subject of the very first importance."¹¹ In some instances, supporting female education was even more important than preaching. The committee on education for the Alabama Methodist conference urged the Reverend Clayton Gillespie to take over as agent of Tuskegee Female College, responsible for raising money for the school, because, they argued, "he could promote the general interests of the Church far more by laboring in this agency than in any other work to which he may be appointed."¹² Episcopal bishops in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi all pushed for diocesan female schools in their annual addresses; Bishop Nicholas H. Cobbs of the Diocese of Alabama even went so far as to declare that establishing a diocesan female seminary "has been the

⁹ Nancy Beadie, "Female Students and Denominational Affiliation: Sources of Success and Variation among Nineteenth-Century Academies," *American Journal of Education* 107, no. 2 (February 1999): 75-115; Kerber "The Republican Mother," 187-205.

¹⁰ For example, see Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirty-fourth Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention* (Tuskegee, 1857), 13. The typical age of admission to these academies was from 12 to 16 years old and students stayed until around age 18—longer if they became teaching assistants or stayed on for an extra year of college courses or music lessons. Some of these academies also offered primary departments for younger girls and (in some cases) younger boys. See Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 75.

¹¹ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirty-sixth Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention* (Tuskegee, 1858), 17. See also Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention*, 54; For more on female education as the priority, see: Minutes, vol. 7, Presbytery of Louisiana Minutes, 1837-1861, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA (hereafter cited as PCHS), 69, 90.

¹² Thomas H. Foster, "Report of the Committee on Education, Alabama Conference," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, December 31, 1853.

desire of my episcopate.”¹³ By 1854, the Mississippi Baptist State Convention had patronized seven different female institutions and only one male college, and the same gender ratio existed for Methodist schools in the state.¹⁴ Some of these schools remained small with classes under twenty pupils, while other institutions like Judson Academy and Centenary Institute had over two hundred female students a year by 1855.¹⁵ Even after the rise of state-sponsored public education, particularly in urban areas like New Orleans, Mobile, and Natchez, private Protestant academies remained some of the most popular and successful institutions in the region, turning out over a thousand new female graduates every year, particularly among the states’ upper- and upper-middle-class citizens.¹⁶

With new schools established every year, it would no longer be necessary to send daughters of the church far away to denominational schools on the East Coast, or even

¹³ Nicholas Cobbs, “Bishop’s Address,” *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-eighth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1859), 16; Leonidas Polk, “Bishop’s Address,” *Journal of the Twelfth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1850), 22; William Green, “Bishop’s Address,” *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1850), 21.

¹⁴ Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist State Convention (Eighteenth Session)* (Memphis, TN 1855), 13; “Mississippi Conference Reports, On Education,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 25, 1854. Some institutions were directly sponsored by state and local denominational governing bodies and others received indirect patronage because they were directed by church members.

¹⁵ Louise Manly, *History of Judson College, 1838-1913* (Atlanta, GA: Foot & Davies, Co., 1913), 41. An exact count of these institutions at any specific time is difficult, as some schools lasted decades while others only one or two sessions. Sometimes principals would move, closing one location and opening another. See Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 65.

¹⁶ The directors of the Presbyterian female institute at Talladega concluded that “All the Education of the Southern country, and indeed of the nation, has assumed, or is rapidly assuming a denominational type,” in Synod of Alabama, Presbyterian Church, *Minutes of the Synod of Alabama, Convened in the City of Montgomery* (Mobile, 1859), 16. See also, Hyde, *Schooling in the Antebellum South*, 25; Beadie, “Female Students and Denominational Affiliation,” 105, 87-89. According to the 1860 census, over 30,000 men and women attended “academies and other schools” rather than public schools in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, see United States Census Bureau, *Eighth Census*, 1860, 506.

worse, to other denominations' schools where they could be pressured to convert. It was this competition among denominations and concern over others' "sectarian" influence on their children that drove much of the school development in the region. The easiest target for all Protestant claims of proselytizing were Catholic schools, accused of encouraging their daughters, as Presbyterian Lucila McCorkle of Talladega declared, to "take the veil and bury themselves in nunneries."¹⁷ Not surprisingly, this anti-Catholic rhetoric was especially prevalent in Louisiana. In 1848 the Reverend Elijah Guion described the competition in Natchitoches for students between a new Catholic convent school and the Episcopal female seminary of his wife, Clara—the latter he celebrated as offering "education uncontaminated with the dangerous and destructive principles inculcated by the emissaries of Rome."¹⁸ Southern Louisiana, a Catholic stronghold, was even worse, according to Methodist James Osgood Andrew. The only solution he saw was to learn from the Catholic Church and use their own schools for the same purpose of creating church members: "if ever Protestantism is to exert its appropriate influence in this land, it must wake up on this subject, and take an appropriate hint from the course of its great antagonist."¹⁹ Many other leading Protestants in the Gulf South agreed, arguing every

¹⁷ Lucila Agnes Cambol McCorkle, *Diary*, vol. 2, *Diaries of Lucila Agnes McCorkle*, Subseries 3.1, William P. McCorkle Papers, MSS 450, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC (hereafter cited as SHC), 36. See also: "Concert of the Judson Female Institute," *Alabama Baptist* (Marion, AL), March 14, 1846; "An Appeal to the Methodist Ministers and Laymen within the Mississippi Conference in behalf of Female Education," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 3, 1855.

¹⁸ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Tenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1848), 47.

¹⁹ J.O. Andrew, "A Trip to Attakapas," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, March 26, 1853. Mississippians were also concerned about Catholic Louisiana's influence on female education, see "Minutes of Mississippi Presbytery from 1848 to 1861, vol. 10," Presbytery of Mississippi Records, 1816-1942, C. Benton Kline Special Collections and Archives, Columbia Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA (hereafter cited as CPTS), 318.

year that it was the religious duty of their churches to build female schools and of parents to send their daughters to schools taught by members of their own denomination.²⁰

Female Founders, Principals, and Teachers

Building Protestant female schools was clearly a male priority in the late antebellum South, and leading laymen and clergy have often received all of the credit—from eyewitnesses and from historians—for founding them.²¹ In reality, these men repeatedly relied on female congregants to do the legwork of gathering support and funding and some of these women remained actively involved in the lives of the schools for years to come. Decades before most denominational organizations became involved in school building, Methodist women coordinated to fund the first female higher education institution in the region, Elizabeth Female Academy in Washington, Mississippi. It may even have been the first institution in the entire United States to offer higher education to women, predating Emma Williard's Troy Female Seminary in New York, which previously claimed this title.²² In 1818, five or six ladies worked together to convince a wealthy widow, Mrs. Elizabeth Greenfield originally of Philadelphia, to donate a large home and its surrounding land which they stipulated would be used for a

²⁰ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1851), 18; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirty-sixth Anniversary*, 17; The Committee on Education of the Louisiana Annual Conference, Report, 1850, Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Conference Committee Records, LACUMC 01 02, Centenary College of Louisiana Archives and Special Collections, Shreveport, LA (hereafter cited as Centenary); Synod of Alabama, *Minutes of the Synod of Alabama* (Mobile, 1859), 16; Observer, "The Promise and Its Fulfillment," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 5, 1854.

²¹ See Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 56, 60; Mathews, *Religion in the Old*, 92-93.

²² See Charles Galloway, "Elizabeth Female Academy: The Mother of Female Colleges," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* (1899): 169-178; Claribel Drake, "Mississippi's Elizabeth Academy: Its Claim to be the Mother of Women's Colleges," Elizabeth Female Academy Subject File, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS (hereafter cited as MDAH).

Methodist academy for young women.²³ These churchwomen then formed a committee and went from house to house raising funds to make repairs to the house and to buy furniture and school supplies.²⁴ Mississippi women continued to support this institution, and five years later, over a hundred women led by the school's governess, Jane Sanderson, signed a petition to the Mississippi legislature asking for financial support to enlarge and repair the school.²⁵ With this petition, these women claimed a public voice, taking advantage of one of the few political acts available to them in order to further the cause of Christian female education.²⁶

In 1839, in another early effort at female higher education, a young widow and wealthy slaveholder, Julia Tarrant Baron, hosted a meeting of interested Baptists in her home in Marion, Alabama to discuss founding a Baptist female school there. Having already donated the land for Siloam Baptist Church in Marion, Baron then became the key financial backer of Judson Female Academy. She paid the rent for the building where the first classes met; lodged Principal Milo P. Jewett, his wife, and several teachers in her home; and donated both land and cash for the new brick school building finished in 1841. Ann Alston King, the wife of the first president of the Board of Trustees, famously

²³ The institution was named after this donor, Elizabeth Greenfield, who was a member of the Methodist Church in Washington, Mississippi, but formerly a Quaker from Philadelphia. See William Winans, *Autobiography*, William Winans Papers, J.B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS (hereafter cited as Cain Archives), 92; Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 55-56.

²⁴ Charles F. Deems, *Annals of Southern Methodism for 1855* (New York, 1856), 279.

²⁵ "Petition of Mrs. Sanderson and others on the subject of Female Education," Petitions, 1817-1908, Box 6815, Folder Schools and School Lands, State and Government Records Series 2370, MDAH. Elizabeth Female Academy closed in 1848 when the state capital moved, but it led the way for other Protestant female academies in the region, see Galloway, "Elizabeth Female Academy," 169.

²⁶ A western political tradition of female petition writing dates back to Early Modern Europe. See James Daybell, "Epistolary Rhetoric in Sixteenth-Century Letters of Petition," *Women's Writing* 13 (2006): 3-20.

suggested the school's name after Ann Hasseltine Judson, one of the first American missionaries to China. Other Baptist women also supported the institution by opening their homes for female students to board while the new school was still under construction.²⁷ These women used their private homes for public religious purposes, hosting meetings with clergy and serving as temporary dormitories for students in order to further the educational goals of their denomination.

White women's involvement in the benevolent cause of founding and donating to Protestant female schools in the Gulf South did not stop when denominational organizations began prioritizing female education in the late 1840s and 1850s. While their actions have been harder for historians to trace than men's, there is evidence that donations continued to come from women, and, even more significantly, many women continued to specify how their money was to be used.²⁸ Episcopalian Olivia Dunbar of Jefferson County, Mississippi, a wealthy slaveholder who Bishop Green described as a "mother in Israel," left a legacy of over \$50,000 in 1860 to the Diocese of Mississippi with the requirement that it be used to found a female diocesan school—profits certainly derived from the labor and sale of enslaved workers on her plantation.²⁹ All of these elite slaveholding women used the profits of a slave labor system to fund the Christian education of white women.

²⁷ Hamilton and Wells, *Daughters of the Dream*, 202, 209, 200; Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 56-59.

²⁸ Christine Farnham argues that a general lack of homosocial socialization outside the family among southern antebellum women "obscures women's participation in the movement to open higher education to their sex, making it difficult to discover how active they were in founding schools," *Education of the Southern Belle*, 56. Farnham cites Jean Friedman's similar conclusions in *The Enclosed Garden*.

²⁹ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi* (Jackson, 1860), 43-44. This was equivalent to over 1.5 million dollars in the present day, see "Inflation Calculator," accessed December 1, 2018, <http://www.in2013dollars.com/1860-dollars-in-2018?amount=50000>.

Other white women donated while still living and remained actively involved in the institutions they helped fund. Martha Holmes and Catharine Norwood, two Louisiana Baptist donors to Silliman Female Collegiate Institute in Clinton, Louisiana even sat on the institution's "board of trustees and proprietors."³⁰ While this instance of women holding an official status as board members appears to be exceptional, many women across the region remained involved in more informal roles as school benefactors and advisors. Anna M. Dickinson, for instance, the widowed founder and owner of Plaquemine Female Seminary in Iberville Parish, donated the school to the Presbytery of Louisiana in 1855, but then stayed on as superintendent of the boarding department and remained an important financial benefactor, personally paying the salary of the principal.³¹ Dickinson remained involved in what she called "the cause of sanctified education" and two years later, she and Mrs. Ellen Tuttle, described by the presbytery as "benevolent friends of the church," donated land and buildings to the presbytery to erect a male seminary nearby and helped them find a Presbyterian teaching staff.³²

Other women chose to fund tuition scholarships. While in most cases only wealthy southerners could afford to send their daughters to these academies and women of color regardless of freedom status were certainly barred from attending, these scholarships offered the opportunity to some daughters of white lower-class families. They often carried the stipulation that they be reserved for the daughters of clergy from

³⁰ Catalog, Silliman Female Collegiate Institute, Clinton, LA, 1854-1855, Hunter-Taylor Family Papers, MSS 3024, Lower Louisiana and Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA (hereafter cited as LLMVC).

³¹ Reverend B. Wayne to Joseph S. Copes, October 30, 1855, November 8, 1855, Copes Papers; Minutes, vol. 6, Presbytery of Louisiana Minutes, 259.

³² Minutes, vol. 6, Presbytery of Louisiana Minutes, 260; Ibid., vol. 7, 168-169; Mrs. A.M. Dickinson, to Joseph Copes, January 19, 1856, Copes Papers.

their denomination or for students who pledged to become teachers themselves.³³ These female donors maintained the existing racial hierarchy while providing educational opportunities to white lower- and middle-class young women, many of whom would train to become teachers themselves.³⁴

Not all female donors were wealthy widows, and even the smallest donation was appreciated. Sereno Taylor, Baptist principal of Silliman, thanked both the male and female congregants of the Baptist church in Clinton who together donated \$1,000 to the institute, while William Stickney reported to the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama in 1858 the deathbed donations of several “young female communicants” to fund a female parish school in Marion.³⁵ He referred to one donation as “a pious offering of a female member of Christ, not rich in the things of this world.”³⁶ Protestant women throughout the Gulf South saw Christian female education as worthy of their financial support and gave what they could to the cause.

Female fundraising and financial support did not end once these schools were built. In 1849, for instance, “the ladies of the Church Society,” a female benevolent group connected to Siloam Baptist Church in Marion, hired a German gardener to landscape

³³ See Julia Huston Nguyen, “The Value of Learning: Education and Class in Antebellum Natchez,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 61, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 241; Jabour, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 49.

³⁴ Sarah Hyde highlights the role both fathers and mothers played in prioritizing their children’s education and argues that “parents solidly in the middle class, like overseers, made sacrifices for their children to attend school,” in *Schooling the Antebellum South*, 45.

³⁵ Sereno Taylor to Calvin Taylor, March 2, 1854, Transcriptions of Letters, 1850-1854, Calvin Taylor and Family Papers, MSS 525, LLMVC; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-eighth Annual Convention*, 29; Ibid, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth Annual Convention*, 28.

³⁶ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth Annual Convention*, 28.

Judson Academy's campus by planting trees and putting in walkways.³⁷ When Sereno Taylor later founded a female academy on the Gulf Coast near Mississippi City, he appointed a personal friend and mother of several of his students to meet with some of her wealthier acquaintances and convince them to donate to the building of a school chapel.³⁸ Female teachers, students, and alumnae also took on the responsibility of raising money for their schools. Presbyterian music teachers Ann and Emily Stuart, along with other women in Salem, Mississippi, sewed items sold at a fair to raise money to build a chapel at Salem High School. Methodist students at institutions in Louisiana and Mississippi held music concerts to raise donations for new libraries and instruments.³⁹ Some students used their public graduations as an opportunity to fundraise, as was the case at Methodist Centenary College in Summerfield, Alabama, where graduates gave speeches in 1855 and 1856 urging their audiences to give generously to support the female branch of this institution as fully as they had the male branch. The Methodist newspaper, the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, published their speeches and credited these girls with the subsequent outpouring of financial support.⁴⁰ In 1855, alumnae from this institute also founded their own society, elected leaders (three from the male and three from the female school), and planned to meet annually "to manifest and increase

³⁷ Manly, *History of Judson College*, 15.

³⁸ Sereno Taylor, Diary, April 7, 1858, May 7, 1858, Sereno Taylor Papers, MSS 617, LLMVC.

³⁹ Ann A. Stuart to Joseph S. Copes, March 23, 1855, Copes Papers; "The Macon Female Collegiate Institute of the Alabama Conference, Mississippi," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 21, 1852; Mary Cornelia Wright, Journal, March 12, 1857, April 7, 1857, Mary Cornelius Wright Journal, 1857-1859, Wright-Boyd Family Papers, MSS 3362, LLMVC.

⁴⁰ "Female Colleges vs. Male Colleges," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 8, 1855; Bishop J.O. Andrew, "Letter from Bishop Andrew," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 19, 1856. For a similar speech from Presbyterian Livingston Female Academy in Alabama, see Ralph M. Lyon, "The Early Years of Livingston Female Academy," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 37 (Fall 1975): 198-199.

our interest in the welfare of the institution.”⁴¹ Protestant women directly and indirectly connected to these schools continued to fund their upkeep and improvement well into the middle of the nineteenth century.

Women were not only financial patrons and fundraisers for the cause of Protestant female education, but also held leadership positions within the schools themselves as principals and presiding teachers.⁴² While many of the larger schools patronized by Protestant denominations by the 1840s and 1850s sought male clergy to serve as principals of their institutions, the gender hierarchy in teaching positions was often more fluid than previous scholars have assumed, especially in smaller schools.⁴³ Some female principals were widowed or single women, like Mrs. Berthe Van Nooten who took over as principal of an Episcopal female seminary in New Orleans after her husband died in 1847 and moved her school to Plaquemine in 1850, or a “Miss Weatherson,” principal of the female department at the Presbyterian Zion Seminary in Covington County, Mississippi.⁴⁴ Others were married women, often the wives of clergymen. An 1856

⁴¹ "Society Formed in Summerfield, Ala.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 6, 1855.

⁴² For examples, see “Brooklyn Male and Female Academy,” *South Western Baptist* (Marion, AL), January 1, 1851; “The Journal of Sarah G. Follansbee, Edited by Mrs. Virginia K. Jones,” *The Alabama Historical Quarterly* 27, no. 3 and 4, (Fall and Winter 1965): 213-258; Caroline Eliza Burgwin Clitherall, Diary, typescript, vol. 8, Caroline Eliza Burgwin Clitherall Diaries, 1751-1860, MSS 158, SHC, http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/c/Clitherall,Caroline_Elizabeth_Burgwin.html; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1853), 42; Lyon, “Early Years of Livingston,” 199.

⁴³ Farnham argues that by the late 1840s, it had become “increasingly difficult” for women to hold leadership positions like the title of academy “principal” and that the “gender hierarchy of teaching intensified,” with men alone holding the title of professor and women relegated to primary education teaching positions, in *Education of the Southern Belle*, 98, 110. Julia Nguyen notes that single women like Jean Shedden, Dinah Poslethwaite, and Rose and Emma Marcilly ran the leading female academies in Natchez, but their denominational affiliation is unclear, in “The Value of Learning,” 254-255.

⁴⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Tenth Annual Convention*, 46; *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), July 7, 1850; Reverend A.R. Graves to Joseph S. Copes, October 17, 1848, Copes Papers.

advertisement for the Baptist Mount Lebanon Female Institute, in Bienville Parish, Louisiana, for instance, listed the Reverend Harrison Lee as a minister attached to the school but listed his wife, Mrs. M. D. Lee, as “principal.”⁴⁵ In another common arrangement, the Methodist Feliciana Female Institute in Jackson, Louisiana advertised the husband, the Reverend Benjamin Jones, as president of the board of trustees but his wife, Rachel Wisner Bangs Jones, as principal.⁴⁶ Some schools, such as the Methodist New Iberia Female Institute run by Mrs. Mary Davis and her daughter, Ella Davis, were eventually adopted by their respective conferences as official denominational schools.⁴⁷ Even when not officially adopted, however, denominational education committees and newspapers included academies run by church member female principals and presiding teachers in their lists of recommended schools to send the daughters of the church.⁴⁸

Not only were these female principals expected to oversee both the secular and religious education of their students, but many church leaders also looked to these women to represent and grow their denomination’s influence in that region, particularly in rural parts of the state or areas that lacked an established church presence. Bishop Green of the

⁴⁵ "Mount Lebanon Female Institute, 1856," *Louisiana Baptist* (Mount Lebanon, LA), December 11, 1856. For a similar arrangement at an Episcopal school in Natchitoches, Louisiana see, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Tenth Annual Convention*, 42.

⁴⁶ "Feliciana Female Institute, Jackson LA," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 28, 1852.

⁴⁷ Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Fifteenth Session of the Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (New Orleans, 1861), 37.

⁴⁸ "The Schools," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 8, 1858; "Synopsis of the Mississippi Conference," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, December 12, 1859; "Brooklyn Male and Female Academy," *South Western Baptist*, January 1, 1851; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth Annual Convention*, 26; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 42; Mississippi Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Minutes of the Forty-third Session of the Mississippi Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, (Vicksburg, 1859), 16-17.

Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi praised two such female principals who founded academies in the 1850s, Miss Judith Slaughter and Mrs. Ann Hazard Hampton. Hampton opened her girls' school in De Kalb, a rural outpost in the red clays hills region of Mississippi, largely populated by yeoman farmers.⁴⁹ Since there was no Episcopal congregation or preacher in the area, Hampton requested annual visits from Bishop William Mercer Green to address her pupils and also used the money she earned running her school to pay \$250—half the salary of a missionary who would visit once a month. Hampton was the only Episcopal communicant in De Kalb known to the diocese, and her school essentially served as the public face of the church for that neighborhood. Bishop Green credited her “consistent example and zealous instruction,”—not the actions of the male missionary—for drawing her students *and* their parents into the Church, “families hitherto strangers to our services.”⁵⁰ In Ann Hampton, Green proclaimed, “the Church possesses not only a pious and intelligent member, but one who is earnestly and zealously engaged in bringing others to a knowledge and love of our doctrine and discipline and worship.”⁵¹ Judith Slaughter opened her school in Noxubee County, just north of De Kalb, and while several Episcopal families already lived in the neighborhood, they had no regular preaching. The real strength of the church in that region, Bishop Green noted, was Slaughter’s school. In 1860, he praised Slaughter’s successful efforts in “doing no little in training the young for both worlds [here and the hereafter].”⁵² When he preached

⁴⁹ Susan Ditto includes Kemper County in her list of antebellum counties, based on 1860 census data, “where Mississippi yeoman farming culture predominated,” in “Hearth and Home,” 129.

⁵⁰ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention*, 34.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

in the neighborhood “to a full congregation,” half of that congregation was Slaughter’s female students.⁵³ Both female schools, then, doubled as worship spaces in a region that lacked the formal worship spaces of separate church buildings.

The Methodist conference in Louisiana also looked to female principals in the 1840s and 50s to spread the influence of their denomination in Baton Rouge and Clinton, Louisiana. In 1839, the Reverend William Winans told Mrs. Mary Read of Baton Rouge that “the state of our Church in your Town is truly deplorable,” and he pitied the children who never experienced the saving influence of Methodism.⁵⁴ Read then opened a female seminary taught along Methodist church principles which received a conference recommendation every year because, even as late as 1853, it was regarded as “the only institution in this part of the Conference under Methodist influence.”⁵⁵ Her school was also the only way the Church could challenge Catholic dominance of female education in the area, including the “nun’s school” in Baton Rouge which a contributor to the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* accused of proselytizing to Protestant daughters.⁵⁶ Mary Winans Wall, a graduate of Elizabeth Female Academy and both the daughter and wife of Methodist clergymen, founded East Feliciana Female College in Clinton, Louisiana in the early 1840s, which was eventually adopted as an official conference institution under her continued management.⁵⁷ The Reverend John Jones praised Mary Wall for her pious

⁵³ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention*, 34.

⁵⁴ William Winans to Mary W. Read, July 25, 1839, Letterbooks, Winans Papers.

⁵⁵ Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, The Committee on Education of the Louisiana Annual Conference Reports, December 1847, January 1853.

⁵⁶ "Notes by the Way," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 30, 1853.

⁵⁷ William Winans, Journal, August 30, 1842, Winans Papers.

influence over a generation of young women in that neighborhood and for the school's positive impact on a region of the conference that her itinerant preacher father only several years earlier had worried would be "very unpropitious to her religious enjoyments" because of its lack of church institutions.⁵⁸ These female principals were able to spread the church in areas where no male missionary or itinerant minister had succeeded.

Even in the more common school governance arrangement where men served as principals of Protestant female academies, principals were almost always required to be married and the wife of the principal was expected to be a church member and to serve as a moral and religious role model for female students.⁵⁹ When Presbyterian Plaquemine Female Seminary advertised for a new principal in 1855, they requested a gentleman, "having a wife also well qualified to be the head of the Seminary. We want them to be Old School Presbyterians of deep and intelligent piety or if not present in our church connection holding no views which would prevent them from heartily and sincerely uniting with our church."⁶⁰ Teaching job descriptions and school advertisements which highlighted the piety and church membership of both the principal and his wife reveal an awareness of the powerful influence adult women in the school could have over the

⁵⁸ William Winans, Journal, August 30, 1842, Winans Papers; John G. Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism as Connected with the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, vols. 3 and 4 (Jackson, MS: Commission on Archives and History, Mississippi Conference, United Methodist Church, 2015), 3:36.

⁵⁹ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 42; Eliza Lucy Irion, Journal, Book 2, typescripts, Irion-Neilson Family Papers, MDAH, 4-5; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fourteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1852), 26.

⁶⁰ Reverend B. Wayne to Joseph S. Copes, November 8, 1855, Copes Papers.

religious lives of female students.⁶¹ In a worst case scenario for Protestants, a Catholic female principal in Mobile, Alabama, “Madam D.,” had such a strong religious influence over her Protestant students that in 1851, several converted and left with her for Paris, apparently handing over their family inheritances in the process.⁶²

This concern for religious influence over female students also applied to the increasingly female corps of classroom teachers, matrons, stewards, and governesses with whom they interacted every day.⁶³ While northern women dominated the early teaching workforce in the Gulf South, late antebellum Protestant academies hoped to attract pious female church members from the South who could make themselves “useful” to the church as teachers of the next generation, free from the potential bias of northern abolitionist sentiments.⁶⁴ Some of these academies began offering teacher training courses in addition to scholarships to students who intended to become teachers

⁶¹ See also, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fourteenth Annual Convention*, 26; “Tuscaloosa Correspondence,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 7, 1860.

⁶² “Roman Catholic Schools and Protestant Youth,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, April 5, 1851. See also, Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Proceedings of the Ninth Anniversary of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson, 1845), 15.

⁶³ For more on the feminization of the teaching workforce in southern schools, see Hyde, *Schooling in the Antebellum South*, 29; Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 10. Anya Jabour argues, “women were the dominant figures in the South’s female academies. Even when men participated in the operations of the schools, schoolgirls highlighted their relationships with schoolmistresses’ in *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 61. For examples of advertisements stressing specific Protestant academies’ pious and church member female teachers, see “Judson,” *Marion Herald* (Marion, AL), September 21, 1839; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention*, 34; James O. Andrew, “Endowment of Centenary Institute,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 26, 1856; Synod of Alabama, Presbyterian Church, *Minutes of the Synod of Alabama, Convened in Government-Street Church, Mobile*, (New Orleans, 1858), 17.

⁶⁴ Ann Firor Scott and Christine Farnham have both emphasized the role of northern female teachers who moved south to teach at female academies and brought with them northern middle class Christian values in Scott, “The Ever Widening Circle,” 3-9; Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 3-4. For an Episcopal example, see Hoffert, “Earnest Effort to Be Friends.”

themselves.⁶⁵ At the Poydras Asylum, a female orphanage run entirely by women in New Orleans, teacher training also served as a source of upward mobility for young women who aged out of the institution. From 1851 to 1855, Protestant teacher Caroline Bowers prepared at least thirty young women at the asylum to pass teacher examinations. Acting essentially as a female boarding school for lower-class families, Poydras Asylum offered a combination of secular and religious instruction that prepared young women for teaching jobs at Christian academies in the region.⁶⁶ When one new teacher left Poydras Asylum in 1854 the female board of managers wrote in their minutes, “their best wishes accompany her and they sincerely hope that the principles of a heart felt religion founded on the Holy Scriptures, teaching gratitude and love to Almighty God and love to each other, will ever abide with her.”⁶⁷ One contributor to the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* in 1860 urged Methodists to recognize the importance of “this sphere of usefulness,” “this great vocation” for women rather than stigmatizing teaching outside the home as only acceptable for women in dire financial straits.⁶⁸ Likewise, in 1853, the committee on education for the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana declared that “women of piety, discretion and self denial must be obtained, who are willing to consecrate their

⁶⁵ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-fourth Convention*, (Marion, 1848), 16; Tuskegee Female College, " *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 28, 1859.

⁶⁶ Board Minute Book, vol. 5, January 16, 1854, Poydras Home Records, 1816-1960, MSS 69, LARC.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, August 17, 1854; January 16, 1855. For more on the female-run Poydras Asylum, see chapter five of this dissertation.

⁶⁸ "Our Methodist Womanhood," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 8, 1860. Julia Nguyen and Christine Farnham argue that southern women did not work outside the home as teachers unless forced to by financial necessity, in Nguyen, "The Value of Learning," 254; Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 3-4; Nguyen, "Useful and Ornamental: Female Education in Antebellum Natchez," *Journal of Mississippi History* 67 (Winter 2005): 299-300.

whole services, for life, to the work of training up the young in the way they should go.”⁶⁹

Protestant women in the Gulf South, in turn, seized upon this language of religious vocation and like their northern counterparts, used this language to justify public careers and public religious identities as teachers.⁷⁰ Some teachers used this language in their private diaries and correspondence, praying for strength to do their duty, as when one Episcopal teacher opening her own school in Tuscaloosa recorded her hope “to do all to his glory.”⁷¹ In letters to a female teacher friend, Presbyterian Caroline Hentz wrote of her experience teaching in Florence, Alabama, “it requires more than the patience of a Job, the wisdom of a Solomon, the meekness of a Moses, or the adaptive power of a St. Paul—to be sufficient for the duties of our profession.”⁷² By equating herself to male Biblical figures who had faced similar challenges in answering God’s call to action, she elevated her work teaching girls to the level of a Biblical religious calling.

This language of women’s religious duty to teach also gained a public platform when it was recorded in newspaper obituaries. The obituary of Laura Goodwyn, a graduate of Methodist Centenary Institute in Alabama, recounted how she interpreted her own decision to begin teaching girls in Louisiana: “She seems to have left the comforts of

⁶⁹ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 24.

⁷⁰ Women interpreting teaching as a socially acceptable religious calling was not just the northern phenomenon described by Ann Firor Scott and Christine Farnham, in Scott, “The Ever Widening Circle,” 3-9; Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 3-4. Southern women also justified such a career outside the home as an extension of domesticity, and as Anya Jabour has argued, “in terms of religious commitment” even regarded “teaching as a form of ministry,” in *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 101, 105. Sylvia D. Hoffert argues that northern evangelical women who moved south to teach considered teaching a “lay ministry” or a “religious vocation” in “Earnest Efforts to Be Friends,” 816.

⁷¹ Clitherall, *Diary*, vol. 8, 1840, Clitherall Diaries, 32.

⁷² Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 165.

her father's house in obedience to what she believed to be her duty. She felt called of God to do good."⁷³ Similarly, the author of the obituary of Mrs. K. A. McIntosh, a Baptist teacher at East Alabama Female College in Tuskegee, wrote that McIntosh, “felt it her duty” to take on the “useful and honorable occupation of an instructor of youth.”⁷⁴ He added, “To the command, ‘Go work in my vineyard,’ she paid earnest heed, and became a devoted laborer in the service of her Lord.”⁷⁵ Obituaries, which often celebrated women’s Christian domestic duties, also praised these women’s public religious duty to teach.

Even when faced with public criticism, female Christian educators drew on the language of religious duty. In 1846, writing from another academy she and her husband had founded in Tuskegee, Alabama, Caroline Hentz vented her concerns about the “weight of responsibility” that teaching young women entailed but declared that she was “willing to suffer if it were necessary in the defense of truth and religion.”⁷⁶ A Baptist teacher, Martha Foster, faced a more direct critique from the father of one of her students in Clinton, Alabama, a Dr. Moor, who was a deist and objected to her opening school with prayer every morning and teaching from the Bible. In a journal entry prayer, Foster reassured herself of her responsibilities as a Christian educator:

What is my duty? O Lord show me that, and give me strength to do it faithfully. She is placed under my charge, and shall she who receives no light at home receive none from me? O God, grant that she may become thy child. I will not have a school where

⁷³ "Lizzie Newton," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 18, 1852.

⁷⁴ Mrs. K.A. McIntosh, "Obituaries," *South Western Baptist*, December 7, 1854.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Caroline Lee Hentz to Mrs. Stafford, January 7, 1846, Series 1, Correspondence, Hentz Family Papers, MSS 332, SHC.

religion cannot be taught - where I cannot tell my pupils that the great end of life is to prepare for death - where I can offer them no consolation in a Savior.⁷⁷

Even when Dr. Moor removed his daughter from her school, Foster did not back down and she declared in her journal that night, “I would not change my course though all my patrons should side with him.”⁷⁸ This was unnecessary because most of her patrons were Baptists who supported her religious curriculum, but the language of religious duty helped her stand up to a powerful male figure in her community. Rather than just teaching because of financial necessity, the middle-class Protestant women who most often became educators also found in teaching a higher calling—to have a formative impact on the religious upbringing of the future female leaders of the church, the daughters of the Gulf South’s elite slaveholding class.⁷⁹

Religious Curriculum, Religious Culture

Working alongside male clergy, the increasingly female teaching and boarding staff of these academies helped build a Protestant religious culture that permeated student life both in and outside the classroom. Although many schools claimed to not teach “sectarian” principles, most added their own denominational emphasis to their

⁷⁷ Martha Foster Crawford, Diary, August 21, 1850, Martha Foster Crawford Diaries, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC (hereafter cited as Duke), <https://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/womenstraveldiaries/Creator/Crawford,%20Martha%20Foster,%201830-1893>.

⁷⁸ Ibid., January 21, 1851.

⁷⁹ There was often a noticeable socio-economic class distinction between the young women who could afford to attend these academies and the women who taught them. Julia Huston Nguyen looks at tuition rates at female academies in Natchez and argues that “several hundred dollars a year—[was] a prohibitive expense for most parents in a region where the average per capita income among the free population was \$92 in 1840 and \$124 in 1860,” in “The Value of Learning,” 241. For more on class differences between students and teachers see, Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 3-4; Nguyen, “Useful and Ornamental,” 299-300; Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 106; Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 32; Beadie, “Female Students and Denominational Affiliation,” 75-155.

coursework and textbooks.⁸⁰ Baptist schools treated the Bible as the most important textbook and emphasized the “primitive simplicity of the gospel,” Methodist schools were also Bible focused but stressed the importance of experiential religion, some Presbyterian schools added to this focus on Biblical truth their own Westminster Catechism, and Episcopal schools often added Anglican church history and the liturgy and catechism laid out in the Book of Common Prayer.⁸¹ Denomination-specific religious curriculum was most evident in academies’ Sunday schools and Bible classes. Some schools required that their students attend while others made it optional.⁸² In academies where Sunday school was optional, boarding students had to make their own religious choices away from home and some joined Sunday Schools with their peers which were sponsored by different denominations than their parents’.⁸³ Rather than relying solely on

⁸⁰ For examples, see "Judson Female Institute," *Alabama Baptist*, September 23, 1843; W. Carey Crane, "Mississippi Female College," *South Western Baptist*, October 8, 1851; Sereno Taylor, Diary, April 14, 1857, Sereno Taylor Papers; "Religious Education," *Church Herald*, October 1, 1852; "Feliciana Female Institute, Jackson, LA.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 15, 1858; Synod of Alabama, Presbyterian Church, *Minutes of the Synod of Alabama, Convened in the City of Montgomery*, (Mobile, 1849), 11.

⁸¹ See "Female Institute at Grenada," *Mississippi Baptist* (Jackson, MS), November 18, 1858; "Religious Education," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 2, 1852; Minutes, vol. 7, Presbytery of South Alabama Minutes, 1826-1861, PCHS, 83, 90; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Tenth Annual Convention*, 28; Victoria Montgomery to J.A. Montgomery, February 2, 1852, Joseph Addison Montgomery and Family Papers, MSS. 1019, LLMVC; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-third Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1859), 87.

⁸² For examples of female academies where Sunday School was required, see: "Orrville Institute, Orrville, Dallas County, Ala.," *South Western Baptist*, March 3, 1852; "East Alabama Female College, Tuskegee, Ala.," *South Western Baptist*, August 16, 1855; Victoria Montgomery to J.A. Montgomery, February 2, 1852, Joseph Addison Montgomery and Family Papers; "Marion Female Seminary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 25, 1852; Ann A. Stuart to Joseph S. Copes, January 31, 1855, Copes Papers.

⁸³ Laura Howe to Julia Howe, October 2, 1856, Chiliab Smith Howe Papers, MSS 3092, SHC; Margaret Anne Ulmer, Diary, March 7, 1858, Margaret Anne Ulmer Papers, MSS 733-z, SHC. See also William R. Arick to Joseph S. Copes, May 16, 1840; Jane H. Copes to Joseph Copes, October 22, 1843, Copes Papers.

male clergy in town or connected with the academy to teach Sunday school, many female teachers took it upon themselves to give Sunday school lessons as part of their religious mentoring responsibilities.⁸⁴ At the Presbyterian Corona Female College in Corinth, Mississippi, Susan Moore Gaston, the wife of the principal who also served as governess and teacher, took over Sunday school classes at the academy whenever her husband was away from home on preaching visits.⁸⁵ Sometimes older students were given the religious responsibility to teach their own Sunday school classes made up of younger students. Several seniors at the Methodist Mansfield Female College in Louisiana were given the opportunity to teach their own Sunday school classes of six or seven girls in the Methodist church, assigning hymns and Bible passages to memorize. Senior Mary Wright found religious purpose teaching this Sunday school class every week and often reported to her Baptist mother how much she loved “the Sunday-school teacher’s vocation.”⁸⁶ Maria Dyer Davies, who taught her own Sunday school class at home in Macon, Mississippi, also directed a Methodist Sunday School class of younger students when she moved to Summerfield, Alabama to take music courses at Centenary Institute. She often recorded her prayers in her journal for the success of both Sunday school classes: “God bless my little class at home and let his spirit attend my feeble efforts here . . . May we be

⁸⁴ Crawford, Diary, September 7, 1850; October 6, 1850, Crawford Diaries; Julia M. Southall, Diary, vol. 9, April 19, 1862, Southall and Bowman Family Papers, MSS 04135, SHC; Esther G. Wright to Sarah R Wright, April 5, 1857, Wright-Boyd Papers; Thomas W. Dorman, "Letter from the Missionary Secretary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 4, 1859; McCorkle, Diary, vol. 1, June 12, 1859, McCorkle Papers.

⁸⁵ Irion, Journal, June 19, 1859, August 7, 1859, August 14, 1859, Irion-Neilson Papers; Ricky Harold Gray, "Corona Female College (1857-1864)," *Journal of Mississippi History* 42 (May 1980): 129.

⁸⁶ Mary Wright to Sarah Wright, April 11, 1857, Wright-Boyd Papers; Mary Wright, Journal, March 28, 1857, April 12, 1857, Wright-Boyd Papers.

inspired with proper interest and may it be a source of good to us & glory to God.”⁸⁷

Even when church services were canceled due to the lack of a preacher or bad weather, both common occurrences in the rural South, Sunday school classes could continue if they were held on campus and thus served as an even more reliable weekly part of students’ religious training.⁸⁸

Many Protestant academies also taught “sacred music” as part of the regular curriculum and some charged extra for music lessons in singing and learning instruments that could be played at church.⁸⁹ The Baptist minister and principal, Sereno Taylor, offered classes in church harp and organ at both of his schools in Clinton, Louisiana and Mississippi City and had his female music teachers as well as his students play the organ and harp at Sunday church services.⁹⁰ School choirs and soloists were given many chances to perform church music in public including at Fourth of July celebrations, concerts, and commencement exercises.⁹¹ Some female school choirs also served as the main choirs for local churches, taking on the public religious role every Sunday of

⁸⁷ Maria Dyer Davies Wightman, Diary, March 8, 1851, April 27, 1851, Maria Dyer Davies Wightman Diary, 1850-1856, Duke, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=dul1.ark:/13960/t2v41ws98;view=1up;seq=10;size=150>.

⁸⁸ Mary Wright to Sarah Wright, November 9, 1856, Wright-Boyd Papers; Irion, Journal, March 12, 1859, Irion-Neilson Papers. For more on female teachers and Sunday schools in the Gulf South, see chapter two of this dissertation.

⁸⁹ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-fourth Convention*, 15; Manly, *History of Judson College*, 21; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Ninth Annual Convention*, 12; Ann A Stuart to Joseph S. Copes, December 1, 1854, Copes Papers.

⁹⁰ Sereno Taylor, Diary, February 1, 1855, Sereno Taylor Papers; Catalog, Silliman Female Collegiate Institute, Clinton, LA, 1854-1855, Hunter-Taylor Family Papers; Sereno Taylor to Calvin Taylor, May 16, 1858, Calvin Taylor and Family Papers.

⁹¹ "Concert at Central Miss. Female College," *Mississippi Baptist*, May 13, 1858; "Judson Examination," *Alabama Baptist*, August 6, 1849; Mary Emerson Taylor, Diary, vol. 2, July 4, 1859, Sereno Taylor Papers; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Ninth Annual Convention*, 20.

leading the congregation in song. This was the case at Centenary Institute, which had a male and female department but only the female students formed the choir that led music at the Methodist church in town every Sunday.⁹² Other students volunteered together to serve in their local church choirs. At the Presbyterian Reverend A.B. Lawrence's female school in Vicksburg, several students made the choice to attend the local Presbyterian Sabbath School together and also joined the church choir, buying their own Bibles and hymn-books and even convincing their teacher, Jane Copes, a fellow Presbyterian, to join the choir.⁹³ Female students and teachers found religious community in regular choir practices and performances with other adult male and female singers, while taking on active, public roles in Sunday services.

Students also had the opportunity at public examinations and commencements to read compositions on religious topics in front of audiences of adult men and women. While a few academies rejected public examinations as inappropriate for young women, these events were the norm across the South, and religious topics for student speeches were common, especially at Baptist and Methodist institutions which offered exams on "Evidences of Christianity."⁹⁴ The commencement exercises in 1854 for Baptist East Alabama Female College in Tuskegee featured both female public prayer and religious

⁹² "Centenary Institute," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 25, 1858. For other examples, see "Thanksgiving Day at Tuskegee," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, December 8, 1858; Judson Female Institute, *Catalogue of the Trustees, Instructors, and Students of the Judson Female Institute, Marion Perry County, Alabama* (Mobile, AL: Strickland & Benjamin's Power Press, 1851), 14.

⁹³ Jane H. Copes to Joseph S. Copes, November 9, 1842, Copes Papers. See also Ulmer, Diary, May 25-27, 1858, Ulmer Papers; Caroline Lee Hentz to Mrs. Stafford, January 7, 1846, Hentz Papers.

⁹⁴ Methodist Tuskegee Female College had private examinations, see "Tuskegee Female College," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 28, 1859. Mary Wright reported that her host did not approve of public exams at Mansfield, but she attended anyways, in Mary Wright, Journal, February 12, 1857, Wright-Boyd Papers.

addresses: Lydia Root offered a “prayer” she wrote entitled “All is Not Gold That Glitters” along with her salutatory address and Martha Driskell read a composition entitled “The Ever Present Divinity.”⁹⁵ Caroline Frances Smith’s valedictory speech at Judson Academy and Mary Stewart’s at Mansfield were both filled with public prayers for their fellow students, teachers, and trustees and hopes that they may see each other again in heaven.⁹⁶ Some student speeches were then published in denominational newspapers, like Laura Saddler’s address to her resigning principal at the Alabama Methodist Oak Bowery Academy in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*. She praised her principal’s Christian virtues, presented him a Bible bought by the graduating class, and led a public prayer to “implore Heaven’s protection” on him as he left their institution.⁹⁷ There is also evidence that some of these student speeches moved into the realm of exhorting and giving religious advice to their audiences. As valedictorian of Mansfield Female College in Louisiana, Mary Wright gave a speech in which she recounted a brief history of Christianity, how through its influence pagan “woman rose from her degraded position and took a higher, more commanding and appropriated station in life,” and how the Protestant Reformation “wrought a material change in the faith, spirit, and conduct of the people.”⁹⁸ She declared that now “a new era in Christianity has commenced—an era marked with peculiar energy, zeal and activity as

⁹⁵ “Examination and Commencement Exercises of the East Alabama Female College,” *South Western Baptist*, July 6, 1854.

⁹⁶ Carolina Frances Smith, “Elevated Aims Essential to Success,” Valedictory Address, July 7, 1841, reprinted in Hamilton and Wells, *Daughters of the Dream*, 265-266; Mary E. Stewart, “Valedictory,” 1856, Mansfield Female College Collection, Centenary.

⁹⁷ “Oak Bowery-Resignation,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 2, 1852.

⁹⁸ Mary Wright, “Commencement Day Composition,” *Compositions: Augustus, Mary, and Esther Wright* ca. 1855-1860, Wright-Boyd Papers.

distinguished from the indifference and slugginess [sic] of a few centuries past” and exhorted her audience to look to “pure Bible truth” in which God “graciously invites us to share in His goodness.”⁹⁹ These school events gave young women a socially acceptable space to speak publicly on their own faith as well as offer their own interpretation of the history and future of the church.

Many Protestant academies encouraged students to board so that they could take full advantage of the religious culture the academy had to offer by living under the pious influence of governesses and teachers.¹⁰⁰ This was especially true for boarding students coming from more rural or isolated regions of the Gulf South who did not have an active religious or social life outside of their families.¹⁰¹ Most required that their boarding students attend Sunday church services when preaching was available, sometimes at a chapel on campus but more often at a church in town.¹⁰² Schools often advertised that they gave students the choice of which denomination’s church to attend, but even when they had this option, students still needed the escort of female teachers or boarding staff.¹⁰³ In the case of the Hentzs’ Presbyterian academy, Caroline Hentz’s husband

⁹⁹ Mary Wright, “Commencement Day Composition,” Wright-Boyd Papers

¹⁰⁰ “Judson Female Institute, Marion, Ala., Announcement of the Session of 1859-60,” *Mississippi Baptist*, September 8, 1859; “Orrville Institute, Orrville, Dallas County, Ala.,” *South Western Baptist*, March 3, 1852.

¹⁰¹ Nguyen, “Useful and Ornamental,” 293.

¹⁰² Hamilton and Wells, *Daughters of the Dream*, 34; “Kirkwood Female Academy, Madison County, Mississippi,” *Church Herald*, March 30, 1855; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana *Journal of the Ninth Annual Convention*, 12; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention*, 69; “Tuskegee Female College,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 28, 1859.

¹⁰³ Sereno Taylor, Diary, February 25, 1855, Sereno Taylor Papers. A Methodist contributor to the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* accused Baptist Judson Academy of not having any teachers who were willing to accompany students to Methodist church services, “The Promise and Its Fulfillment, Again,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 7, 1854.

stayed home while she took the students to the Methodist church every week since Presbyterian preaching was not readily available in Florence, Alabama.¹⁰⁴ In her diary while attending the Presbyterian school in Corinth, Mississippi, Eliza Lucy Irion repeatedly noted asking her governess and teacher, Mrs. Susan Gaston, for permission to attend extra evening services at the Methodist church in town on Sundays. Once she and several of her classmates wanted to go hear a popular itinerant preacher visiting in town, but Gaston did not approve of his style of preaching and they could not attend.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, Mary Wright at school in Mansfield, Louisiana, recounted a special Sunday trip to hear preaching at the “Campbellite Church” accompanied by several of her Methodist teachers, a “Mrs. Phillips,” “Miss Bates,” and “Miss Bell.”¹⁰⁶ Female teachers’ willingness to attend other types of preaching had a direct impact on the extracurricular religious life of their students.

Pupils at evangelical Protestant schools, including Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist academies, also had the opportunity to attend revivals and protracted meetings with their teachers and classmates on and off campus.¹⁰⁷ These events sought to revive current church members in their faith and religious duty and to encourage the

¹⁰⁴ Caroline Lee Hentz, Diary, May 8, 1836, August 7, 1836, Hentz Family Papers, SHC, http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/h/Hentz_Family.html#d1e588.

¹⁰⁵ Eliza Lucy Irion, Journal, April 3, 1859, May 8, 1859, June 19, 1859, Irion-Neilson Papers. The denominational affiliation of this preacher, “Alex Campbell,” is unclear.

¹⁰⁶ Mary Wright to Sarah Wright, February 1, 1857, Wright-Boyd Papers. “Campbellite” was a mildly pejorative term used to describe the Disciples of Christ, a breakaway sect from the Baptist Church.

¹⁰⁷ Ulmer, Diary, April 8, 30, 1858, Ulmer Papers; Wightman, Diary, May 18-22, 1851; Suzette, “Christian Experience,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 21, 1855; Irion, Journal, July 28, 1858, Irion-Neilson Papers; Jane Copes to Joseph S. Copes, October 4, 1837, Copes Papers, LARC. For references to revivals at female academies throughout the rest of the antebellum South, see Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 60; Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 40-42.

unconverted to seek their own conversion experience, profess religion, and join the church. Spiritual conversion was a key part of coming of age in the evangelical antebellum South, and adolescent female students around twelve to sixteen years old were at the ideal age to have this experience at school, surrounded by other classmates going through the same process.¹⁰⁸ Professing religion was also one of those rare, socially acceptable opportunities for a young woman in the South to speak publicly in front of adult men and women in her community, and she did so about her faith, offering her own interpretation of her conversion experience.¹⁰⁹ Many female academies encouraged these conversions and public professions of faith, canceling classes so students could attend revivals and emphasizing to parents of their denomination that a religious curriculum meant nothing if the school did not also bring students into the church through a conversion experience.¹¹⁰ As one Methodist wrote to the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, “whatever intellectual and moral charms are thrown around the character of the schools, they ought to be held as a failure, if they do not send forth a redeeming influence among their pupils, and largely augment the intelligent piety and working zeal of the church.”¹¹¹ Throughout the Gulf South, evangelical parents often

¹⁰⁸ For typical age of conversions, see Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 40.

¹⁰⁹ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-fourth Convention*, 34; *Ibid.*, *Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention*, (Tuskaloosa, 1850), 23; A.H. Mitchell, “Obituary,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, January 1, 1853; Ulmer, *Diary*, April 23, 1858, Ulmer Papers; “Marion Female Seminary, Marion, Perry County, Alabama,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 13, 1853.

¹¹⁰ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-Third Anniversary*, 12; “Religious Education,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 2, 1852; *Minutes*, October 1858, Presbytery of Mississippi Records, 488-489. For examples of female schools in the Gulf South canceling classes for revivals see: Rev. Alex Campbell to Joseph S. Copes, October 23, 1840, Copes Papers; Ulmer, *Diary*, April 23, 1858, Ulmer Papers.

¹¹¹ “Our Educational Institutions,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 8, 1859.

based the selection of a school for their children on the expectation that they would be converted there.¹¹² In newspapers and in annual meetings, evangelical Protestants praised female academies by describing them as nurseries of the church and even “consecrated” or “sacred ground” because of the wealth of conversions that happened there.¹¹³

Episcopal women had their own religious coming-of-age experience through the sacrament of confirmation, where Episcopalians who were baptized at birth made the conscious decision as adults to publicly affirm the church and its teachings in the presence of their bishop. Previous scholars have recognized this comparison in Protestant rites of passage but have failed to note how often confirmations, like conversions, happened while young women were away at school.¹¹⁴ Episcopal dioceses in the Gulf South, like their evangelical counterparts, encouraged schools to do more than just offer the daughters of the church a religious curriculum; they should, as Bishop Green of Mississippi declared, “be training them in gospel truth, and fitting them for heaven.”¹¹⁵ Some Episcopal schools were even the site of adult baptisms of non-Episcopal students

¹¹² Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 59-60; Sarah R. Wright to Ellen Wright, November 9, 1854; Sarah R. Wright to Esther Wright, April 1, 1857, Wright-Boyd Papers; J.W. Brown to Rev. James H. DeVotie, April 13, 1853, James H. DeVotie Papers, Duke.

¹¹³ "Revivals," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, March 9, 1859; "Prayer Answered," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 21, 1852; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention* (Marion, 1851), 17; H.E.T., "Meetings of interest," *South Western Baptist*, December 18, 1856; Minutes, March 1860, Presbytery of Mississippi Records, 551-552. For references to the school as consecrated ground, see "Centenary Institute," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 30, 1858; John G. Jones, *A Complete History of Methodism as Connected with The Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, vols. 1 and 2* (Nashville, TN: Smith & Lamar, Agents, 1908), 2:536-537.

¹¹⁴ For an example of this previous scholarship, see Nguyen, “Active Faith,” 120.

¹¹⁵ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-first Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1857), 44. See also, *ibid.*, *Journal of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention*, 34; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Ninth Annual Convention*, 20.

who had decided to join the church of their own accord.¹¹⁶ As was the case with evangelical conversions, the number of annual confirmations was often higher at female academies than at their male equivalents and girls typically went through these experiences in groups, alongside their female classmates.¹¹⁷ For many schoolgirls in the Gulf South, these essential rites of passage for Protestant women happened not within the traditional confines of the home or under a mother's guidance, but at school, under the guidance of female teachers, school matrons, and governesses.

Contrary to previous assumptions, female teachers serving as religious exhorters and evangelizers to their students was not just a northern phenomenon.¹¹⁸ Schoolgirls throughout the Gulf South acknowledged the roles played by their teachers who offered religious advice in and outside of the classroom.¹¹⁹ Sometimes teachers advised in private

¹¹⁶ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-second Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (New York, 1848), 11; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fourteenth Annual Convention*, 60.

¹¹⁷ See Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1852), 12; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Thirty-third Annual Convention*, 87; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Eighth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1846), 27; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1858), 15. For a Methodist and Baptist gender comparison see, "Revival in Talladega Institute," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, April 19, 1856; A. Spencer to M.A. Keener, November 20, 1849, Keener Family Papers, MSS 50, Centenary; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirty-fourth Anniversary*, 13.

¹¹⁸ For scholarship on the North see, Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation*, 36-37. For the South, scholars have stressed female teachers' agency as moral role models and their religious interpretation of teaching as a form of ministry rather than any role in aiding student conversions. See Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 64; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters* 61-64; Nguyen, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 262. Scott Stephan gives one example of a woman in North Carolina who reluctantly helps her husband's students convert, but she is seen as exceptional, in *Redeeming the Southern Family* 160. Sylvia Hoffert also gives one example of a northern-born Episcopal female teacher acting as "spiritual guide" and catechizer to "impressionable young women" at Hillsborough Female Academy in North Carolina, in "Earnest Efforts to Be Friends," 824-827, 842.

¹¹⁹ See Mary Winans Wall, "The Mother of Female Colleges," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 19, 1890; A.H. Mitchell, "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 23, 1852. For an

conversations with their students, as did Martha Foster, a Baptist teacher in Clinton, Alabama. Foster wrote in her diary in the fall of 1850 that she had been advising her student, Sallie Ricks, who was debating joining another church instead of the Baptists, “to seek diligently to know her duty” to her own church, and described her nightly efforts with boarding students, Della, Martha, and Bella. She had convinced them to say their prayers and now was “trying to get them to promise to seek religion.”¹²⁰ Other teachers exhorted in more public settings: in the classroom and at revivals. Margaret Ulmer and Mamie Bethune, classmates at the Methodist academy at Tuskegee, converted during a protracted meeting in town, not while listening to a male preacher but “while Dear Mrs. Andrew and Mrs. Reed were talking to us” at a prayer meeting.¹²¹ Jane Copes, a Presbyterian teacher in China Grove, Mississippi, gained such a strong reputation for helping her students convert at their revival that leading Methodists in town invited her to assist them at their own revival and she spoke with many young people in order to “lead them to reflect seriously on their course.”¹²² Female teachers also accompanied students to prayer meetings or in the Methodist tradition, class meetings, and some even began their own prayer meetings for their students and encouraged young women to speak up and share their experiences. This was the case at the Presbyterian female academy in Talladega, Alabama where assistant principal Mrs. Julia Finley and Lucila McCorkle, the

example with Louisiana students at a Baptist school in Kentucky, see Mrs. E.B Farnam to Sarah R. Wright, March 26, 1858, Wright-Boyd Papers.

¹²⁰ Crawford, Diary, November 1, 1850, December 12, 1850, Crawford Diaries.

¹²¹ Mrs. Reed was a primary school teacher and Mrs. Andrew was the wife of a Methodist Bishop and also the mother of the stewardess at the school. She was frequently involved in the religious life of the students, see Ulmer Diary, April 23, 1858, Ulmer Papers.

¹²² Jane Copes to Joseph S. Copes, June 11, 1845, Copes Papers. China Grove was a rural community near Livingston, MS.

wife of a minister and school trustee, organized and hosted weekly prayer meetings for the students.¹²³ In Huntsville, Alabama, Eliza Lay, the wife of the Episcopal rector in town, claimed that “Miss Kellogg,” a Presbyterian female teacher at the local seminary, “almost preaches to the girls at school” during their prayer meetings, convincing them to convert to her own church.¹²⁴ In classrooms, revivals, and prayer meetings, Protestant female teachers worked to bring students into the fold of their own churches.

While it has been argued that men in the late antebellum South were generally hesitant to give women credit for bringing about conversions outside of their own families, many were willing to do so when those conversions were of female students at their academies.¹²⁵ The Committee of Education for the Alabama Baptist State Convention praised female teachers at Judson whose religious instruction was the “means . . . to the conversion of many more souls.”¹²⁶ In an 1856 letter to the editor, one Methodist in Baton Rouge gave credit for religious interest in the city to Mary Read, the principal of Baton Rouge Female Seminary:

Not one of her students is boarding with her who is not the subject of religious impressions. Many of them have been converted this year—many more are seeking the pearl of great price. Never have I seen a female school in which greater advancements,

¹²³ McCorkle Diary, March 7, 1859, October 9, 17, 1859, McCorkle Papers. For other examples of female teachers organizing prayer or class meetings, see, Crawford, Diary, September, 14-15, 1850, Crawford Diaries; Ulmer, Diary, May 18, 27, 1858, Ulmer Papers; Bishop J.O. Andrew, "Letter from Bishop Andrew," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 19, 1856; *Ibid*, November 17, 1858.

¹²⁴ Eliza Lay to Henry C Lay, "December 4, 1855, Correspondence, Henry C. Lay Papers, MSS 418, SHC.

¹²⁵ For example, "Lizzie Newton," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 18, 1852. For previous scholarship, see Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 225-226; Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 181. Scott Stephan interprets his one example of a principal's wife aiding a student revival as justified through the combined language of “humility and domesticity,” since she still only influenced children, in *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 159-160.

¹²⁶ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-Second Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention*, (Marion, 1846), 19.

moral and intellectual have been made, than those made *by her*.¹²⁷

Not only was Mrs. Read's personal role in this interest in religious conversion at her academy clear, but it also overshadowed—for this eyewitness—the male attempts at preaching and organizing revivals in the city at large.¹²⁸ While confirmations at Episcopal schools required the presence of a male bishop and confirmation classes were often led by ordained male rectors, some female teachers took on the role of preparing students for this sacrament, especially at rural schools further away from a consistent church presence. Episcopalian Ann Hampton prepared her students for confirmation at her school in De Kalb, Mississippi, and then proceeded to host the bishop and hold their confirmation service in her own parlor with herself as confirmation sponsor to all of the girls. The missionary George Stewart who she paid to visit her school praised her as “one most devoted daughter of the church here, whose struggles for it have been so faithful and energetic.”¹²⁹

Some female teachers in the Gulf South, like their northern counterparts, even took credit for their role in bringing about these conversions, justifying their actions with the language of religious duty.¹³⁰ Laura Goodwyn, describing the conversion of thirteen

¹²⁷ Samuel B. Suratt, "Revivals, Good News from the Old Capitol," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 17, 1856, emphasis is my own.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-fifth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Jackson, 1861), 44. See also Mrs. Tuomey assisting a local priest prepare her students for confirmation in Tuscaloosa, in Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-ninth Annual Convention*, 26.

¹³⁰ Scott Stephan gives one example of the wife of a Methodist principal at Wesleyan Female College in Murfreesboro, North Carolina, Anne Davis, who “helped guide female student converts through a revival experience” but Stephan argues that she, like other southern teachers, “often downplayed her agency” and he labeled her a “reluctant revivalist.” In general, he argued, “women’s comfort level with

out of sixteen students at her Methodist school in Church Hill, Louisiana, remarked in her diary, “Here am I truly the ‘presiding genius,’ and here is an extended usefulness in which to exercise the talents God has given me . . . Oh, shall I not henceforth be more devoted to my blessed Redeemer, more wholly give up to his service? By the grace of God, I will.”¹³¹ Likewise, the Episcopal teacher Julia Southall of Columbus, Mississippi wrote to her sister, “my life must be free of blame . . . that I may influence some of these dear young girls committed to my care, for usefulness . . . and happiness in eternity.”¹³² Many teachers worried that they had not done enough to bring about the conversion of their students. Martha Foster repeatedly asked herself in her diary, “Am I doing all I can for the cause of Christ?”¹³³ Lucy Atkinson at Judson went so far as to write a former student, Mary Whitfield, and express her “deep anxiety” about being “unfaithful to the high trust committed to me” as her teacher, to lead her to commit to a religious life.¹³⁴ In her letters she tried to fulfill this duty by continuing to ask about Whitfield’s spiritual welfare: “have you meantime been as assiduous in the performance of that higher duty which you owe to God,” she asked, “have you complied with his reasonable requisition, of an entire consecration of yourself to his service?”¹³⁵ Whitfield’s school matron, Sarah

proselytizing decreased the farther they move away from their homes,” in *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 159-160.

¹³¹ "Lizzie Newton," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 18, 1852.

¹³² Julia Southall to Josephine Southall, January 11, 1873, Letters of Julia M. Southall, Southall and Bowman Family Papers.

¹³³ Crawford, Diary, August 30, 1850, Crawford Diaries.

¹³⁴ L.M. Atkinson to Mary E. Whitfield, Summer 1844, January 18, 1845, April 29, 1845, Whitfield Papers, Auburn University Archives, Auburn, AL (hereafter cited as Auburn).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* See also *ibid.*, January 18, 1845; *ibid.*, April 29, 1845.

Williams Goree, also wrote her letters expressing concern that Whitfield would not convert before her death and they would never be reunited in heaven.¹³⁶ Female teachers throughout the Gulf South took on the religious responsibility to grow the church. This meant not just teaching their students a Protestant curriculum but also, in many cases, helping them prepare for a Christian afterlife, whether that was through a conversion experience, a public profession, or a rite of confirmation.

Students also looked to their fellow classmates for religious advice and mentorship as they prepared to join a church or while going through a conversion experience. Sometimes this was through informal religious conversations, especially with older students who had already converted.¹³⁷ Some found the confidence to approach the altar or mourning bench during a revival because other students agreed to come up and pray alongside them.¹³⁸ Some formed their own prayer meetings that met in their bedrooms or boarding halls with the express purpose of helping their fellow classmates work through their anxiety about the fate of their souls.¹³⁹ Margaret Ulmer wrote about attending a prayer meeting in the bedroom of Laura and Tempis Pettways at Tuskegee Female Academy and her own desire for them to be her spiritual mentors: “Laura and

¹³⁶ Sarah Williams Goree to Mary E. Whitfield, November 8, 1844, Whitfield Papers.

¹³⁷ Esther G. Wright to Sarah R. Wright, December 1857, Wright-Boyd Papers; A.H. Mitchell, "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, January 1, 1853; "Mortuary," *South Western Baptist*, February 18, 1852.

¹³⁸ Wightman, Diary, February 3, 16, 1851, June 3, 1851; Irion, Journal, Irion-Neilson Papers, 2:10.

¹³⁹ Rev. S.B. Suratt, "Louisiana Conference, Mansfield," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 12, 1859; "Lizzie Newton," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 18, 1852; Esther G. Wright to Sarah R. Wright, June 25, 1858, Wright-Boyd Papers; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Convention*, Appendix B; Irion, Journal, Irion-Neilson Papers, 2:12; Christine Farnham describes similar prayer meetings in dorm rooms in female academies in Georgia and North Carolina, in *Education of the Southern Belle*, 172-173.

Tempis are two of the most pious girls that I ever saw. I love them so much. I wish they would impart some of their piety to me.” After Ulmer converted, she went on to host her own prayer meetings at school and exhorted to her fellow students, warning one classmate, Maria, “of the danger she was in, and how good God has been to spare our lives, and what sinful creatures we have been.” She even exhorted in public to her roommate while accompanying her to the altar during a protracted meeting. Ulmer used the same language as many of her teachers—the language of religious duty—to justify her evangelizing in public, writing, “I made a solemn vow this morning, to do all the good I can. It makes me feel so badly, for fear that I will fail in my duty.”¹⁴⁰

Like Margaret Ulmer, students in Protestant academies across the Gulf South found ways to form their own female religious communities with their classmates that were distinct from their family and church networks back home.¹⁴¹ Not only did they help each other through the process of conversion but they also continued to support each other’s religious journeys by meeting together to study Sunday school lessons, practice hymns, or discuss sermons they heard; organizing their own Bible studies and exchanging Bible verses; and accompanying each other to prayer meetings, choir practices, or other churches in town.¹⁴² In the case of Episcopal schools, where students did not have the same impetus of conversion to form prayer meetings as evangelical

¹⁴⁰ Quotations from Ulmer Diary, April 23-27, 1858, Ulmer Papers.

¹⁴¹ Previous scholarship on female religious community and networks beyond the family developing at schools focuses on the North. See Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation*, 36-37; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29.

¹⁴² Ulmer, Diary, April 16-26, 1858, May 29, 1858, Ulmer Papers; Mary E. Whitfield and M.P. Jewett to Nathan B. Whitfield, April 5, 1843, Whitfield Papers; Irion, Journal, Irion-Neilson Papers, 2:11, 12-13, 18, 22; 4:6; “Summerfield, Alabama,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 17, 1858; Mary Wright to Sarah Wright, November 9, 1856, Wright-Boyd Papers.

students did, classmates supported each other by attending to the rituals of the liturgical calendar together. In 1858, the seventy female students who boarded at Trinity School in Pass Christian, Mississippi attended church services every Wednesday and Friday during Lent as well as every day during Holy Week leading up to Easter. Their collective devotion to the rituals of the season led the Reverend George Sill to comment that they had “formed an interesting congregation in themselves”—their own religious community distinct from the rest of the parish.¹⁴³

As with student-teacher religious networks, the religious community students formed at school did not completely cease upon graduation. Sue Watts of Monticello, Louisiana wrote to her former classmate Ellen Howe of Okolona, Mississippi to tell her that she had finally gone through confirmation while at school in Tennessee and to urge her friend to do the same.¹⁴⁴ One Methodist student who left Centenary due to illness asked her classmates “to remember her in their prayers when she should be far removed from them” and they wrote her letters telling her how they did so during class meeting.¹⁴⁵ On her deathbed, Anastasia Confer, a student of the Methodist Feliciana Female Institute in Jackson, Louisiana, asked her father to have her death notice published so “that her school mates and associates might know how she died, and that she had gone to Heaven.”¹⁴⁶ Female students repeatedly took the initiative not only to create a support network but also to continue this religious advice and friendship when they returned

¹⁴³ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention*, 69.

¹⁴⁴ Sue Watts to Ellen Howe, October 24, 1854, November 9, 1854, Howe Papers.

¹⁴⁵ A.H. Mitchell, "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 23, 1852.

¹⁴⁶ William James, "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 26, 1854.

home, looking forward to the ultimate reunion of that religious community in heaven.

Adult female teachers also created their own religious communities with other women who lived and worked at these schools. Some teachers went through the process of confirmation or conversion alongside other teachers or their students.¹⁴⁷ Others attended church services, prayer meetings, and choir practices together and female teachers at Judson Academy even founded their own weekly prayer meeting separate from their students' meetings.¹⁴⁸ In Macon, Mississippi, a group of female teachers found religious community through collective volunteer work helping to fix up the local Baptist church and prepare it for services.¹⁴⁹ Many Protestant female teachers in the Gulf South reported that they were looking for a faithful community to join when they applied for teaching jobs and some turned down more lucrative positions elsewhere because they valued this kind of religious society more.¹⁵⁰ These teachers found religious purpose beyond the domestic sphere by teaching, advising, and evangelizing at Protestant schools, but many also found a community of fellow teachers that supported and contributed to this work and to their own spiritual needs.

¹⁴⁷ Rev. I.T. Hinton, "Louisiana," *Alabama Baptist*, December 25, 1846; Laura Howe to Ellen Howe, October, 20, 1856, Howe Papers; "Obituaries," *South Western Baptist*, September 21, 1854; Episcopal Church of the Nativity, Huntsville, "Century Old Episcopal Church of the Nativity Huntsville, Alabama," *The Alabama Historical Quarterly* Vol. 5, No. 4 (Winter, 1943): 414; L.A. Reed, "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 3, 1855; Benjamin Drake to E.A. Covington, September 23, 1832, Benjamin Drake Notebook, Galloway Family Papers, MDAH.

¹⁴⁸ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Convention*, Appendix B; Ann A. Stuart to Joseph S. Copes, May 15, 1855, Hester W. Copes and Jane H. Copes to Joseph S. Copes, April 20, 1837, Ann A. Stuart to Joseph Copes, December 1, 1854, Copes Papers; Caroline Lee Hentz to Mrs. Stafford, January 7, 1846, Hentz Papers; Sereno Taylor, Diary, March 7, 1857, January 16-17, 1858, Sereno Taylor Papers.

¹⁴⁹ Wightman, Diary, September 14, 1853.

¹⁵⁰ Maria Van Dyke to William Winans, August 1, 1841, Winans Papers; Crawford, Diary, November 1, 1850, Crawford Diaries; Miss S.J. Campbell to Joseph S. Copes, September 25, 1854, Mary Ann A Stuart to Joseph S. Copes, December 1, 1854, Copes Papers.

Christian Benevolence Beyond the Academy

The religious culture of these institutions in the Gulf South also indicates that female teachers and students saw themselves as part of a larger Christian community that extended beyond the school. They subscribed to denominational newspapers, invited clergymen to speak to their literary societies on the leading religious issues of the day, and interpreted their own local revivals as part of a larger Christian resurgence stretching across the East Coast.¹⁵¹ This feeling of being part of something larger than themselves often translated into support for benevolent causes, missionary work, and reform movements.¹⁵² The type of benevolent causes students and teachers devoted their time and money to depended on the direction of their denomination (at the national, state, and local level). Women at Baptist female academies in late antebellum Alabama, for example, donated to help rebuild Howard College, the male Baptist school in Marion, after it burned down and they also donated to, joined, and gave commencement speeches about the Alabama Baptist auxiliaries of national Bible and tract societies.¹⁵³ Methodist

¹⁵¹ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth Anniversary*, 17; M. Hanna to William Winans, July 1, 1827, Winans Papers; Jane Copes to Joseph S. Copes, August 29, 1849, December 25, 1857, Mary Stuart to Joseph Copes, September 29, 1855, Copes Papers; Irion, Journal, Irion-Neilson Papers, 2:5, 9-11; Examination and Commencement Exercises of Amite Female Seminary, "Mississippi Baptist, June 24, 1858; "Commencement of Central Female Institute," *Mississippi Baptist*, August 12, 1858; Esther G. Wright to Sarah R Wright, June 25, 1858, Wright-Boyd Papers; Ulmer, Diary, April 19, 1858, April 23, 1858, Ulmer Papers.

¹⁵² Female academies' involvement in benevolent and missionary causes in the antebellum South, like southern women's involvement in these causes as adults, continues to be overlooked in existing scholarship. Hamilton and Wells reference the missionary society at Judson in *Daughters of the Dream*, 50. For one North Carolina and one Georgia example, see, Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 125. Hoffert writes that Episcopal Hillsborough Female Academy in North Carolina "represented an attempt to instill in students such values as benevolence, public service, frugality, and temperance," but does not explore this claim any further, in "Earnest Efforts to Be Friends," 820.

¹⁵³ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirty-First Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention*, (Marion, 1854), 27; *Mississippi Baptist*, August 8, 1858; Manly, *History of Judson College*, 14; "Examination of Mississippi Female College," *South Western Baptist* July 30, 1851;

female schools donated to conference efforts to support their retired itinerant preachers and the widows and orphans of deceased ministers.¹⁵⁴ In 1858, after hearing about Bishop Nicholas Cobbs' efforts to sponsor an orphanage in Alabama, a group of Episcopal schoolgirls in Montgomery founded their own sewing society, the profits of which would go to "an orphan asylum that Bishop Cobbs and members of the Episcopal Church are building."¹⁵⁵ Other Protestant academies also participated in sewing societies for benevolent causes, as when Jane Copes coordinated the sewing projects of her students in Vicksburg to sell at a fair in Jackson to raise money for a new Presbyterian church there.¹⁵⁶ Some schools even contributed to multi-denominational benevolence efforts, like when the Baptist female college in Tuskegee, Alabama put on a choir concert to raise money for the local Presbyterian Church.¹⁵⁷

Schools tied to Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian traditions, following the lead of their churches, also contributed to local temperance movements.¹⁵⁸ Female students

"Mississippi Female College," *South Western Baptist*, August 18, 1852; Alabama Baptist State Convention, "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Alabama Bible Society," *Minutes of the Twenty-fifth Convention*.

¹⁵⁴ Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Fourteenth Session of the Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, (New Orleans, 1860), 24. Caroline Thayer, governess of Elizabeth Female Academy, organized and directed the "Female Assistance Society" of Washington, Mississippi to raise extra funds for this Methodist cause, see Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 2:116-117.

¹⁵⁵ Julia Pickens to Ellen Howe, October 13, 1858, Howe Papers.

¹⁵⁶ Jane H. Copes to Joseph S. Copes, February 22, 1843, April 20, 1843, Copes Papers.

¹⁵⁷ Ulmer, Diary, April 10, 1858, Ulmer Papers.

¹⁵⁸ Existing scholarship on temperance movements in the antebellum Gulf South downplays women's involvement, in general, and does not mention the role of female students and teachers, see John W. Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 11; John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprise: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South*, (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1982).

and teachers had varying levels of involvement in the temperance cause: some simply attended Sons of Temperance events together or signed pledges that made them members of a local temperance society; others were asked to make banners and food for the events or even to give speeches at temperance meetings that emphasized the Christian nature of the movement.¹⁵⁹ In 1848, Eliza Saffold, a senior at Judson from Dallas County, Alabama, presented a Bible to the Marion Division Sons of Temperance at their Fourth of July celebration on behalf of her classmates. She then gave a speech to the crowd which was later published in the *Alabama Baptist* newspaper.¹⁶⁰ In New Orleans, Presbyterian Elizabeth Halsey Copes read a composition at her public exams entitled “The Public Reform: Or, Anti-License League,” which celebrated this organization’s efforts to shut down establishments that served alcohol. In her speech, Copes appealed specifically to Christians, reminding her audience of “the duty of every Christian, as a means to an end, to lend his aid to the Anti-License League” because “the temperance reformation is one of the essential preparations to the progress of Christianity.”¹⁶¹ Copes, like many of her fellow Protestant schoolgirls in the Gulf South, felt compelled by a Christian duty to take on a public voice and a public role in the benevolent reform movements of the day.

Female teachers and students also felt called to the Christian duty to grow the church, and expanding beyond their initial evangelizing to their students and classmates, they also organized to support their denomination’s home and foreign missionary efforts.

¹⁵⁹ Mary Elizabeth Whitfield to Nathan B. Whitfield, March 7, 1843, Whitfield Papers; Mary Emerson Taylor Diary, May 11, 1859, Sereno Taylor Papers; Emma Holcombe to Mary Anna Keener, July 11, 1848, Keener Family Papers; Wightman, Diary, March 5, 20, 1851; William R. Arick to Joseph S. Copes, May 16, 1840, Jane Copes to Joseph Copes, May 25, 1840, Copes Papers.

¹⁶⁰ "Celebration—Fourth of July," *Alabama Baptist*, July 7, 1848.

¹⁶¹ "Our Public Schools," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, January 1, 1853.

Annual conference reports throughout the 1840s and 50s listed the “young ladies” of Protestant academies as group donors to their denominations’ foreign missions to China, Africa, and India as well as missions closer to home in California and Native American territories.¹⁶² At the Methodist academy in Tuscaloosa, students not only donated their own money to the national Methodist missionary society but also worked to collect donations from members of their community.¹⁶³ Students and teachers from Episcopal schools often reported donations to their diocesan auxiliary to the “Episcopal Society for the Diffusion of Christian Knowledge,” an organization that sponsored missionary efforts within the diocese itself.¹⁶⁴ In 1860, influenced by their principal and his wife, Thomas and Elizabeth Savage, both of whom were former missionaries to West Africa, the students and teachers of Trinity Female Seminary in Pass Christian made a combined donation to the Episcopal “African Mission” of \$110.¹⁶⁵

At some of the larger female institutions in the region, students and teachers organized their own school missionary societies. Students at Judson Female Academy founded the Ann Hasseltine Judson Missionary Society in 1841, named (like the school

¹⁶² For examples, see Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention*, (Tuskegee, 1854), 30; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-second Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1853), 10; Eliza A Fox to William Winans, Winans Papers; Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Twelfth Session of the Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (New Orleans, 1858), 15; Jane Copes to Joseph Copes, April 23, 1837, Copes Papers; *Minutes of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Cahaba Baptist Association* (Marion: 1857), 22.

¹⁶³ Methodist Episcopal Church, *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Conference Office, 1838), 52.

¹⁶⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1855), 12, 88.

¹⁶⁵ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention*, 78; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Thirty-third Annual Convention*, 18.

itself) after the famous Baptist female missionary. Any students who were members of the Baptist Church could join, and while a female teacher, Lucy Smith, presided at meetings during the 1850s, older students were elected to officer positions including treasurer and corresponding secretary of the society. The missionary society met once a month on Sunday afternoons to discuss the latest news from Baptist foreign and home missions and to collect donations to support missionaries. Petty cash from current students, teachers, and alumnae added up and every year this society made one of the largest donations to the Alabama Baptist State Convention for missionary work. In 1859, the committee on education praised the society's contribution of \$265 as "a sum larger than that contributed by the great majority of our Churches, and by some of our Associations."¹⁶⁶

By 1857, the Baptist students at East Alabama Female College in Tuskegee had their own missionary society which also gave substantial annual donations to the state convention's mission funds.¹⁶⁷ By 1855, the Episcopal diocesan institute in Pass Christian, Mississippi had its own "Young Ladies' Missionary Society" which submitted donations specifically to Episcopal foreign missions.¹⁶⁸ Young women gained valuable

¹⁶⁶ Manly, *History of Judson College*, 24; "Judson Female Institute Missionary Society," *Alabama Baptist* November 11, 1846; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirty-seventh Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention*, (Tuskegee, 1859), 12; *ibid.*, *Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh Anniversary*, 5; Hamilton and Wells, *Daughters of the Dream*, 50. The Judson Missionary Society's missionary donations are listed in the minutes of every annual meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Convention from 1845 through the Civil War. For a northern equivalent, see the Mount Holyoke missionary society in Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 62-71.

¹⁶⁷ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirty-fourth Anniversary*, 27.

¹⁶⁸ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *Spirit of Missions* 20 (New York, 1855), 83, 212. See also American Baptist Home Mission Society *The Ninth Report of the American Baptist Home Mission Society* (New York, 1841), 60.

experience as members and officers of societies within the homosocial space of their schools, which prepared them for future leadership in female missionary and benevolence societies as adults.¹⁶⁹

After 1846, Judson students also had a personal connection to a missionary cause in Shanghai, China. That year, their teacher Eliza Sexton married a Baptist missionary, the Reverend J. Lewis Shuck, after meeting him at Judson when he came to give a talk on the importance of missions in China. Eliza Shuck became the first Southern Baptist foreign missionary, male or female, to come from the state of Alabama. Every year while Eliza Shuck was in Shanghai, her former students in the missionary society at Judson raised money to fund the education of a Chinese girl under Mrs. Shuck's care.¹⁷⁰

Shuck was one of several female teachers from the antebellum Gulf South who expanded the space of their religious calling to teach internationally by becoming missionaries and founding mission schools in foreign countries.¹⁷¹ Mary Jane McClelland converted to Methodism while teaching girls at the Pearl River Academy in Mississippi and after reading Phoebe Palmer's book on the Holiness movement, felt inspired to devote her life to missionary work in China.¹⁷² McClelland, like Baptist teachers in Alabama Eliza Sexton and Martha Foster, had to marry missionaries before they could serve in this capacity, but each highlighted their own personal calling to missionary work

¹⁶⁹ For adult female benevolence and missionary societies in the Gulf South, see chapter five of this dissertation.

¹⁷⁰ Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Twelfth Session*, 15.

¹⁷¹ Anya Jabour argues that many southern female teachers saw teaching itself as a form of missionary work, in *Scarlett's Sisters*, 105.

¹⁷² Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 4:215-219.

rather than their husbands'. As Martha Foster declared after having a visionary spiritual experience in 1849, "I believe it is the will of God that I should become a missionary."¹⁷³ For Foster, teaching girls in an academy in Alabama was only preparation for her larger purpose of bringing Christian teachings and the message of salvation to the new space of "a heathen land."¹⁷⁴

Of all the Protestant denominations, Baptist female academies in the Gulf South were the most invested in foreign missionary work. Not only did they lead the way in donations and organized missionary societies, but they also encouraged their students to become missionaries themselves. Judson trustees celebrated Shuck's decision to become a missionary, not just because she had "consecrated her life to the service of Christ" but because "this event has awakened among teachers and pupils an evident increase of interest in the cause of missions, and we indulge the hope, that in no distant day, some of the daughters of the South, educated in the Institute, will follow the example of this beloved teacher."¹⁷⁵ Likewise, in 1851, Mary Washington College in Pontotoc, Mississippi encouraged Baptists to send their daughters to school there by highlighting their graduates' potential service to the church as missionaries: "you know not the high destiny that awaits them . . . that benevolent daughter dening [sic] in arduous duty, over the benighted mind of the degraded heathen, dispelling the gloom that surrounds them,

¹⁷³ Crawford, Diary, November 20, 1849, Crawford Diaries.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., May 12, 1851.

¹⁷⁵ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-second Anniversary*, 13.

dispensing the light of gospel truth . . . ”¹⁷⁶ When the Southern Baptist Convention suspended its session in 1851 to allow newly commissioned missionary teacher Martha Foster Crawford speak, she told the delegates of Alabama, “when you return to our dear state tell her daughters that a sister has gone forth, rejoicing in the privilege of spending her life in a heathen land, and hopes to [be] joined by some of their numbers.”¹⁷⁷ Even though the majority of students would never become foreign missionaries themselves, they spent their formative years at institutions that encouraged their donations and public activism in missionary causes and they watched some of their teachers follow a religious calling into this work. Their schools affirmed both “missionary” and “missionary society member” as acceptable and honorable identities for southern Protestant women.

Female students and teachers also supported a missionary cause much closer to home that was crucial to white southern identity as benevolent Christian slaveholders: the mission to the enslaved. They sent donations to help supply missionaries to plantations in their states and also drew the connection between supporting their denomination’s missionary efforts in Africa and their pro-slavery Christianity message at home; in both cases they saw their donations as part a paternalistic effort to improve the lives of Africans.¹⁷⁸ One Methodist teacher in Louisiana, Laura Goodwyn, dreamt of becoming a

¹⁷⁶ P.H. Rodests, W. H. Holcombe, William Young, "To the Friends of Education in Mississippi and the Adjoining States," *South Western Baptist*, April 2, 1851. For another example, see "Martha Foster Crawford," *South Western Baptist*, April 23, 1851.

¹⁷⁷ Crawford, Diary, May 9, 1851, Crawford Diaries.

¹⁷⁸ E.J. Hamill, "Treasurer's Report, in account with the Alabama Conference Missionary Society," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 1, 1860; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 20, 83; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirty-fourth Anniversary*, 27; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention*, 78; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-first Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1852), 11. See also Martha Foster Crawford’s diary

missionary in Africa, but when that was not feasible she turned to writing a column for women in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*. Under the pseudonym of Lizzie Newton, she published articles encouraging female slaveholders to bring their enslaved laborers to church and read the Bible to them during the week.¹⁷⁹ Mary Wall, who ran her own female academy in Clinton, Louisiana, also opened a Sunday school for her own and her neighbor's enslaved laborers which she conducted for some twenty years leading up the Civil War.¹⁸⁰ These female teachers who exemplified this Christian duty to the enslaved, a duty which in turn justified black enslavement as "benevolent," were role models for their students—the future plantation mistresses of the Gulf South.

Big, Little, Urban, Rural: Geographic Variations

Certainly not every female school in the antebellum Gulf South had their own missionary society or even regular preaching on Sundays. The religious culture of an institution often depended not only on its denominational affiliation but also on its size and location. The extensive career of Jane Copes, who taught throughout the Gulf South in cities, towns, and in remote rural communities, offers an excellent example of how environment shaped what kinds of religious roles were available to both teachers and students. In the fall of 1842, Jane Copes, a native of Maryland and teacher in Mississippi since 1837, took a job at "Reverend Lawrence's School" in Vicksburg. Vicksburg had a

where she entered an essay contest sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Convention on the topic of "duties of Christian masters to servants," in Crawford, Diary, April 14, 1850, Crawford Diaries.

¹⁷⁹ Lizzie Newton, "Plain Talk for Christians," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 22, 1851; "Lizzie Newton," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 18, 1852.

¹⁸⁰ Mary Winans Wall, essay in *The Gospel Among the Slaves: A Short Account of Missionary Operations Among African Slaves of the Southern States*, comp., W.P. Harrison (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), 371-372.

Presbyterian church in town which she attended with the music teacher, a “Mrs. McClelland,” and many of their students. McClelland became a close friend, teaching Copes sacred music lessons in their spare time. Copes also developed a close friendship with the Reverend Lawrence’s wife, Sarah, who served as the principal of the Presbyterian Sunday school and gave Copes her own Sunday class to teach. This Sunday school had over ninety students and the teaching staff was large enough that Sarah Lawrence held regular teacher meetings to coordinate their work. On the Fourth of July in 1843, their Sunday school marched alongside the Baptist and Methodist Sunday schools in a temperance parade to the church, amounting to over two hundred scholars. Copes was a temperance society member and she and some of her older students sang in the choir for their event at the church and listened to multiple Presbyterian preachers give rousing temperance speeches to a crowd of over seven hundred people. Copes also joined the Vicksburg Benevolent Sewing Society, a multi-denominational women’s organization which helped raise money for benevolent causes by selling handmade items at fairs. Copes helped the Vicksburg society coordinate with the Jackson Ladies’ Sewing Society, where her sister-in-law was a member, and Copes and her students’ sewing projects were sold at a Jackson fair to help their society raise funds for a new Presbyterian church in Jackson. Urban Vicksburg already had the religious infrastructure in place of churches, Sunday schools, and benevolent societies and Copes was able to take advantage of all of the spaces available to her as a teacher to serve her church and include her students in the larger religious culture of the town.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Jane H. Copes to Joseph S. Copes, October 22, 1842, November 9, 1842, February 22, 1843, March 31, 1843, April 20, 1843, June 3, 1843, July 4, 1843, Copes Papers.

In the spring of 1844, Copes was hired to establish her own school in the rural neighborhood of China Grove in the middle of Mississippi just west of Canton—an area which lacked the religious infrastructure she was accustomed to in Vicksburg. There was no regular preaching to take her students to, nor a Sunday school or benevolent society in place. At first, Copes interpreted her rural isolation as divine Providence—“all sent in merely to correct me for my sins”—but she also took it upon herself to create spaces for a communal religious culture for her students. She reported to her brother, a doctor near Jackson, that her students were “anxious to have a Sabbath school but we have no books or teachers convenient,” so she introduced Bible reading from her own Bible into their regular curriculum and had students memorize passages over the weekend. She also invited interested schoolgirls over to her house in the evenings to say hymns and prayers with her, turning her private home into a homosocial religious meeting space. The girls “appear very happy to have some one to teach them,” Copes declared, and she felt happy to be useful: “I often think dark and thorny is the desert and if we should prove to be Christians at last it wont be as terrible after all . . . to be peacefully useful in our circle.”¹⁸²

Jane Copes did not stop there; she also made repeated requests of her brother to help her bring a Presbyterian preacher to China Grove, and when they succeeded, she was the one who scheduled preaching appointments and took credit: “I have been trying to do something toward the promotion of the gospel since I came and [now] there is a change for the better.” She also had her brother mail her religious tracts which she turned into a circulating library for her students. Many were temperance tracts, and Copes used this to

¹⁸² Jane H. Copes to Joseph S. Copes, April 28, 1844, June 4, 1844, Copes Papers.

singlehandedly jumpstart a temperance society among her students, writing a pledge her students signed and encouraging the boys' school to join as well. Her mixed-gender temperance society became so popular that she had to ask her brother to send a copy of their constitution from the Jackson temperance society because "there are some adults who have expressed a wish to join" and she wanted to make her society official. Copes invited a Presbyterian preacher to give temperance addresses at their meetings, and when a revival took place in China Grove and many of her students and their parents converted, she declared, "we attribute it to the Temperance society and the tracts in a great measure. They tell many examples, has been a great help to them and they often express thankfulness to me for the interest I have taken in them in trying to instruct them and pray with and for them." Like rural Episcopal teachers Ann Hampton and Judith Slaughter, Jane Copes had to take the initiative when the neighborhood around her school lacked a strong religious culture, but that also meant she led the way and took the credit when the church grew under her watch. It was hard work, but she felt rewarded in this calling, telling her brother in a letter about the revival, "may you be happy and in order to be so live in the path of duty as nearly as you can know the will of God. I intend to try to study his will for the future."¹⁸³

Lacking a religious network in China Grove, Copes' family connections in Jackson were crucial to her finding both a preacher and religious literature, but she was the one responsible for developing the infrastructure of a religious community in person. While certain religious and benevolent organizations were not available to a rural teacher

¹⁸³ Jane H. Copes to Joseph S. Copes, May 20, 1844, June 4, 1844, June 17, 1844, November 22, 1844, March 16, 1845, June 11, 1845, Copes Papers.

and Copes often lacked the adult female religious friendships of a larger or urban school, if she took things into her own hands, she could find powerful religious identities as organizer, exhorter, advisor, and leader, not just in her school, but for her entire neighborhood—male and female.¹⁸⁴

Christian Life After School

When students left these Protestant female academies, some followed the example of their teachers and became educators themselves, some wrote for religious newspapers, and a few even became foreign missionaries.¹⁸⁵ Most of these students, however, followed the traditional path of southern womanhood—married, had children, and took on the domestic responsibilities of Christian motherhood. Many younger teachers eventually left their careers behind and did the same. Officially, these academies remained conservative institutions that always saw as their chief mission a Christian republican motherhood education. Still, while none advocated for students to completely reject a traditional domestic life, they nevertheless offered an environment—a space for religious practice—where adding to that domestic life more public religious roles was not only acceptable but encouraged as part of female Christian duty. As was said of Methodist Mary Bowman, a graduate of Elizabeth Female Academy in Mississippi, these

¹⁸⁴ Anya Jabour describes teaching as an opportunity for rural southern women to engage in benevolent work since they lacked access to urban charitable organizations. She also notes how common this feeling of isolation was for rural female teachers, but not what women might have done to deal with isolation, especially through religious practice, in *Scarlett's Sisters*, 102-105.

¹⁸⁵ "Southern Teachers—The Graduating Class of Centenary Institute," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 30, 1860; "Lizzie Newton," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 18, 1852; Letter to Ellen Howe from "The Literary Editor of the Field and Fireside," June 9, 1860, Howe Papers; Caroline Lee Hentz to Mrs. Stafford, March 5, 1851 Hentz Papers; "Orrville Institute, Orrville, Dallas County, Ala.," *South Western Baptist*, May 5, 1851; "East Alabama Female College," *South Western Baptist*, August 16, 1855; Mary Winans Wall, "The Mother of Female Colleges," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 19, 1890; "Sparta Masonic Female Academy," *Louisiana Baptist*, February 21, 1856.

women after leaving school continued to ask, “what can I do for the Sunday-school, for ‘my preacher’ and for the poor.”¹⁸⁶ Having spent their formative years within the space of these academies, surrounded by female mentors who gave them opportunities to act on their faith in and outside of the classroom, they left school with a larger set of expectations for their future religious lives. At the same time as they served the church as mothers and wives, they could become Sunday school teachers for white or enslaved children; attend and exhort at revivals; fundraise for benevolent and missionary causes; join choirs, temperance societies, and prayer meetings; and find and create religious networks with other Protestant men and women in their communities. Some would even continue to reunite with their former classmates and teachers at annual denominational meetings and at camp meetings, attending with their families and spouses but recreating their old female communities from school within the homosocial spaces of meals, prayer groups, and preaching events.¹⁸⁷ The young women who graduated on the eve of the Civil War left school expecting rich public religious lives outside of the home, and like the generation of women before them, they would continue to invest their time and money into the benevolent cause of female Christian education, solidifying Protestant churches’ presence in the Gulf South.

¹⁸⁶ Wall, "The Mother of Female Colleges," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 19, 1890.

¹⁸⁷ Frances Jane Bestor Robertson, "Diary of Frances Jane (Bestor) Robertson, 1851-1874," October 25, 1851, November 6, 1852, in *American Women's Diaries*, segment 2, Southern Women, Jane Dupree Begos, comp., [microfilm] (New Canaan, CT: Readex, 1990), reel 2; L.M. Atkinson to Mary Elizabeth Whitfield, December 10, 1844, Whitfield Papers.

CHAPTER TWO

Nurseries of Female Piety and Benevolence: The Gulf South's Free and Enslaved Sunday Schools

Perhaps in no one field out of the family has woman been more largely, usefully, or successfully employed than in the Sunday School. In this, from its very origin, has she been its principal laborer . . . and if the religious instruction of our children is to be committed to others than their parents, to whom shall we confide it more properly than to the pious females of our churches?

—*Alabama Baptist*

Although this excerpt praising women's involvement in the American Sunday school movement originally appeared in an article in New York City's *Christian Intelligencer*, the editors of the *Alabama Baptist* re-printed the article in 1849 because the sentiment also applied in the Gulf South.¹ As with the female academy movement, women in both the North and the South were the majority of Sunday school teachers and crucial to the schools' success. Almost all of the scholarship on pre-Civil War Sunday schools, however, focuses on the earlier northern movement, which began in the 1790s in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York City and spread across New England and the mid-Atlantic.² When the late antebellum equivalent in the South is discussed at all, scholars have portrayed Sunday schools and women's involvement in them as part of the general decline and domestication of women's roles in the church. Many argue that Sunday

¹ "Female Labor in Sunday Schools," *Alabama Baptist*, May 22, 1849.

² Anne Boylan, *Sunday School: the History of an American Institution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 160-163; Page Putnam Miller, "Women in the Vanguard of the Sunday School Movement," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 58, no. 4 (Winter 1980): 311-325; Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 132-134.

school teaching was simply an acceptable extension of a Christian motherhood duty to instruct children and the space of the Sunday school classroom was an extension of the domestic sphere.³ In scholarship on Protestant Sunday schools for the enslaved, when the conversation extends beyond male missionaries, scholars focus on the white “mistress” instructing enslaved children in her plantation home. Again, this is interpreted as acceptable only because of a slaveholding ideology that the enslaved were “part of the family” and thus teaching Christianity to them was part of her domestic duty.⁴

In trying to fit white and black Sunday schools into this domestication narrative, scholars have downplayed their significance in ensuring church growth and the success of mainstream pro-slavery Protestantism in the South, minimizing women’s contributions in the process. Sunday schools were, in fact, second only to preaching in terms of successful evangelizing efforts. They were also the most accessible and prolific avenue for women’s public religious activism in the South, particularly in the more recently settled Gulf South. With fewer barriers to entry for both students and teachers than private female academies, women from across the usual divides of socio-economic, marital, racial, and freedom status found public spaces to act out a religious duty to evangelize and contribute to their churches’ missions. Through Sunday school work, women in both the

³ Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 135-136; Kierner, *Beyond the Plantation Household*, 186; Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 180-181; Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home*, 174-198. Randy Sparks argues that it “is difficult if not impossible to measure” whether new organizations like Sunday schools “benefited or further restricted women” but does say they “may have encouraged greater segregation by gender in the expanding number of auxiliary religious organizations,” in *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks*, 107.

⁴ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 30-35; Miller, “Women in the Vanguard,” 321; Mathews, *Religion and the Old South*, 116; Vaughn, *Bishops, Bourbons and Big Mules*, 23-25; Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 166; Blake Touchstone, “Planters and Slave Religion in the Deep South,” in *Masters and Slaves*, ed. Boles, 99-126; Nguyen, “Active Faith,” 110-111; Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 129.

urban and rural Gulf South—in churches, homes, orphanages, and schools—not only shaped the next generation of church members, but also became founders, principals, directors of missionary efforts, authors of teaching materials, and publicly recognized leaders in their churches.

Women and the Early Sunday School Movement

The first attempts to establish Sunday schools in the Gulf South came from northern missionaries, particularly in connection with the American Sunday School Union, a multi-denominational society founded in Philadelphia in 1817 with strong ties to the Presbyterian Church. While early missionaries came in the 1820s, the ASSU officially began its “Mississippi Valley Enterprise” in 1830, sponsoring missionaries who would organize non-sectarian “union” Sunday schools west of the Alleghenies from Michigan to Louisiana.⁵ Like their itinerant preaching counterparts, these early Sunday school missionaries complained about the particular challenges of working in the region: long distance travel to scattered, rural populations; lack of interest and education among potential teachers; and in the Catholic stronghold of southern Louisiana, resistance to Protestant teaching.⁶

In order to meet these challenges, male missionaries in the 1830s often depended on educated, northern-born women who immigrated to the Gulf South to organize and maintain Sunday schools in their absence. In letters written to the corresponding secretary

⁵ American Sunday School Union, *Eighth Annual Report of the American Sunday School Union* (Philadelphia, 1832), 25; Barbara A Sokolosky, “Historical Sketch,” in *American Sunday School Union Papers, 1817-1915: A Guide to the Microfilm Collection*, (Sanford, NC: Microfilm Corporation of America, 1980), 6.

⁶ John Ogden to F.W. Porter, April 15, 21, 1834, June 30, 1834, S.W. Hutton to Mr. F.W. Porter, May 9, 1853, Incoming Correspondence and Reports, American Sunday School Union Papers, 1817-1915, PCHS.

in Philadelphia in 1834, ASSU missionary, John Ogden, praised a “Mrs. Brown” in Bayou Chicot, Louisiana who was “raised in the eastern states,” and a group of woman “raised in the north” now living in Alexandria, Louisiana who alone were “engaged in the good work” of Sunday school organizing and teaching.⁷ In 1833, the ASSU missionary Hillery Patrick credited a “Mrs. Allsbury,” “a pious intelligent New England lady” for single-handedly keeping a Sunday school going in Westville in southern Mississippi. Residents of the small town told Patrick, “since Mrs. Allsbury has left us, our School has died away.” When Allsbury moved to Augusta in Perry County, Mississippi, she “kept up” another Sunday school. Patrick saw her labors throughout Mississippi as exemplary for both men and women trying to organize Sunday schools despite the challenges of the region, writing to Philadelphia that “the history of the labors of this Lady, as will appear from this, will show, what the exertion of a single individual may do in the midst of much inefficiency, want of interest, and declension all around.”⁸ As with female academies, the earliest efforts to establish Sunday schools in the Gulf South depended on educated, northern-born women.

At the same time, many northern women who came to the Gulf South to teach in female academies or co-educational elementary schools also became involved in union and early individual church Sunday schools that included more than just their weekday students. Alabaman Sarah Haynesworth Gayle wrote in 1830 of a northern Episcopal woman, Julia Osborne, who taught young girls in the academy in Tuscaloosa during the

⁷ John Ogden to F.W. Porter, April 21, 1834, John Ogden to F.W. Porter, June 30, 1834, American Sunday School Union Papers. See also, Anne Boylan, “Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Women in Sunday Schools,” *Feminist Studies* 4 (1978): 72.

⁸ Hillery Patrick to F.W. Porter, December 31, 1833, American Sunday School Union Papers.

week and then taught at a multi-denominational Sunday school on Sunday.⁹ Caroline Poole, a Presbyterian born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, not only taught a day school for boys and girls in Monroe, Louisiana throughout the 1830s, but she also founded a Sunday school in 1836 with the help of several other female neighbors who were also born and educated in New England. After running the Sunday school by themselves for over a month which met alternately between her school house and the courthouse, the local Presbyterian minister made a special visit to her house and, as she described it, pledged he “will assist me” in organizing the Sunday school so that it was officially in connection with his church. The male minister became the Sunday school superintendent, but it was this group of northern women, led by the local female teacher, who founded the school, recruited its students, and actually taught the classes. Poole’s Sunday school continued to meet every week, making it more consistent than any Protestant preaching in town.¹⁰

Caroline Poole’s connection with the local Presbyterian preacher in Monroe, Louisiana is exemplary of the growing interest among southern Protestant clergy at the time for their own denominational Sunday schools that would teach their church principles. As early as 1834, the Sabine Baptist Association in Louisiana urged its preachers to establish their own Baptist Sunday schools in their churches.¹¹ By the 1840s, widespread denominational organizations and individual clergy in the Gulf South began pushing for their own Sunday schools. Annual meeting minutes from this decade are

⁹ Sarah Haynsworth Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle, 1827-1835, A Substitute for Social Intercourse*, ed. Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins and Ruth Smith Truss (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 128.

¹⁰ Caroline B. Poole, "A Yankee School Teacher in LA, 1835-1837: The Diary of Caroline B. Poole," James A Padgett, ed., *Louisiana Quarterly*, (July 1937): 651-679.

¹¹ John T. Christian, *History of the Baptists in Louisiana* (Shreveport, LA: Louisiana Baptist Convention, 1926), 127.

filled with reports that stressed the evangelizing power of Sunday schools and the religious duty of ministers to establish their own, as well as bemoaning the challenges to do so in the Gulf South, echoing the same complaints of earlier northern missionaries.¹²

Southern clergy in the 1840s were not only rejecting ASSU non-sectarian principles, but they were also growing suspicious of any northern organization, Sunday school tract, or teacher who might pose an abolitionist threat to the institution of slavery.¹³ As part of this rejection of northern influence, Protestant denominations in the Gulf South began to look to southern women to take over as teachers and organizers. First this meant southern women educated at northern schools, like the Presbyterian Reverend James Smylie's daughter, Amelia, who attended school in Philadelphia and wrote to her father, after attending "a course of lectures to the S.[unday] School teachers of Phil'a'a," that she hoped now "to be prepared to assist you when I return" to Amite County, Mississippi.¹⁴ Another option was to seek help from the East Coast South, as when an Episcopal woman from Charleston, South Carolina visiting her relatives in

¹² Sunday School Report, 1846, Crystal Springs Circuit, Quarterly Conference Records, Z/0111.000/S/Box 1, MDAH; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 13 (New York, 1848), 73; Mississippi Baptist State Convention, "Report on Sabbath Schools," in *Proceedings of the Eighth Anniversary of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (Vicksburg, 1844); Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Sixteenth Anniversary of the Baptist State Convention in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1839), 7; Minutes, vol. 2, Presbytery of East Alabama Minutes, 1854-1861, PCHS, 124; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 6 (New York, 1841), 297; "New Orleans District Sabbath School Union Report," December 1851, Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Conference Committee Records.

¹³ S.W. Hutton to F.W. Porter, May 9, 1853, S.B. Cleghorn to R.B. Westbrook, June 3, 1857, American Sunday School Union Papers; Fields Bradshaw to Absalom Peters, November 10, 1835, Correspondence, Alabama, American Home Missionary Society Records (hereafter cited as AHMS), Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA (hereafter cited as Amistad); Boylan, *Sunday School*, 39. See also : Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 127.

¹⁴ Amelia Smylie to James Smylie, December 23, 1826, Smylie-Montgomery Family Papers, LLMVC.

Lafayette, Alabama gathered together over seventy children in town in 1838 and “taught them through the summer on the plan of our [Episcopal] Sunday schools” used in her hometown. Upon leaving, she turned the class, already set up along southern and Episcopal principles, over to the congregation and sent them copies of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer to use.¹⁵ While some northern women continued to teach Sunday school in the Gulf South, making sure to avoid expressing dangerous “northern sentiments,” most of the mainstream denominations were transitioning to local teachers.¹⁶

The rise of female academies and day schools in the Gulf South in the 1840s and 1850s was crucial to this shift to southern-born and southern-educated female Sunday school teachers. Not only was it very common for female teachers at these academies to work on the weekends as Sunday school teachers at local churches, but also many academy teachers began their teaching careers in the Sunday school.¹⁷ Academy students as well, educated in a denominational curriculum, also led the way in becoming Sunday school teachers once they graduated, a position that could be held alongside traditional domestic duties like getting married and having children.¹⁸ When a Presbyterian female academy was planned for Bayou Chicot, Louisiana, even John Ogden, the ASSU missionary, recognized how helpful having locally educated teachers would be for the

¹⁵ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 3 (New York, 1838), 105-106.

¹⁶ “Biography, Mrs. Mary Janette Foster,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 1, 1850.

¹⁷ Crawford Diary, May 9, 1847-October 6, 1847, Crawford Diaries; Wightman Diary, March 8, 1851, July 31, 1852; “Obituaries,” *South Western Baptist*, December 7, 1854; I.J. Roberts to F.W. Porter, June 15, 1833, American Sunday School Union Papers.

¹⁸ E.B. Teague, “Autobiography of Rev. Eldred Burder Teague, D.D., 1820-1902,” Elder Burder Teague Papers, MSS. 1390, W.S. Hoole Special Collections, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL (hereafter cited as Hoole), 28-32; “Obituary,” *South Western Baptist*, April 13, 1853.

cause: "this school I think will educate many young ladies, who will go from it with Christ in their hearts and who may assist in organizing many Sunday Schools in our state."¹⁹

Not all Sunday school teachers in the Gulf South were academy-trained women, however, as basic literacy was often good enough to instruct a class in Bible and catechism memorization. For young white women who could not afford to attend private Protestant schools or devote the time and energy to working there, teaching Sunday school offered a way take the Christian duty of instructing children to the public sphere on a scale that far surpassed the female academy movement and continued to grow in the decades leading up the Civil War. In 1834, there were only fourteen Protestant Sunday schools reported in the entire state of Louisiana, but by 1858 there were eighty-one Sunday schools just among the Methodists of the state, including 534 teachers and 3,638 scholars; the Episcopal Church in Louisiana that year had twenty-two Sunday schools with 141 teachers and 1,450 scholars.²⁰ Presbyterians reported a Sunday school in almost every church in the state and Baptists noted a strong interest in most of their churches despite a lower proportion of schools overall.²¹ In almost every Gulf South Sunday school across denominations, the number of female teachers either equaled or exceeded

¹⁹ John Ogden to F.W. Porter, July 4, 1835, American Sunday School Union Papers.

²⁰ American Sunday School Union, *Tenth Annual Report of the American Sunday School Union* (Philadelphia, 1834), 50; Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Thirteenth Session of the Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, (New Orleans, 1859), 41; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-First Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1859), 41.

²¹ Presbytery of Louisiana, Minutes, March 1860, Presbytery of Louisiana Records, 255; Louisiana Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Session of the Louisiana Baptist State Convention* (Mount Lebanon, 1859), 23. While Primitive Baptists dismissed Sunday Schools as non-Biblical, mainstream or missionary Baptist conventions encouraged churches to establish them.

that of male teachers. Throughout the nineteenth century, obituaries praised Protestant women for their antebellum service as Sunday school teachers, including some who taught for decades and many who continued to teach even while raising small children or running a household.²² It was common for a teaching staff to consist of one male minister and a few women from the church, often including or led by the minister's wife, as this was an acceptable way for her to publicly assist her husband with his pastoral duties.²³ While church leaders complained about the gender imbalance and lack of male volunteers, they ultimately relied on this female majority to keep the schools going and teach both male and female classes.²⁴

Women in Charge: Founders, Mangers, and Superintendents

As was the case with Caroline Poole, the New England schoolteacher in Clinton, Louisiana, sometimes women took the initiative to open Sunday schools without the help of missionaries or clergy. Teachers like Poole also had the advantage of already knowing the families in their communities who would most likely attend Sunday classes. This role of Sunday school founder, however, was not limited to northern emigrants; by the 1840s, southern-born teachers like Baptist Martha Foster Crawford, and Presbyterian Jane Copes

²² Obituaries," *South Western Baptist*, March 8, 1860; "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, January 28, 1854, March 4, 1854, May 6, 1854, June 18, 1856, July 30, 1858; Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 107; Robertson, *Diary*, June 12, 1859, *American Women's Diaries*.

²³ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1827), 5; Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 2:330; "Obituaries," *South Western Baptist*, March 1, 1860; Thomas H. Foster, "Biographical Sketch, Mrs. Rebecca S. Saunders," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 24, 1854; W.A.M., "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 22, 1855; John Ward Gurley, *Diary*, September 21, 1834, Gurley Family Papers, 1781-1887, MSS. 238, LARC.

²⁴ First Methodist Church, Columbus, MS, Conference Records, 1851, Mississippi State University Archives, Starkville, MS (hereafter cited as MSU); Annie Lee Millis, *Transcript of the Pea River Presbyterian Church, Barbour County, Alabama Session Book* (Shreveport: Department of Archives, 1959), 2; J. G. Jones to Benjamin Drake, May 6 1840, Benjamin M. Drake Papers, MSS. 09, Cain Archives.

organized with other women to establish Sunday schools in Alabama and Mississippi.²⁵ Even women who were not already teachers took this initiative when their communities lacked an interested or available minister. In 1845 in Baton Rouge, the vestry of St. James Episcopal Church asked the women of the church “to interest themselves in establishing a Sabbath School” until they could find a church rector to supervise, which the women did successfully.²⁶ In 1860, in rural Clark County, Alabama, Presbyterian Ann Heath, wrote, “I feel that I am on Missionary ground here,” when she founded a Sunday school in her neighborhood after noting that “we only have occasional preaching, and all of a different denomination from my own.”²⁷ While historian Cynthia Kierner argued that in the East Coast South before 1830 many rural Sunday schools “were wholly the products of women’s individual or collective effort,” in the late antebellum Gulf South, women were still needed to lead the way even in more settled towns including Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Pass Christian, Mississippi; and Montgomery, Alabama.²⁸

Scholars assume that before 1860—even in the North—administrative positions in Sunday schools were exclusively male, but this was not the case in the Gulf South.²⁹ Women were listed as “female superintendents” or “female department heads” for girls’

²⁵ Crawford, Diary, September 4, 1850, Crawford Diaries; Jane Copes to Joseph Copes, June 4, 1844, December 29, 1858, Copes Papers.

²⁶ Edward Bond, *St. James Episcopal Church, Baton Rouge A History, 1844-1994* (Baton Rouge: St. James Episcopal Church, 1994), 14.

²⁷ Ann M. E. Heath to Christopher Robert, February 27, 1860, AHMS.

²⁸ Kierner, *Beyond the Plantation Household*, 137-138; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1844), 19; Bond, *St. James Episcopal Church*, 14-16; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 16 (New York, 1851), 212-213.

²⁹ Boylan, “Evangelical Womanhood,” 72.

Sunday school classes in Attakapas and Bayou Chicot, Louisiana, and Woodville, Mississippi in the 1830s, but some women held the title of “superintendent” or “principal” for entire co-educational schools like in Vicksburg, Mississippi; Lowndes County, Alabama; and Livingston and Sabine Parishes in Louisiana in the 1850s.³⁰ Other women served as elected officials and committee members. Maria Dyer Davies was elected the treasurer of the Methodist Sunday school association in Macon, Mississippi in 1852, serving as the only woman on the board of officers.³¹ Six women in Chunnenugee, Alabama formed an all female “committee” that submitted an obituary and tribute to their fellow teacher, Mary Eliza Blackman, and the Tuscaloosa Union Sunday School attached to First Presbyterian Church appointed female teachers to serve on committees alongside men to raise money, give out awards, and make house calls to students.³²

The most common situation, however, was for women to be *de facto* in charge of Sunday school administration without holding an official title. Annual denominational conference records, particularly for Episcopal, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches in the Gulf South, repeatedly described women as “sustaining,” “supervising,” or

³⁰ S.R.T. to Benjamin Drake, May 31, 1837, Benjamin M. Drake Papers; John Ogden to F.W. Porter, November 6, 1833, *ibid.*, April 3, 1834, N.H. Bray to Dulles, June 30, 1855, American Sunday School Union Papers; Jane Copes to Joseph S. Copes, October 22, 1842, Copes Papers; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1848), 16.

³¹ Wightman, Diary, February 1, 1852.

³² "Tribute of Respect to a Sunday-School Teacher," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 12, 1856; "Minutes of the Teacher's Association of Tuscaloosa Union Sunday School, 1831-1848," First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa, Records, 1820-1948, MSS. 0518, Hoole; See also John Ogden to F.W. Porter, November 6, 1833, American Sunday School Union Papers.

“managing” Sunday schools in country, town, and city churches.³³ Minister’s wives were often called upon to fill this unofficial administrative position, particularly if their husbands were itinerant preachers or away for long stretches of time for denomination business, but many served all year round even when a minister was in residence.³⁴ As the Methodist Coles Creek Quarterly Conference described the situation in Rodney, Mississippi in 1844, the Sunday school “was conducted at present by the Ladies, and such Gentleman, as they can get to help them from time to time.”³⁵ Women conducted the school and men assisted. Baptist Sunday school teacher Martha Foster Crawford wrote in her diary in 1850 that their Sunday school did not have officers or a superintendent but they did not need one to be productive; she and Drusilla Maxwell “can teach those who go whether we have a superintendent or not.”³⁶ Some of the larger Sunday schools in towns had teachers’ meetings where female teachers were allowed to vote on officer positions, but more often women exerted informal influence over the Sunday school.³⁷ One Episcopal priest’s wife in Huntsville, Alabama, Eliza Lay, wrote to

³³ For examples, see: Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 48; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-third Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1854), 13; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 23 (New York, 1858), 170; Session Minutes, April 27, 1841, Lafayette Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, Records 1840-1930, PCHS; R.G. Latting to Joseph S. Copes, December 12, 1851, Copes Papers.

³⁴ Basil Manly Diary, Manly Family Papers, MSS. 0900, Hoole, 6; James A. Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 137; J.D. Adams, "Biographical," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, March 21, 1860; Gurley, Diary, September 21, 1834, Gurley Family Papers.

³⁵ Coles Creek Circuit Quarterly Conference, October 5, 1844, Cane Ridge, Bayou Pierre, et al (Fayette d.) Quarterly Conference Records, QC 93, Cain Archives.

³⁶ Crawford, Diary, September 7, 1850, Crawford Diaries.

³⁷ "Marion Sunday Schools," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 15, 1859; Wightman, Diary, January 4, 1852, February 1, 1852, February 7, 1852; Coles Creek Circuit Quarterly Conference Records in Cane Ridge, Bayou Pierre, et al (Fayette d.) Quarterly Conference Records, 199-200; Edward Fontaine

her husband away at Alabama's 1848 annual convention to tell him that the male superintendent of the Sunday school was sick and unable to open their Sunday school with prayer. Also, as Eliza explained, Mr. Shepherd, the interim priest, "says the ladies will frighten him off if they propose he should act. They [the ladies] propose that I should open it." Eliza was concerned her husband would not approve, "as it has been said that women must keep silence in the churches" and it is unclear if she performed this role, but the other female teachers certainly supported her right to do so and their influence was enough to intimidate the male guest preacher from acting.³⁸

Other female Sunday school teachers exerted influence behind the scenes by offering criticism or advice to their male colleagues. One woman in Natchez wrote to the Reverend Benjamin Drake, a presiding elder in the Methodist Church in Mississippi, to complain about her minister and his failure to perform his duties in respect to the Sunday school: "I think he ought to meet once a month at least, to suggest some improvements or to engage the Teachers and scholars by his presence," she wrote, urging Drake to use his influence to remind her minister of his duty.³⁹ Whether officially as superintendent or committee member, unofficially as manager or supervisor, or behind the scenes as advisor, when it came to the day-to-day operations of Gulf South Sunday schools, women routinely called the shots.

Journal, July 21, 1849, Edward Fontaine Papers, microfilm, Roll 324, MDAH; Gurley, Diary, October 19, 1834, Gurley Family Papers.

³⁸ Eliza Lay to Henry C Lay, February 19, 1848, Lay Papers.

³⁹ "Sister in Christ" to Benjamin Drake, November 15, 1856, Benjamin M. Drake Papers. For female teachers giving male colleagues teaching advice, see also: Mary Jane Chamberlain to Nathan Cornell, December 20, 1857, Chamberlain-Cornell Correspondence, 1853-1986, MSS. 310, Noel Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Shreveport (hereafter cited as LSUS); Elizabeth Copes to Joseph S Copes, March 18, 1858, Copes Papers; Clara Young to Robert Tweed, July 14, 1843, Robert Tweed Papers, MSS. 1894-z, SHC.

Growing the Church

Protestant clergy throughout the Gulf South depended on female volunteers to keep church Sunday schools in operation, and yet it was often the case that children attended Sunday school even more regularly than preaching or worship services led by the clergy. This was certainly true in the rural Gulf South where many churches shared visiting clergy that came only once or twice a month. As the Tuskegee Baptist Association urged in 1854, "if such churches would organize Sabbath Schools and meet every Sunday in that capacity it would, in a considerable degree, supply the deficiency arising from only monthly preaching," not just for children but for their parents who could attend as well.⁴⁰ Even when female teachers had to travel miles to reach their Sunday school classes they made this a priority, and several noted attending Sunday school class instead of going to hear preaching closer by.⁴¹ Maria Dyer Davies worried that when she moved outside of the town of Macon, Mississippi she would lose her religious community in the Methodist Sunday school, and so almost every week she found a ride to town, stayed with female friends, and taught her same Sunday school class for at least year after she moved.⁴² Even in more urban locations like Vicksburg or New Orleans, when preaching was canceled because a minister was ill or traveling, there were multiple lay teachers who could run Sunday school classes or fill in for each other. Parents in these cities also often chose to send their children to Sunday school instead of

⁴⁰ Tuskegee Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Tuskegee Baptist Association* (Tuskegee: 1854), 15. See also: Sophia Hays Diary, August 20, 1854, Hays-Ray-Webb Papers, MSS. 4, MSU; Sarah R. Wright and Esther G. Wright to Mary Wright, June 1855, Wright-Boyd Papers; Clitherall, Diary, September 7, 1856, Clitherall Diaries; Poole, "Yankee School Teacher in LA," 651-679.

⁴¹ I.J. Roberts to F.W. Porter, February 15, 1833, March 31, 1833, American Sunday School Union Papers.

⁴² Wightman, Diary, January 30, 1854-May 6, 1855.

a church service because it was specifically directed towards their age group.⁴³ In 1859 in New Orleans, the Presbyterian minister Thomas Markham attended a female Sunday school teachers meeting that met at the home of a “Mrs. Wilburn,” because he was concerned the teachers had been “placing Sab Sc [Sabbath school] work before ch[urch] Attendance.”⁴⁴ It is not surprising that women found more social and spiritual fulfillment as teachers in the Sunday school classroom than as passive attendees in male-led services. In all of these different locations throughout the Gulf South, female volunteers prioritized Sunday school teaching and were essential to creating a consistent church presence in their communities, whether they had regular preaching or not.

Women who prioritized their work in Sunday schools and spent hours preparing lessons and traveling to class often noted being motivated by a religious duty to do so. Clergy recruited women to be Sunday school teachers in annual addresses that highlighted their religious obligation “to employ the talents God has given them;” the diaries of Protestant female Sunday school teachers (like their female academy equivalents) are filled with prayers that they would fulfill their duties faithfully in training the next generation of church members; and obituaries celebrated any woman who “strove to make herself useful, and especially in the department of Sabbath-school labors was she zealous and successful.”⁴⁵ In 1857, the rector of Lafayette Presbyterian

⁴³ Martha Moss, Diary, January 21, 1854, Martha Moss Diary, 1853-1856, MSS. 5067, LLMVC; Mahala P. H. Roach, Diaries, transcripts, October 26, 1855, November 2, 1856, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers, MSS. 2614, SHC.

⁴⁴ Thomas Markham Diary, August 9, 1859, Thomas R. Markham Papers, MSS. 250, B:42, LLMVC.

⁴⁵ Cahaba Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Fortieth Anniversary*, 15; A.H. Mitchell, "Obituaries," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, December 5, 1860; *ibid.*, October 26, 1859. See also, Sarah Wright, Devotional Notebook, May 19, 1850, June 2, 1850, Wright-Boyd Papers; "Martha Foster

Church in New Orleans spoke to Sunday school teachers and praised them for accepting the “responsibilities and duties of y[ou]r high and holy calling,” and a Methodist teacher in Natchez once compared her work in the infant Sunday school to the challenges of missionary preachers in irreligious New Orleans—“great faith must be possessed” by both.⁴⁶ Lucila McCorkle of Talladega, Alabama certainly felt her Sunday school work could have long-lasting consequences, praying, “O God, graciously grant that my influence with them [students] may be felt even in eternity to the praise of thy glorious grace.”⁴⁷ Teaching Sunday school meant embracing an important and public religious vocation and many women took these responsibilities outside the home very seriously.

Male clergy and female Sunday school teachers alike recognized that Sunday schools were particularly “useful” spaces for growing their respective churches by encouraging and preparing students for conversion and church membership. While the early union Sunday school programs in the Gulf South were intended to teach non-sectarian Christian morality, over the course of the 1840s and 1850s denomination-specific Sunday schools became more popular as “nurseries of piety” that taught the specific catechisms and church principles of Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal faiths.⁴⁸ For evangelical denominations like the Baptist, Methodist, and

Crawford," *South Western Baptist*, April 23, 1851; Moss, Diary, July 3, 1855; Robertson, Diary, June 12, 1859, June 26, 1859, American Women's Diaries; White Sands Circuit, Covington District, Quarterly Conference Minutes, June 19, 1849, Cain Archives.

⁴⁶ Thomas R. Markham, "Sabbath School Discourse, Deut. 6:6,7, New Orleans, December 13, 1857," Markham Papers; Eliza Fox to Susan Drake, June 19, 1833, Benjamin M. Drake Papers.

⁴⁷ McCorkle, Diary, June 12, 1859, McCorkle Papers.

⁴⁸ "Minutes of the Teacher's Association," First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa Records, 2; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 6, 297; McCorkle Diaries, February 27, 1859, McCorkle Papers; "Church records including minutes of stewards meetings, 1853-1873," Felicity United Methodist Church, New Orleans, Records, LACUMC/02, Centenary; Mississippi

Presbyterian churches, newspapers and annual conference reports frequently credited Sunday schools for successful revivals, noting instances when almost all of the conversions at these events were current or former Sunday school scholars and teachers.⁴⁹ Episcopalians, on the other hand, attributed confirmations, the parallel coming-of-age rite to conversions, to the training students received in Sunday school classes.⁵⁰ Even more importantly, female Sunday school teachers were recognized in obituaries and church reports for their efforts to bring students to conversion, confirmation, or church membership.⁵¹ An Episcopal Sunday School in New Orleans, for instance, had female teachers leading the confirmation classes for older girls as part of the Sunday school.⁵² Female teachers also took credit for this role and blamed themselves when student conversion or confirmation did not happen. Presbyterian Lucila McCorkle in Talladega, Alabama wrote in her diary in 1847 that “my labors have not been in vain. Six of my class have professed publicly their faith in Christ.”⁵³ Sophia Hays of Attala County, Mississippi, on the other hand, repeatedly worried that she was not doing enough in her

Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Proceedings of the Sunday School Convention of the Miss. Annual Conference, Held in the City of Vicksburg, Miss., May 9-11, 1860*, (Vicksburg, 1860), 16-21.

⁴⁹ Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (New Orleans, 1840), 18; Gabriel Hawkins, "Revivals, Butler Circuit, Alabama Conference," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 27, 1856; J.W. Williams, "Alabama Conference, West Wood Station," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 27, 1859.

⁵⁰ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 3, 201-202.

⁵¹ For example, see Thomas H. Foster, "Biographical Sketch, Mrs. Rebecca S. Saunders," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 24, 1854.

⁵² Maria Inskeep to Fanny Hampton, April 29, 1861, Fanny Leverich Eshleman Craig Collection, MSS. 225, LARC.

⁵³ McCorkle, Diary, June 12, 1859, McCorkle Papers.

class: “had I conversed freely on the subject of soul’s salvation as I should have done, and then followed it up with earnest prayer?”⁵⁴ Sophia Blunt, of Tuscaloosa County, Alabama did not profess her conversion and join the Baptist Church until she was appointed to serve as a Sunday school teacher. As her future husband the Reverend E.B. Teague, explained, after being appointed, she “became so oppressed with the responsibility, upon reflection so deeply convinced of the unfitness for such work of an irreligious person, that she has no rest until she found peace in believing in Jesus.”⁵⁵ Before she could work to help her students convert and join the church, she had to model that conversion herself.

These anxieties over religious duty heightened with denominational competition. Presbyterian Mary Hutchison of Jackson, Louisiana was concerned that young people were jumping into the “excitement” of conversion in Methodist revivals without thinking it through, and so she and several female friends founded a Sunday school based on Presbyterian teachings that would prepare their students for a more thoughtful conversion and membership in the Presbyterian Church instead.⁵⁶ Martha Moss in New Orleans took it personally when she heard Emma, one of her scholars, had converted to Catholicism. In her diary she lamented her failings and made a pledge to try even harder for a Presbyterian conversion:

I have been a[n] unfaithful teacher and I have not warned her as I ought to have done. But I will strive to do my duty. I have sent for her to come and see me this week and O that the Lord will incline her to come but not my will but thine be done[.] O God

⁵⁴ Hays, Diary, September 5, 1857, Hays-Ray-Webb Papers.

⁵⁵ E.B. Teague, "Autobiography," Teague Papers, 28-32.

⁵⁶ Mary E. Hutchison to John Gurley, November 15, 1836, Gurley Family Papers; Gurley, Diary, September 21, 1834, *ibid.*

but one thing I desire that the path of duty may be made plain before me and that Emma may be numbered among the true followers of Christ.⁵⁷

Helping students make the “right” decisions about conversion and church membership was a central part of a Sunday school teacher’s religious duty, and women, through the language of resignation to divine will, asserted this public identity as evangelizers—a role usually reserved for male preachers.

The duty for female teachers to evangelize through Sunday school classes also extended to adults. Some churches offered separate adult Sunday schools, usually taught by male church leaders, but in some cases led by women. In 1861, Robert Alexander of northern Mississippi, for instance, noted attending a Methodist Sunday school where he “heard a tolerable good lesson from 4 or 5 girls in my class.”⁵⁸ More often, female teachers evangelized to the parents of students, who were encouraged to attend classes with their children. Some teachers, like Sophia Hays, saw their work with children in the Sunday school as the beginning of a chain reaction of conversions that would save the souls of parents and “in the end perhaps result in good to thousands.”⁵⁹ Others took a more personal approach to parents: in Greensboro, Alabama, Sarah Gayle often attended Julia Osborne’s Sunday school class with her children and Osborne used this as an opportunity to give Gayle religious books and encourage her to attend preaching events with her.⁶⁰ Another opportunity for evangelization to adults was at multi-denominational

⁵⁷ Moss, Diary, June 18, 1855.

⁵⁸ Robert Alexander, Diary, October 16, 1861, Robert Alexander Diary and Account Ledger, microfilm, Roll 36232, MDAH. For more on female led prayer meetings and adult Bible classes, see chapter three of this dissertation.

⁵⁹ Hays, Diary, March 7, 1858, Hays-Ray-Webb Papers.

⁶⁰ Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, 128, 169.

Sunday school fairs and individual school anniversary celebrations, some of which allowed women to give public speeches. At the anniversary celebration at McGhee Methodist Church in New Orleans in 1852, both female students and female teachers made addresses to a packed, mixed-gender audience and then encouraged that audience to donate money to the Sunday school cause.⁶¹

Teachers were also expected to make house calls to their students and encourage the parents to become church members. As Presbyterian Thomas Markham in his Sabbath school discourse in 1858 remarked, “visitation of the families of scholars . . . is yet the most blessed opportunity afforded to the Christian laity of preaching Christ crucified” and a way to evangelize to adults who may never attend church, “among a class whom the minister rarely if ever reaches.”⁶² This included visiting current students, especially if they had been absent that week, as well as evangelizing to potential new students and their families. The Tuscaloosa Sunday school connected to the First Presbyterian Church elected male and female “visiting committees” made up of teachers whose job was to visit and report on which children in town did not attend any Sabbath school.⁶³ When the Presbyterian Sunday school in Hernando, Mississippi had to be suspended for lack of membership in 1854, it was a group of women from the church that

⁶¹ "Sabbath School Anniversary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 8, 1852. See also "Sunday School Celebration," *Alabama Baptist*, June 17, 1843.

⁶² Markham, "Sabbath School Discourse," Markham Papers.

⁶³ "Minutes of the Teacher's Association," First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa, Records, 7-8, 10, 12-13.

volunteered to visit families around town and encourage them attend.⁶⁴ Female duty to evangelize did not end at the classroom door; it expanded out into the larger community. A public motherhood duty to evangelize to children became a way for women to evangelize to adults in the process, mimicking male missionary tactics through their house visits.

While Sunday schools were “nurseries of piety,” a female Bible class for teenage students could act as “a nursery for teachers.”⁶⁵ Many of the larger Protestant churches opened Bible classes, often taught by the same female teachers, in order to train young women how to teach their own Sunday school classes.⁶⁶ Some of these women attended Bible class as students and taught Sunday school at the same time. Even seasoned Sunday school teachers, however, would attend teacher meetings that helped create friendships between male and female colleagues. While most organizational teacher meetings were male-run, some allowed female teachers to speak publicly in mixed company in order to give reports on the status of their classes.⁶⁷ Prayer meetings designed specifically for teachers, on the other hand, were usually divided by gender, allowing women to meet together separate from their male colleagues to share their concerns and pray for their

⁶⁴ S.W. Hutton to F.W. Porter, January 9, 1854, American Sunday School Union Papers. For more examples, see: E.M. Avery to Joseph S. Copes, January 22, 1849, Copes Papers; Robertson, Diary, August 13, 1859, American Women's Diaries; Moss, Diary, March 6, 1854.

⁶⁵ Quotation from Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1851), 33. For a North Carolina example, see Hoffert, “Earnest Efforts to Be Friends,” 822.

⁶⁶ Wightman, Diary, January 12, 1851; “Tribute of Respect to a Sunday-School Teacher,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 12, 1856; Hays, Diary, March 7, 1858, Hays-Rays-Webb Papers; Moss, Diary, December 1, 1853; Markham, “Sabbath School Discourse,” Markham Papers. Anne Boylan makes a similar argument for Bible classes in the antebellum North, in “Evangelical Womanhood,” 69-70.

⁶⁷ “Marion Sunday Schools,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 15, 1859; “Minutes of the Teacher's Association,” First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa, Records, 7, 26.

classes.⁶⁸ In smaller, more rural churches, this kind of homosocial religious community was more informal, as women met together at each other's homes to prepare their Sunday school lessons, called on each other to serve as substitute teachers, and sought advice on teaching practices.⁶⁹ Thus domestic spaces served as public meeting spaces for women to share teaching advice and spiritually prepare for their class together through prayer and Bible reading. Sophia Hays of Attala County, Mississippi went down to visit the Fulton Street Church Sunday school in New Orleans in 1858 in order "to have the benefit of listening to Mrs. White's instructions to her class which I knew would be both highly interesting & profitable to me."⁷⁰ Female religious community formed not just between a teacher and her students—as scholars have already acknowledged—but also between adult female teachers through a shared space of the Sunday school, even, as in this case, across state lines.⁷¹

Sunday Schools and Female Benevolence

In order for Sunday schools to succeed, they also needed books, catechisms, and other teaching materials. Even in the early years of ASSU missionaries, women served as local contacts, distributing union Sunday school tracts to parents and teachers in their

⁶⁸ Session Minutes, November 8, 1860, Lafayette Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, Records; Session Minutes, December 27, 1852, First Presbyterian Church, Vicksburg Records, microfilm, Roll 36211, MDAH. For co-ed teacher prayer meetings, see "Minutes of the Teacher's Association," First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa, Records, 9, 28.

⁶⁹ Wightman, Diary, August 31, 1851; McCorkle, Diary, February 27, 1853, McCorkle Papers; Session Minutes, November 8, 1860, Lafayette Presbyterian Church, New Orleans Records; Hays, Diary, April 7, 1858, Hays-Ray-Webb Papers; Sarah R. Wright and Esther G. Wright to Mary Wright, March 1, 1858, June 1855, Wright-Boyd Papers.

⁷⁰ Hays Diary, April 25, 1858, Hays-Rays-Webb Papers.

⁷¹ Sparks argues that "Sunday schools provided some women and girls with the opportunity to meet together and create bonds of intimacy and affection without direct male supervision," but does not go into the detail of relationships outside of the classroom and between teachers themselves, in *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 107. For the antebellum North, see Boylan, "Evangelical Womanhood," 70.

neighborhoods and creating Sunday school libraries.⁷² In the 1840s, some southern churches still received donations from northern women, like “The Philadelphia Female Prayer Society,” which donated eighty Books of Common Prayer to the Sunday school at the Episcopal Church in Hernando, Mississippi.⁷³ When Gulf South church leaders began urging Sunday schools to adopt denomination-specific literature published by their own southern presses—and thus free from abolitionist influence—they relied on Gulf South women to take the place of northern female benevolence as donors and distributors.⁷⁴ In some cases individual women bought Sunday school books for a school or gave money and specified it be used for this purpose; in other cases women worked together to fundraise for Sunday school libraries.⁷⁵ In Alabama in the late 1840s, the Greensboro Female Benevolent Society made annual donations to the Sabbath school library at Salem Baptist Church and by the 1850s, the female sewing society attached to First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa was fundraising to make improvements to their own Sunday school

⁷² "Louisiana: Extract of a letter from a lady, dated New Orleans, March, 1826, to the Corresponding Secretary," *American Sunday School Magazine*, (Philadelphia, 1826), 136; Labbé, “Helpers of the Gospel,” 258.

⁷³ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 12 (New York, 1847), 70. See also, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Sixth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1844), 22.

⁷⁴ For examples of Gulf South churches calling for southern denominational Sunday school literature, see: “G.H. Martin to A.C. Dayton,” *Tennessee Baptist* (Nashville, TN), February 26, 1859; Aberdeen Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Sixteenth Session of the Aberdeen Baptist Association*, (Aberdeen, MS: 1859), 15; S.B. Cleghorn to R.B. Westbrook, June 3, 1857, American Sunday School Union Papers; Mississippi Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Proceedings of the Sunday School Convention*, 21; S.B. Cleghorn to R.B. Westbrook, June 3, 1857, American Sunday School Union Papers.

⁷⁵ "Obituaries," *Tennessee Baptist*, April 21, 1860; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-ninth Annual Convention*, 36; Fayette Circuit Quarterly Conference, March 1832, Quarterly Conference Records, QC 93, Cain Archives; "Only the Sunday School," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 25, 1854.

library.⁷⁶ Presbyterian women in Benton, Mississippi and La Belize, Louisiana, although not officially organized into benevolent societies, went door to door collecting money to establish Sunday school libraries in their communities.⁷⁷ Sometimes female teachers had to buy their own Sunday school books for their classes or request donations from their students.⁷⁸ As for tract distribution, southern women often worked informally as when rural teachers wrote to their female friends in towns with libraries or book depositories to request teaching materials like children's catechisms and religious tracts.⁷⁹ Edward Fontaine, rector of the Episcopal Church in Aberdeen, Mississippi had to write to his "cousin Susan . . . to aid us with books for S. School." Fontaine suggested she organize a book collection in her congregation in Columbus, Mississippi, "to furnish us with any they can spare."⁸⁰

Not only did the Gulf South need southern funds and distributors, but they also needed southern authors to write acceptable Sunday school literature. While this job was mostly reserved for men, Mary Anne Cruse of Huntsville, Alabama provides one example of a published female author of Sunday school books, including *The Little*

⁷⁶ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-Third Anniversary*, 17; *ibid.*, *Minutes of the Twenty-Fourth Convention*, 34; Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 83.

⁷⁷ S.W. Hutton to Mr. Campfield, March 9, 1853, S.B. Cleghorn to F.W. Porter, March 7, 1857, American Sunday School Union Papers. For the Piney Woods region of Mississippi, see: S.B. Cleghorn to R.B. Westbrook, June 3, 1857, *ibid.*

⁷⁸ "Sunday School Anniversary, Mobile," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 26, 1859; McCorkle, Diary, May 7, 1848, McCorkle Papers; Minutes, April 1843, First Baptist Church, Louisville, MS, Records, Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, Mississippi College, Clinton, MS (hereafter cited as MBHC).

⁷⁹ M. Byron to Margaret Butler, June 18, 1860, Margaret Butler Correspondence, MSS. 1068, LLMVC; Jane H. Copes to Joseph and Mary Ann Copes, April 13, 1844, April 9, 1858, Copes Papers; A.C. Dayton, "What More Can Be Done?" *Tennessee Baptist*, September 8, 1860; Clara Young to Robert Tweed, June 23, 1851, August 20, 1860, Tweed Papers.

⁸⁰ Fontaine, Journal, February 14, 1848, Fontaine Papers.

Episcopalian, or the Child Taught by the Prayer Book written in 1854 and *Bessie Melville* in 1858.⁸¹ Cruse, a Sunday school teacher at the Church of the Nativity, Huntsville, wrote these books in order “to imbue the minds and hearts of the young with a just appreciation of the value and excellence of the Book of Common Prayer.”⁸² Although published by the Episcopal press in New York, the books were used in homes and Sunday schools throughout the Gulf South and praised by local priests and Bishop Cobbs because of their southern Episcopal author and message.⁸³ In the *Little Episcopalian*, two young sisters not only learn to appreciate Episcopal liturgy, but their family also owns a plantation with caricatures of helpful and content enslaved laborers and they visit the slave quarters with their mother who gives Christian counsel to an enslaved woman and buys her a Bible and a Book of Common Prayer.⁸⁴ Even in fiction, white southern women were responsible for distributing books informally as gifts, to both white and black church members.

More often, women did not write their own Sunday school literature, but did act as advisors and arbitrators of what books were acceptable to teach. In 1858, the *Southwestern Baptist* newspaper of Marion, Alabama published a letter from “a pious and gifted lady” written to the Reverend E.B. Teague, in which she recommended “Basvard’s Infant Series,” writing, “I hope they will be adopted in our Sabbath School, as they seem

⁸¹ Janet Cornelius only highlights male authors of Sunday school literature and rising fears of abolitionist influence in the northern-based tract and Bible societies, in *Slave Missions and the Black Church*, 140-145.

⁸² Mary Ann Cruse, *The Little Episcopalian; or The Child Taught by the Prayer Book* (New York: General Protestant Episcopal Sunday School Union and Church Book Society, 1854), vi.

⁸³ Mary Anne Cruse to Henry C. Lay, June 1849, L.M. Anderson to Henry C Lay, April 1, 1855, N.H. Cobbs to Henry C Lay, July 18, 1859, in Lay Papers.

⁸⁴ Cruse, *The Little Episcopalian*, especially 109-115; 172-174.

to meet a demand that has long been existing.”⁸⁵ Some female teachers were appointed to the official role of “Sunday school librarian,” like Episcopalian Clarissa Leavitt Town of Baton Rouge who kept track in her diary of her work deciding which books their school needed, ordering them from New Orleans, cataloging the books at the church, and then “receiving and distributing books to the Sunday school schollars [sic]” who were allowed to check them out.⁸⁶ When this position did not exist, female teachers acted as informal librarians, determining which books they wanted to teach with and which they would give out to their students either to borrow or keep as gifts.⁸⁷ Without the support of white female teachers, Gulf South churches could have never ensured that Sunday schools stuck to denominational and pro-slavery texts.

Female benevolence and Sunday school teaching overlapped in other ways besides funding and distributing texts, most notably through Sunday school missionary societies. Protestant clergy throughout the Gulf South encouraged Sunday schools to organize their own missionary organizations as a way to teach children the importance of Christian benevolence and evangelization and also with the hopes that these children would inspire their parents to donate more to church missionary causes.⁸⁸ While historian

⁸⁵ “For the South Western Baptist,” *South Western Baptist*, January 28, 1858; See also E.H. Copes to Joseph S. Copes, May 28, 1858, Copes Papers.

⁸⁶ Clarissa E. Leavitt Town, Diary, May 10, 1853-June 12, 1853, Clarissa E. Leavitt Town Diary, MSS. 1376, LLMVC.

⁸⁷ Wightman, Diary, November 9, 1851; McCorkle, Diary, February 28, 1847, McCorkle Papers; Markham, Diary, August 23, 1859, Markham Papers; Moss, Diary, March 6, 1854.

⁸⁸ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-first Annual Convention*, 13; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Twenty-eighth Annual Convention*, 15; Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Eleventh Session*, 9; “Marion Sunday Schools,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 15, 1859; American Sunday School Union, *Thirty-third Annual Report of the American Sunday School Union* (Philadelphia, 1857), 44.

Beth Barton Schweiger noted women supervising Sunday school children's missionary meetings as a postwar phenomenon in Virginia, women in the Gulf South were doing so by the 1840s.⁸⁹ Some Sunday schools, like the one at Christ Church, Episcopal, Mobile, had separate missionary societies for the boys' and girls' classes, and others, like the Methodists in Marion, Alabama, had one missionary society, but appointed "mangers" from each of the boys and girls' classes to collect annual dues and report at monthly meetings.⁹⁰ When the Louisiana Methodist Conference met in 1855, church leaders approved a recommended constitution for "juvenile missionary societies," in which the "board of managers" would include "one male and one female teacher, five boys and five girls."⁹¹ It was assumed that female teachers and students would serve in official leadership positions in these missionary societies.

Annual denominational reports from the 1840s on, especially for foreign missionary funds, are filled with donations from Sunday schools raised by scholars and their teachers, some giving even more than their parent societies.⁹² As the Episcopal Board of Missions explained in 1851, "It may seem a strong statement, but nevertheless a tolerable intimate acquaintance with the matter enables us to make it confidently—that

⁸⁹ Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 159-160.

⁹⁰ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Thirteenth Annual Convention*, 17; "Marion Sunday Schools," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 15, 1859.

⁹¹ Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Tenth Session of the Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, (New Orleans, 1856), 9.

⁹² For examples, see: Minutes of the Tuskegee Baptist Association, 1855, box 7, folder 14, Alabama Church and Synagogue Records Collection, 1805-2008, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL (hereafter cited as ADAH), 2; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 8-26 (New York, 1843-1861); Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Fourteenth Session*, 11, 14, 37; Minutes, vol. 2, Presbytery of Tuscaloosa Minutes, 1835-1861, PCHS, 375-376.

the hope of our missions is in the Sunday Schools of the church.”⁹³ The most active Sunday school missionary societies with the largest donations came from the urban Gulf South, most notably among all the Protestant churches in New Orleans, Natchez, and Mobile. Some towns and villages, however, like Woodville and Raymond, Mississippi; Lowndesboro and Hayneville, Alabama; and Alexandria and New Iberia, Louisiana also had Protestant Sunday school missionary societies that contributed to their denominations’ annual collections.⁹⁴ Even when smaller, rural Sunday schools lacked official missionary societies, many still collected donations for their denomination’s missionary funds, like the Methodist Sunday schools at Columbus preaching station in Alabama and Waterproof station in Louisiana as well as Pine Ridge Presbyterian Church, north of Natchez.⁹⁵ In addition to foreign missions, Sunday schools in Louisiana also donated to German immigrant missions which had their own Sunday Schools in New Orleans and Sunday schools throughout the Gulf South donated to pay the salaries of

⁹³ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, "Letter from the China Mission to a Sunday School," in *The Spirit of Missions* 16, 106.

⁹⁴ T.W. D. to Benjamin Drake, November 21, 1853, Benjamin M. Drake Papers; Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes of the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Vicksburg, 1857), 19-20; Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes of the Alabama Conference of the M.E. Church, South* (Montgomery, 1856), 25; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 22 (New York, 1857), 246; Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Missionary Report and Minutes of the Eighth Session of the Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South*, (New Orleans, 1854), 13.

⁹⁵ Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes of the Alabama Conference of the M.E. Church, South*, (Columbus: Chapman & Smith, 1853), 13; Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Fourteenth Session*, 14; Session Records, March 1859-March 1860, March 1860-March 1861, Pine Ridge (Presbyterian) Church Records, microfilm, Roll 36094, MDAH.

missionaries to the enslaved.⁹⁶ Church leaders looked to Sunday schools to fund both foreign and domestic missionary causes and model this charitable giving for their parents.

Gulf South Sunday schools across mainstream Protestant churches also “adopted” foreign children by specifying that their donations were to be used for the religious instruction of a child in one of their denomination’s foreign missions, most commonly in West Africa, China, India, and Burma.⁹⁷ The Sunday school missionary society at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in New Orleans offered a donation “for the education of an African child, to be named Leonidas Polk” after the Bishop of Louisiana and Christ Church, Episcopal Juvenile Missionary Society in Mobile paid for the education of an African child renamed “Emma Alabama Jones” after a Sunday school teacher.⁹⁸ Part of this effort to “Christianize” children in foreign missionary schools was to give them English names and Sunday schools used this as an opportunity to honor the men and women who were active supporters of their missionary cause.

As was the case in Protestant female academies, some women went even further, like Emma Jones of Mobile, who saw Sunday school teaching as a stepping-stone to teaching at missionary schools in foreign countries. In 1845, Emma Jones, an unmarried

⁹⁶ Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Missionary Report and Minutes of the Eighth Session*, 13; *ibid.*, *The Missionary Report and Minutes of the Eleventh Session*, 12-13; Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes of the Alabama Conference of the M.E. Church, South* (Marion, 1859), 51; “Sunday School Enrollment Book, 1853-1890,” folder 6, Dryades Street Methodist Episcopal Church South, Records, LACUMC/02, Centenary.

⁹⁷ For examples, see: Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Proceedings of the Sunday School Convention*, 6; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 8-26; O.E. Blue, “Alabama Missionary Society,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, January 5, 1856; Session Minutes, July 7, 1859, Session Book 3, First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa Records; E.M. Avery to Joseph S. Copes, July 7, 1851, Copes Papers; Minutes of the Tuskegee Baptist Association, 1855, Alabama Church and Synagogue Records Collection, 2; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Thirteenth Annual Convention*, 17.

⁹⁸ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Sixth Annual Convention*, 21; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 9 (New York, 1844), 128.

woman from Alabama, went from teaching at a Sunday school whose missionary society sponsored the education of several foreign children to actually teaching at such a missionary school in Shanghai and receiving donations from her old class. Her bishop back in Alabama recognized the connection between her religious duties in Mobile and Shanghai, writing in his annual report that year, "May the blessing God rest upon that devoted and self-denying lady and may she prove as useful as she was in Mobile." Jones even founded an Episcopal school for female children in Shanghai in 1852.⁹⁹

Certainly the majority of female Sunday school teachers in the Gulf South did not follow in Emma Jones' footsteps, but they did support women like Jones in their Christian education missions. In 1838, Mrs. Sarah Holloway of the Baptist Sunday school at Palestine, Hinds County, Mississippi donated \$11.62 to "Mrs. Wade's school in Burmah" and the Methodist Sunday school in Auburn, Alabama gave money "to aid Mrs. Lambeth in China Mission" in 1859.¹⁰⁰ Church leaders recognized that Sunday schools could serve as a training grounds for both female teachers and students who would go on to become missionaries. As the Cahaba Baptist Association in Alabama reported in 1856, "The Missionary and Sabbath School enterprises are, in spirit, almost inseparably [sic] connected together and many the larger portion of . . . our missionaries, both male and

⁹⁹ "History of Christ Church, Taken from Volume Four of Christ Church Parish Register, 1883," in Christ Church, Mobile Records, Episcopal Diocese of Alabama Records, MSS. AR1046, Birmingham Public Library Archives, Birmingham, AL (hereafter cited as BPL); Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1845), 13; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 12, 256-257; *ibid.*, *The Spirit of Missions* 11 (New York, 1846), 210. See also Barry Vaughn, "The founder of our work for women": Emma Jones of Mobile and Shanghai," presented at the Alabama Historical Association Annual Meeting, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, April 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (Natchez, 1838), 24; Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes of the Alabama Conference* (1859), 52.

female, at home and abroad, received their early training and first impressions in the Sabbath School.”¹⁰¹ At other Sunday schools, students paid to have their female teachers made into life members of the parent missionary societies for their denomination’s state and national missionary organizations.¹⁰² Through Sunday school missionary societies, female teachers served as models of Christian benevolence to their students and encouraged this duty to support missionary causes in the future male and female leaders of the church.

Female Sunday school teachers in the Gulf South did not necessarily have to look outside of their own states (or local communities) to find opportunities to offer Christian education to those deemed less fortunate. Not only did they make house calls to visit absentee students and church families, but female teachers also led the way in visitations to poorer residents to recruit Sunday school scholars. “Respectable” female teachers thus justified crossing class barriers into “unrespectable” physical spaces occupied by poorer families as the means to evangelizing to their children.¹⁰³ Protestant women also collected and distributed books and “suitable clothing” for children who might not otherwise be able to attend. Some women made individual donations and others made collective contributions like Tuscaloosa Female Benevolent Society which donated books

¹⁰¹ Cahaba Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Thirty-ninth Anniversary of the Cahaba Baptist Association* (Marion, AL, 1856), 16.

¹⁰² Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Fifteenth*, 13; Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes of the Alabama Conference* (1856), 25; *ibid.*, *Minutes of the Alabama Conference of the M.E. Church, South* (Montgomery, 1858); 44.

¹⁰³ As historian Marise Bachand has argued, in antebellum southern cities like Charleston and New Orleans, “often animated by religious fervor, benevolence brought ladies into unrespectable spaces they would not have visited otherwise,” in “Gendered Mobility and the Geography of Respectability in Charleston and New Orleans,” *Journal of Southern History* 81, no. 1 (February 2015), 54. For this boundary crossing in female benevolence societies, see chapter five of this dissertation.

and shoes for poor Sunday school scholars in town in 1860.¹⁰⁴ Thus even women who did not teach were able to use the Sunday school cause as a means to exercise their public Christian duty to show charity to the less fortunate, claiming superior religious and social status in the process.

Some churches, especially in towns and cities in the Gulf South, organized separate Sunday charity schools that taught a combination of religious instruction and basic literacy for children labeled “poor,” “deserted,” or “destitute.” While previous scholars have assumed that these Sunday schools for the poor only existed in the urban North and even then mostly before 1820, women in the Gulf South made these denominational charity Sunday schools a priority, and continued to do so even up to the Civil War.¹⁰⁵ In this region, where public education lagged behind the rest of the nation, charity Sunday schools offered a rare opportunity for literacy education, especially for lower-class families. As Episcopal priest Samuel Lewis of Christ Church, Mobile, reported in 1838, “some of the scholars attending this school receive little or no instruction of any kind elsewhere,” including children who brought their parents to learn from the classes as well.¹⁰⁶ Male ministers recognized female leadership in this work, as was the case in Mobile beginning in 1838 and continuing through the 1850s. The rectors of Trinity and Christ Church, Episcopal and the Presbytery of South Alabama all singled

¹⁰⁴ Minutes, 1855, Presbytery of New Orleans Minutes, 1854-1861, PCHS, 78; "New Orleans District Sabbath School Union, of the M.E. Church South" Report, December 31, 1847, Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Conference Committee Records; "Minutes of the Teacher's Association," First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa, Records, 6; "Marion Sunday Schools," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 15, 1859.

¹⁰⁵ Boylan, *Sunday School*, 6; Sokolosky, "Historical Sketch," 1-2; Minutes, February 6, 1860, May 29, 1860, Record Book, vol. 1, Tuscaloosa Female Benevolent Society Records, 1854-1861, Hoole.

¹⁰⁶ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1838), 10-11.

out “the ladies especially” in Mobile who, as teachers and organizers, made their respective denominations’ charity Sunday schools successful.¹⁰⁷ As the presbytery reported, Presbyterian women “made it their business to gather in many from the streets and lanes of the city for this benevolent object,” including “from Catholic families who are now under a good religious influence.”¹⁰⁸ Eliza Clitherall, who lived on a plantation outside of Mobile, traveled to town on Sundays to teach at St. John’s Episcopal Church and wrote of the charity school, “oh may God’s blessing attend our labor of love, & make us instruments of good to their poor children” and “may some souls or soul be benefitted by this.”¹⁰⁹ Teaching staffs often overlapped with regular church Sunday schools and so did this feeling among women of embracing a religious duty to form new church members.

Imitating a northern phenomenon, Methodists and Presbyterians founded “factory Sabbath schools” in towns like Tuscaloosa and Tuscumbia to reach the children and adults of cotton textile factory-employee families, some co-educational and some, like the Methodist case in Tuscaloosa, “female-operated.”¹¹⁰ The Tuscumbia Presbytery in 1856 reported that the factory Sabbath school was a success in both literacy and religious instruction: “many adults as well as children have been taught to read in it; a number

¹⁰⁷ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1849), 21; Minutes, vol. 4, Presbytery of South Alabama Minutes, 216-217.

¹⁰⁸ Minutes, vol. 4, Presbytery of South Alabama Minutes, 216-217; *ibid.*, vol. 7, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Clitherall, Diary, July 28, 1854, September 2, 1854, Clitherall Diaries.

¹¹⁰ *Independent Monitor*, April 29, 1846, cited in Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 83; Session Minutes, April 1860, First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa Records; Minutes, October 1856, Presbytery of Tuscumbia Minutes, 1849-1861, PCHS, 195; *De Bow’s Review of the Western and Southern States* 9, (New Orleans: J.D.B. De Bow, 1850), 214.

have become hopefully pious & not a few after they have left the factory trace their religious impressions to the instruction they received in this school.”¹¹¹ In 1850s Montgomery, Alabama, the charity Sunday school was a multi-denominational women’s effort; churchwomen of St John’s, Episcopal Church conducted the school but received teaching assistance from non-Episcopal women in town. This school not only had an all-female volunteer teaching staff that rotated every two weeks, but they also held elections for a female board of officers to run operations year-round.¹¹² Protestant women in Montgomery were thus able to control all levels of their benevolent operation to give religious instruction to the poor.

The Protestant women in Natchez, New Orleans, and Mobile were also able to bring religious instruction to children in their cities’ orphan asylums.¹¹³ Martha Moss, who already taught at multiple Presbyterian Sunday schools in New Orleans, wrote in her diary in 1855, “I trust that I am called by Divine Providence to teach in the House of Refuge Sabbath Evening.” As with her other Sunday school classes, Moss prayed for her orphan asylum class, “that I may feel as I should the worth of their immortal souls” and that they, through her class (and the Bibles she gave as gifts), might be prepared to profess conversion. “Every Sabbath School teacher is a laborer for Christ,” Moss

¹¹¹ Minutes, October 1856, Presbytery of Tuscumbia Minutes, 195.

¹¹² Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-third Annual Convention*, 11; Clitherall, Diary, March 29, 1854, April 5, 1858, Clitherall Diaries.

¹¹³ “An Act to Incorporate the Female Charitable Society of Natchez,” February 12, 1819, State Government Records Series 2370, MDAH; “Sunday School Anniversary, Mobile,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 26, 1859.

declared, and living in New Orleans gave her multiple opportunities to embrace this identity as a public evangelizer and teacher.¹¹⁴

At female orphanages like Poydras Asylum in New Orleans and the Natchez Orphan Asylum, Protestant women hired as matrons and regular teachers also took on the responsibility of teaching Sunday school.¹¹⁵ When the Poydras Asylum moved outside of town away from churches, female teachers also improvised Sunday worship services, with explanations of Bible readings, hymn singing, and catechism recitation.¹¹⁶ As was the case at academies for upper-class girls, female teachers at orphanages took on the responsibility of regular religious instruction.

While charity Sunday schools were more common in urban areas with concentrated lower-class populations, women took the initiative to establish them in more rural areas of the Gulf South as well. An obituary in the *Southwestern Baptist* in 1855 recognized Sarah Gindrat as the founder of a Baptist Sunday school in Macon County, west of Montgomery, Alabama, “for the children of a poor neighborhood in the piny [sic] woods where she spent a portion of the Lord’s day in affording such instruction as they were able to receive and in directing their young minds in the way to life.”¹¹⁷ Some rural

¹¹⁴ Moss, Diary, June 12, 1855, December 5, 1855.

¹¹⁵ Board Minute Book, vol. 6, January 16, 1856, Poydras Home Records; Natchez Orphan Asylum, *Annual Report of the Managers and Officers of the Natchez Orphan Asylum* (Natchez, 1855), 10.

¹¹⁶ Poydras Female Asylum, *Fortieth Annual and First Printed Report of the Poydras Female Asylum* (New Orleans, 1857), 13. Before moving to Rickerville in 1856, Protestant and Catholic governesses of the Poydras Asylum ran separate Sunday schools for Protestant and Catholic girls. See Board Minute Book, vol. 2, February 27, 1825, Poydras Home Records; Pamela Tyler, *New Orleans Women and the Poydras Home: More Durable Than Marble* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 35, 45, 67. For more on Protestant women and orphanages, see chapter five of this dissertation.

¹¹⁷ "Domestic Missions," *South Western Baptist*, January 11, 1855.

women gained recognition for collaborating together, as when Bishop Leonidas Polk in 1857 praised “a flourishing Sunday School, gotten up among the deserted and destitute population in the village of Pineville, [Louisiana] by the indefatigable zeal of the ladies of the parish of St. James” Episcopal Church in Alexandria.¹¹⁸ Ultimately, however, the largest opportunity for female charity through Sunday school teaching in the rural Gulf South occurred on the plantation: controlling the religious instruction of the enslaved.

Mission to the Enslaved: Myth versus Reality

The image of the white plantation mistress benevolently praying and reading the Bible to her slaves is a popular motif not only in Lost Cause literature (most famously in Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*) but also in southern memoirs, both white accounts and white-curated ex-slave narratives recorded through the Federal Writer’s Project in the 1930s.¹¹⁹ These memoirs, as any source based on reminiscences of the past, run the risk of being purposefully or accidentally inaccurate, and at best, unreliable as the main source on antebellum slavery. When it comes to the Protestant mission to the enslaved, scholars must look to sources written during the antebellum period itself in

¹¹⁸ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1857), 23-24. See also Florence, Alabama, in Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention*, 13.

¹¹⁹ For examples, see: Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (1936; repr., New York: Pocket Books, 2008), 95; George P Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, First Supplemental Series, Mississippi Narratives, (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1972-), 682, 768, 1602; Esther Wright Boyd, *Reminiscences of Esther Wright Boyd*, 1906, transcript, Jesse D. Wright Papers, MSS. 99, LLMVC, 8; Harrison, comp., *Gospel Among the Slaves*, 369-372.

order to put into context these memoirs which celebrated female slaveholders in particular for their Christian benevolence.¹²⁰

It is clear from antebellum sources that Protestant male church leaders in the Gulf South, especially by the 1830s, urged slaveholders—male and female—to prioritize the religious instruction of slaves for a combination of reasons. Certainly, many sincerely felt a religious obligation to evangelize to the enslaved, but they also encouraged religious instruction as a means to make better enslaved laborers who would not lie, cheat, or steal, and as a means to challenge the northern abolitionist critique that American slavery was immoral and incompatible with Christianity. The mission to the enslaved was the centerpiece of the pro-slavery Christianity that made mainstream Protestant denominations appealing to white slaveholding southerners rather than a potential threat to the slave system.¹²¹

Church leaders specifically argued that the enslaved needed white religious instruction through formal or informal Sunday schools in order to ensure that slaveholders would control the version of Christianity they learned and because of racial stereotypes that assumed the enslaved could not understand church principles or preaching on their own. Even though teaching the enslaved how to read and write was illegal by the 1830s in every slave state but Kentucky, oral religious instruction was

¹²⁰ See also, Katherine E. Rohrer, "Slaveholding Women and the Religious Instruction of Slaves in Post-Emancipation Memory," *Journal of Southern Religion* 15 (2013): <http://jsreligion.org/issues/vol15/rohrer.html>; Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves," 473-492.

¹²¹ For examples of male church leaders in the Gulf South advocating for religious instruction for the enslaved for these reasons, see: *Mississippi Baptist*, September 16, 1858; Town, Diary, June 5, 1853; A.L.H., "Louisiana Correspondence," *Tennessee Baptist*, January 14, 1860; Choctaw Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Ninth Anniversary of the Choctaw Baptist Association* (New Orleans, 1848), 10-11; Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 2:426-427; Minutes, vol. 4, Presbytery of South Alabama Minutes, 216-217. See also, Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear*, 95-96, 106-108, 113-117.

encouraged.¹²² Church leaders even argued that religious instruction was more important for the enslaved than attending preaching or worship services, especially in a region like the Gulf South where regular preaching was hard enough to find for the dispersed white population. In 1854 at the Aberdeen Baptist Association meeting in Mississippi, the “Committee on the Colored Population” argued that although pastors should still preach to black congregations on Sunday afternoons, “your committee, in view of the deficiency of means, would recommend as a more efficient course, the adoption of the catechetical instruction. Books adapted to their understanding, may be procured for the purpose from *The Southern Publication Society*” the report continued, “and the owners or some person employed for the purpose, can, by spending a few hours on the Sabbath, impart more information to them, a greater knowledge of the Scriptures in a short time, than perhaps by any other method.”¹²³ Other Protestant church leaders in the Gulf South agreed, arguing that both enslaved children and adults needed “elementary instruction,” “brought down to their own comprehension,” and encouraged slaveholders to use the same catechisms and oral-teaching methods intended for young white children.¹²⁴

It was because of this infantilization rhetoric that male church leaders looked to the female slaveholder to lead the way in the mission to the enslaved as an extension of

¹²² Thomas L. Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 29; Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear*, 5.

¹²³ Aberdeen Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Eleventh Session of the Aberdeen Baptist Association*, (Aberdeen, MS, 1854), 25.

¹²⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1846), 14-15; Choctaw Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Fourteenth Anniversary of the Choctaw Baptist Association* (Columbus, MS, 1853), 6; Minutes, March 1858, Presbytery of Louisiana Minutes, 145; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of an Adjourned Meeting of the Thirty-First Annual Convention* (Montgomery, 1863), 40.

her maternal Christian duty to her own children. As part of the pro-slavery Christian message, slaveholders referred to their enslaved populations, particularly those working within the house, as “part of the family” and the obligation of the white matriarch to care for their religious instruction was, as Bishop Leonidas Polk of Louisiana wrote in 1856, “so plain and positive, as it is to take care of any other portion of their household.”¹²⁵

It is important to note that while women claimed this maternal Christian responsibility to the enslaved in their nostalgic memoirs after the war, this rhetoric shows up in earlier antebellum church conference reports, personal papers, and newspapers. Late antebellum priests and ministers not only looked to women to fill this role but they also praised individual women for doing so, recording their observations as visitors to classes or giving women credit when enslaved congregants professed conversion, were baptized or confirmed, and joined their churches.¹²⁶ At the same time, female writers also helped to construct this rhetoric of the benevolent mistress giving religious instruction on the plantation, both privately by recording their labors in letters and diaries and in some cases publicly as published writers.¹²⁷ Martha Foster, Sunday school teacher and future missionary to China, wrote an essay on the duties of Christian masters and mistresses to

¹²⁵ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1856), 21-22.

¹²⁶ A.C. Dayton, ed., "I Am Afraid," *Tennessee Baptist*, May 19, 1860; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 14, 28; "One Round on My Mission," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 5, 1855; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention*, 44-45. See also, "Obituaries," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 20, 1856, November 16, 1859, March 7, 1860.

¹²⁷ Mary Wright Diary, 1857-1859, Wright-Boyd Papers; Eliza Magruder, Diary, Eliza L. Magruder Diary, 1846-1857, MSS. 654, LLMVC; Clitherall, Diaries, June 18, 1852-June 10, 1860, Clitherall Diaries; Jane Copes to Joseph S. Copes, November 16, 1860, Copes Papers; Hays, Diary, April 19, 1857, Hays-Ray-Webb Papers.

their servants and submitted it to the Alabama Baptist Convention in 1850.¹²⁸ Laura Godwyn, wife of a Methodist minister in the Louisiana Conference, wrote an advice column in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* under the pseudonym Lizzie Newton in which she described her own experiences catechizing enslaved adults and children and responded to women's likely excuses for not doing their duty. In response to, "they go to church," Godwyn replied, "but very often they do not comprehend what they hear; and the sound is an unknown tongue." In answer to women's concerns about their own lack of education—"I cannot teach them; I do not know how to explain the Bible,"—she wrote, "they are far more ignorant than you are and if you teach them nothing but 'Thou God seest me,' you have reason to persevere."¹²⁹

Then there was author Mary Anne Cruse, of Huntsville, Alabama, whose Sunday school books taught young white girls how to be good Christian mistresses by helping direct religious instruction for the enslaved in the plantation home and also going with their mothers to the cabins of the enslaved to teach them about the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. In the *Little Episcopalian* published in 1854, young Jennie Melville "gives religious counsel to a much older enslaved woman, "Aunt Sally," after entering her cabin uninvited and asks her mother to buy Sally a Book of Common Prayer, which Jennie then marks with suitable prayers for Sally to memorize.¹³⁰ This is a perfect example of the infantilization of enslaved women and the elevation of white girls as future ideal Christian mistress in antebellum literature. The image of white women (and

¹²⁸ Crawford, *Diary*, April 14, 1850, Crawford Diaries.

¹²⁹ Lizzie Newton, "Plain Talk for Christians," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 22, 1851.

¹³⁰ Cruse, *The Little Episcopalian*, 109-110, 172-174.

white girls) conducting the religious instruction of the enslaved is not simply a post-war fabrication, as some scholars have argued, but part of the rhetoric that antebellum women helped to create in the 1840s and 50s.¹³¹

This still leaves the question of how much of this antebellum rhetoric reflected actual motivations for female-led religious instruction. Earlier scholars like Anne Firor Scott and Catharine Clinton accepted this rhetoric at face value and treated the female slaveholder as an ally to the enslaved as benevolent evangelizer; other scholars, including Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, saw the female mission to the enslaved as evidence that white women were complicit in a patriarchal racial order and of their acceptance of an ideal Christian womanhood that isolated them to acting within the domestic sphere.¹³² Both of these positions, however, still accept the antebellum rhetoric that women's role in this evangelization work remained solely as mothers within the private space of their household. Through this assumption of domesticity, scholars have downplayed the significance of women's roles in upholding slavery and racism through religion, focusing instead on male clergy as the public front to the mission the enslaved. In the process, they have inadvertently confirmed a maternal-white infantilized-black relationship in female religious instruction on the plantation.¹³³ Thavolia Glymph's argument, however, that the plantation home was not solely a private or family space but rather a public workspace

¹³¹ For a recent example of this post-war argument, see Rohrer, "Slaveholding Women."

¹³² Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 18; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 161; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 30, 35. For more scholarship with a similar conclusion to Fox-Genovese, see: Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 116; Nguyen, "Active Faith," 110-111; Miller, "Women in the Vanguard," 320-323.

¹³³ For scholarship that focuses on male masters and male missionary efforts in the Gulf South, see: Touchstone, "Planters and Slave Religion;" Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*; Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*; Cornelius, *Slave Missions*.

and site of white female power and violence, needs to be applied to how we think about female religious instruction.¹³⁴ Though relying on this rhetoric as justification, white women were not simply acting out of a maternal Christian instinct, but rather for the same paradoxical reasons as men—sincere concern for their own souls and sometimes those of the enslaved, a desire for more productive and faithful laborers, and as a way to prove to outsiders that slavery was a positive good and compatible with their faith.

At the same time, scholars have assumed that only slaveholding women saw to religious instruction and only then for those enslaved on their own plantations, usually working in the home. In the Gulf South, where absentee landlords were widespread and regular preaching was not, some slaveholding women worked together to meet the needs of their community or looked to non-slaveholding women, white and black, to lead religious instruction in slave quarters, classrooms, biracial churches, and plantation chapels.¹³⁵ This diverse group of women who taught at formal and informal Sunday schools, on rural farms and in towns and cities, was essential to the mission to the enslaved in both rhetoric and reality.

Rural Sunday Schools with White Female Teachers

The most common reference to the religious instruction of the enslaved, in antebellum and postbellum sources, by both white and black authors, was that of the

¹³⁴ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 29-35. See also Rebecca Fraser who argues that “southern white women of the slaveholding classes did not need separate spheres: they could effectively step into a quasi-public world without ever leaving the confines of their domestic world” in *Gender, Race and Family in Nineteenth Century America: From Northern Woman to Plantation Mistress* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

¹³⁵ For evidence of widespread absentee plantation ownership particularly in the Gulf South see, William Kauffman Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 3, 6, 130-134.

female slaveholder directing a class on Sundays on the plantation, either in her own home or in the quarters of the enslaved.¹³⁶ This norm grew out of geographic pragmatism given the time and distance it would take to travel to church and the lack of regular preaching every Sunday, but also out of a desire to exert control over the version of Christianity the enslaved received. Stephanie Camp's argument that slaveholders created a "geography of containment" that sought to limit enslaved mobility to the plantation, especially for enslaved women, certainly applies to where religious instruction happened as well.¹³⁷

Even when white households traveled to church, many did not allow or encourage those enslaved on their property to travel with them. Eliza Magruder, for instance, while living on her aunt's cotton plantation in Jefferson County, Mississippi, recorded attending church most Sundays and then returning home to instruct her aunt's enslaved population who remained there. In her first recorded instance in January 1846, Eliza "read a sermon, and heard Lavinia and Annica repeat the commandments and taught the former a hymn," but by 1857 her operation had expanded to an entire class: "my Sunday school was well attended," she wrote in July.¹³⁸ Caroline Clitherall of Spring Hill, Alabama outside Mobile, who also taught at the Sunday school for poor white children in town, referred to her class at home among the enslaved as "my little congregation," suggesting her own identification with the position of a male preacher.¹³⁹ In female slaveholder diaries from

¹³⁶ For examples in Federal Writer's Project accounts from the 1930s, see: Rawick, ed., *American Slave*, First Supplemental Series, Mississippi Narratives, 682, 768, 1597; First Supplemental Series, Alabama Narratives, 112; Second Supplemental Series, Texas Narratives, 3666-3667. See also Touchstone, "Planters and Slave Religion," 116.

¹³⁷ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 28.

¹³⁸ Eliza Magruder, Diary, January 25, 1846, July 12, 1857.

¹³⁹ Clitherall, Diary, July 24, 1852, July 10, 1860, Clitherall Diaries.

the 1840s and 1850s, the descriptions of religious instruction ranged from reading and explaining Bible stories and teaching prayers to more formal “catechizing” of the enslaved, usually through memorization and recitation of the catechism (from the white woman’s church of choice) as preparation for church membership.¹⁴⁰ In this way, slaveholding women could exert control over which denomination their enslaved populations would identify with and in which church, if any, they might receive the sacrament of baptism or officially join as members.¹⁴¹

Religious instruction was not always a solitary job. Often, as was the case with Eliza Magruder, younger women in the household were encouraged to take on this responsibility alongside their mothers or older female relatives.¹⁴² On larger plantations teachers might also be women unrelated to the slaveholding family who did not own enslaved laborers themselves. At Leighton, the sugar plantation of Episcopal Bishop Leonidas Polk located on Bayou Lafourche in Louisiana, Polk himself led daily prayers and preached among the enslaved population but did not actually teach. Instead, his wife, older daughters, and the governess, “Miss Beauchamp,” taught all of the Sunday school catechism classes which were divided by age and gender. Beauchamp recalled that her class “consisted of grown-up boys”—evidence that women’s authority over religious

¹⁴⁰ "Alabama Conference, Uchee Mission," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 24, 1859; Mary Wright Diary, December 13, 1858, Wright-Boyd Papers; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Convention*, 44-45; Hays, Diary, April 19, 1857, Hays-Ray-Webb Papers; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1847), 12.

¹⁴¹ For more on enslaved women joining churches, see chapter three of this dissertation.

¹⁴² Clitherall, Diary, March 12, 1854, Clitherall Diaries; Mrs. R.L. Hobdy, "Makers of Methodism in this Area," *Alabama Christian Advocate*, June 25, 1942; Irion, Journal, February 6, 1859, August 21, 1859, Irion-Neilson Papers.

instruction was not always limited to children or to women.¹⁴³ White women within these households worked together to instruct enslaved laborers and train the next generation of plantation mistresses, but some also looked to other churchwomen in their communities for advice. Part of Eliza Lay's job as an Episcopal priest's wife in Huntsville, Alabama was advising other women in the church on how to "do her duty" for her servants and what Bible passages to read.¹⁴⁴ Even when not teaching together, white women looked to one another for moral support and practical advice.

In other cases, especially absentee plantations where the owners lived elsewhere most of the year and overseers directed operations, non-slaveholding women were left in charge of religious instruction. In several articles in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, Methodist ministers urged their members to hire Christian overseers to ensure missionaries' access to the plantation and Christian standards of morality when owners were gone, but having a Christian overseer's wife was also important.¹⁴⁵ In 1855, Methodist missionaries outside of Dayton, Alabama described one overseer's wife who acted as a spiritual intercessor between an older enslaved woman on her deathbed and the minister, writing, "thank God for pious overseers and pious wives, who care for the souls of their servants."¹⁴⁶ In Laurel Hill, Mississippi, the Episcopal priest, Thomas Savage,

¹⁴³ William M. Polk, *Leonidas Polk: Bishop and General*, vol. 1 (New York: Logmans, Green, and co., 1915), 194-197.

¹⁴⁴ Eliza Lay to Henry C Lay, "September 24, 1850, Lay Papers.

¹⁴⁵ "Our Home Work," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 17, 1860; "Proper Overseers for Southern Plantations" *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 18, 1854; "One Round on My Mission," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 5, 1855. For the legal authority of overseers in the Gulf South over the religious practice, assembly, and travel of enslaved persons, see: William E. Wiethoff, *Crafting the Overseer's Image* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 48-51.

¹⁴⁶ A. McBryde and J. Taylor, "Missionary Reports, Dayton Mission, Ala. Con.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 9, 1855.

reported in 1848 that on the three plantations of absentee owner William Mercer, including over four hundred enslaved laborers, the Sunday schools “are under the charge of Mrs. S[avage] and the wives of the overseers.” Savage’s wife worked to distribute “seven prayer books...and 8697 pages of reading in the form of Tracts and volumes, doctrinal and practical, agreeable to the teachings of the church” to the overseers’ families, in part to prepare the wives to help her teach the enslaved Sunday school classes.¹⁴⁷ Lower-class white women in the Gulf South, often with the help of missionary wives, were able to claim this religious duty to instruct enslaved populations, and claim the moral superiority and social status that came with this benevolent Christian mistress identity, without actually owning slaves themselves.

Mary Winans Wall, the daughter of Methodist minister William Winans, began a neighborhood Sunday school on her plantation near Clinton, Louisiana, with the help of elite slaveholding female friends, “Mrs. Judge McVea and Mrs. Lucy Barton.” While Wall recalled that her work received some criticism from men and women in her community, including one woman who told her, “I can’t help believing you are an abolitionist,” Wall’s position in society as a minister’s wife helped her justify her actions and she “had influential friends to defend my course.” It certainly helped that the judge’s wife was one of her assistant teachers. Even her own adult sons disapproved, but, the determined Wall reported, “I kept resolutely on my way, despite all dissuasion or opposition.”¹⁴⁸ She, like her mother before her, claimed this religious duty to educate the

¹⁴⁷ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-second Annual Convention*, 37-38.

¹⁴⁸ Harrison, comp., *Gospel Among the Slaves*, 369-371.

enslaved, but unlike her mother, she felt this responsibility for her larger community beyond those enslaved on her own plantation.

Wall's account, however, comes from a memoir written in 1893 in a book with a very specific purpose: to defend antebellum slaveholders and prove that "Southerners—many of them—were warmly zealous in their endeavours [sic] to promote religious instruction among their slaves." Not only did Wall go into detail of her own Sunday school classes, but she also claimed that many of her formerly enslaved students, including a few who became preachers, thanked her for teaching them. At the same time, Wall expressed shock that many students did not feel the same way and left her Sunday school upon emancipation: "twenty years in all had I faithfully devoted to them, and it pained me to see the readiness with which they left me, until only seven were left."¹⁴⁹ Wall, like many white preachers in biracial churches after the Civil War, interpreted a desire for autonomous religious practice as ingratitude.

Scholars like Katherine Rohrer contrast antebellum accounts to memoirs like Wall's to argue that white women either did not care or failed to succeed in their missions to the enslaved; the enslaved largely ignored their efforts; and after the war, women exaggerated their efforts in a Lost Cause defense.¹⁵⁰ There is certainly some truth to this interpretation for the Gulf South. Even with antebellum reports giving credit to female slaveholder instruction for slave baptisms, conversions, and confirmations—sometimes ten or twenty at a time—the majority of the enslaved population of the Gulf South never received any kind of religious instruction or considered white women responsible for

¹⁴⁹ Harrison, comp., *Gospel Among the Slaves*, 372.

¹⁵⁰ Rohrer, "Slaveholding Women."

their eventual church membership.¹⁵¹ Even on Bishop Polk's plantation in Bayou Lafourche, where Polk claimed his female household ran a Sunday school for sixty to eighty enslaved workers, this only included one third of the entire population of over two hundred slaves that lived and worked there. While this indicates that those who attended did so out of choice rather than from white compulsion, the vast majority still chose not attend, even when owned by a bishop outspoken in his advocacy for this work.¹⁵² Based solely on numbers of attendees and converts, female religious instruction of the enslaved population was "unsuccessful" and postbellum memories were certainly exaggerated.

That being said, scholars should not simply dismiss antebellum white women's efforts at religious instruction, especially because most of these women at the time would have measured their success along a different spectrum. To these women, more important than the question, "did they save the souls of the enslaved?" was the question, "did they do their due diligence and make a valiant effort?" "Did they do enough to save their own souls in the eyes of the church and of God?" Rohrer is correct that "plantation mistresses were seldom reticent to record feelings of frustration, anger, or indifference" at their attempts to give religious instruction to the enslaved, but at the same time, these women claimed they had fulfilled their religious duty by the attempt.¹⁵³ In the Gulf South, the anxieties women expressed in their diaries were about failing to do one's duty or not

¹⁵¹ Hays, Diary, April 19, 1857, December 31, 1857, Hays-Ray-Webb Papers; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention*, 47; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Thirty-fifth Annual Convention*, 8, 55; Hamilton, "Obituaries," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 16, 1859.

¹⁵² Glenn Robbins makes this argument in *The Bishop of the Old South: the Ministry and Civil War Legacy of Leonidas Polk* (Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 2006), 110. William Polk claimed there were four hundred slaves at Leighton, making the proportion receiving religious instruction even smaller, in *Leonidas Polk*, 183.

¹⁵³ Rohrer, "Slaveholding Women."

being useful rather than about failing to convert.¹⁵⁴ Methodist slaveholder Ann Raney Thomas sums up this white perspective on religious instruction of the enslaved perfectly in her account from Point Coupee, Louisiana:

I went to the negro quarters at dinner time to read to them the Bible. They soon tired of my labours, and when they saw me coming they would close their doors against me, endeavoring to make me believe they had gone off somewhere. I told them I was free from their sin, as I had done my duty. God would not require their souls at my hand.¹⁵⁵

Women like Thomas were not tied to the results of their efforts in the lives (or afterlives) of the enslaved, just the results as it applied to their own salvation. Likewise, when male church leaders praised women, they included women “endeavoring to improve” their slaves without success and pointed out what slaveowners gained even in the attempt to evangelize.¹⁵⁶ When describing Louisa Harrison’s Episcopal mission to the enslaved on Faunsdale Plantation in Marengo County, Alabama, the Reverend Francis Hanson declared, “I trust that God her Saviour will remember her in her troubles and afflictions for her pious care of her servants,” not that God would remember her for the number of new church members she sponsored.¹⁵⁷

When things did not go well, white women were quick to blame the faults of the enslaved rather than their own efforts. While “Aunt Sally” in *The Little Episcopalian* was praised for welcoming the uninvited slave mistresses into her cabin in order to receive religious instruction, the enslaved laborers who asserted what historian Stephanie Camp

¹⁵⁴ Hays, Diary, November 2-5, 1857, Hays-Ray-Webb Papers; Clitherall, Diary, June 18, 1852, March 25, 1853, January 1, 1853, March 12, 1854, Clitherall Diaries.

¹⁵⁵ Ann Raney Thomas Coleman, Personal Reminiscences, typescript, Ann Raney Thomas Coleman Papers, 1846-1892, Duke, 13.

¹⁵⁶ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Convention*, 54.

¹⁵⁷ Francis Hanson, Diary, transcript, September 26, 1858, Francis Hanson Diary, SPR96, ADAH.

has called a “rival geography” of the slave cabin as private space by closing their doors when Ann Thomas attempted to co-opt that space for religious instruction were blamed for refusing Christianity.¹⁵⁸ Eliza Magruder in Jefferson County, Mississippi complained in 1857, “my poor Sunday school seems to drag, I fear they don’t take much interest in it . . . poor human nature takes more interest in things of time than eternity.”¹⁵⁹ When Clarissa Leavitt Town of West Baton Rouge tried to instruct her enslaved maid Rosa she wrote, “I hope it may have a good influence on her, though it seems to be hoping against hope, she is so perverse.”¹⁶⁰ According to Town, it was Rosa’s failings, expressed through racial stereotypes, which stood in the way of Rosa’s salvation, and Town could still claim to be a benevolent slaveholder in the face of northern criticism.

Even violence against the enslaved was acceptable as part of women’s religious duty, especially if the enslaved resisted instruction. When Olivia Dunbar locked her enslaved house servant, Annica, in the attic for an entire day, Olivia’s niece who was also Annica’s Sunday school teacher wrote, “I pray it may humble her, and make further punishment unnecessary.”¹⁶¹ She recognized that punishment could be used as a tool of religious instruction. Narratives of the formerly enslaved from the 1930s confirm that religious instruction often coexisted with white female violence. Phillis Fox recalled of her time enslaved in Webster, Mississippi, “Missus Sarah, she’d read de Bible to us a

¹⁵⁸ Cruse, *The Little Episcopalian*, 109-111; Coleman, *Reminiscences*, Coleman Papers, 13; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 93-94.

¹⁵⁹ Eliza Magruder Diary, August 9, 1857.

¹⁶⁰ Town, Diary, February 1, 1853.

¹⁶¹ Eliza Magruder Diary, April 27, 1857.

heap—an whip us a heap to[o].”¹⁶² Henry Johnson, also enslaved in Mississippi, recalled the threats of eternal violence that awaited a slave who disobeyed and did not learn his catechism: “De mistress heared us our catechism every morning. We better knowed it, too, I ‘member jes’ as well when she told me I was a bad boy an’ would burn in de fire if I don’ watch out.”¹⁶³ Both white female violence in the present and threats of violence in the afterlife were justified as an attempt to motivate acceptable Christian practice as prescribed by slaveholders. Ultimately, however, as Bishop Polk declared, “You may not save him [the slave], but you will save yourself.”¹⁶⁴ Protestant women in the Gulf South took this advice to heart. All that religious duty really required was a sincere effort and that was enough for white southern women to claim the role of benevolent Christian slaveholder. The attempt was enough to validate the rhetoric used in pro-slavery propaganda, and in that larger political sense, female missions to the slaves were successful. Perhaps that is why so many women, like Mary Winans Wall, expressed sincere shock and disbelief when ex-slaves after the war did not share their feelings.

Female Teachers of Color and Rural Sunday Schools

White women did not have an exclusive claim on female religious instruction on Gulf South plantations. In most scholarship that discusses enslaved-led religious practice on plantations, however, the focus is on black preachers—sometimes with and sometimes without white sanction, but always male.¹⁶⁵ As Brenda Stevenson has argued, however,

¹⁶² Rawick, ed., *American Slave*, First Supplemental Series, Mississippi Narratives, 768.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, Second Supplemental Series, Texas Narratives, 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Quote from Herman Cope Duncan, ed., *The Diocese of Louisiana: Some of its History, 1838-1888* (New Orleans, 1888), 40. See also Touchstone, “Planters and Slave Religion,” 102-103.

¹⁶⁵ Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 11, 24-36, 59-64; Sparks, *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks*, 115-145.

some enslaved women were able to take on both the “social power” and the “socially redemptive identity of religious women,” and reject racial stereotypes of thoughtlessness and sexual immorality in the process.¹⁶⁶ In Stevenson’s analysis, they did so by laying claim to an ideal Christian motherhood similar to their white female counterparts.¹⁶⁷ There is little discussion in previous scholarship of how enslaved women of color, like white women, expanded beyond this domestic ideal to become Sunday school teachers for enslaved children and adults, sometimes in secret and other times with white approval. Moreover, the Gulf South, where absentee slaveholding on large sugar and cotton plantations was widespread and male missionaries to the enslaved never met demand, offered an opportune religious environment for enslaved women to fill the void of religious instruction.

Most surviving evidence of this religious instruction directed by enslaved women of color on plantations comes from postbellum memoirs.¹⁶⁸ In a memoir written in 1879, Charlotte Brooks, formerly enslaved on a sugar plantation in Louisiana, recalled Jane Lee, an enslaved woman from Virginia who brought her Protestant beliefs and practices with her along the internal slave trade. While the female slaveholder on the Louisiana plantation was a devout Catholic, Brooks remembers Jane Lee reading to them in the slave quarters from her own Bible and hymnbook rather than white instruction. Brooks even gave credit to Lee’s informal religious instruction in cabin prayer meetings for her

¹⁶⁶ Stevenson, “Marsa Never Sot Aunt Rebecca Down,” 353-355.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 353-355. See also White, *Ar’n’t I A Woman*, 56-61; Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 95, 109, 164.

¹⁶⁸ In addition to memoirs, Janet Duitsman Cornelius finds evidence of enslaved female religious instructors “from Reconstruction, when educators from the North found many literate black women willing, able, and available, to teach the freed peoples,” in *When I Can Read My Title Clear*, 91, 145-146.

Protestant conversion: “it was Aunt Jane’s praying and singing them old Virginia hymns that helped me so much.”¹⁶⁹ Enslaved migrants from the Upper South, a region where evangelicalism had deeper roots, brought with them crucial elements of Protestant faith and practice that helped foster Protestant community among the enslaved in the Gulf South coming from diverse regions of the country.¹⁷⁰ Gulf South interviews of the formerly enslaved from the 1930s also describe older enslaved women who had memorized Bible passages and Protestant hymns and passed down this religious knowledge through oral instruction to enslaved children.¹⁷¹ Religious instruction was not always so informal, either; Henrietta Murray, enslaved in Choctaw County, Mississippi, for example, claimed that her grandmother was allowed to teach “a Sunday School class on Sunday afternoons durin’ slavery days an’ taught us all we knowed.”¹⁷² As far as she remembers, they did not attend church and her owners took no interest, but they did give Murray’s grandmother permission to give oral instruction on the plantation, perhaps also taking the credit as benevolent slaveholders for indirectly attending to the spiritual needs of the enslaved. At the same time, these enslaved women asserted a “rival” religious geography of the slave quarters from their slaveholders, as combination public-and-

¹⁶⁹ Octavia V. Rogers Albert, *The House of Bondage, or, Charlotte Brooks and Other Slaves* (New York, 1890), 11, 31.

¹⁷⁰ See Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 161-162.

¹⁷¹ Rawick, ed., *American Slave*, First Supplemental Series, Alabama Narratives, 242-243, First Supplemental Series, Mississippi Narratives, 305.

¹⁷² Rawick, ed., *American Slave*, First Supplemental Series, Mississippi Narratives, 1610.

private spaces where enslaved women could direct religious practice for their families as well as their larger communities, in place of white instructors.¹⁷³

There is one particularly notable account of enslaved female-led religious instruction on a plantation in Green County, Alabama that was actually written during the antebellum period. This account is especially exceptional because the author is a literate enslaved woman, Lucy Skipwith, who wrote a series of letters from Alabama to her owner, John Cocke, who resided in Virginia. At Bremo Plantation in Fluvanna County, Virginia, Lucy Skipwith learned how to read and write and received religious instruction in a Sunday school directed by John Cocke's wife, Louisa, a devout Presbyterian.¹⁷⁴ In 1840, John Cocke transferred forty-nine enslaved laborers, including Lucy Skipwith, to Hopewell Plantation in Alabama, which had a black slave driver and eventually a white overseer to manage cotton production but no resident owners.¹⁷⁵ In this environment, Lucy Skipwith took charge of religious instruction on the plantation in both adult prayer meetings and children's Sunday school classes and kept Cocke informed of her progress even through the Civil War.

In several of these letters, Lucy Skipwith laid claim to white ideals of Christian motherhood by arguing that she could do a better job giving religious instruction to her daughter, Betsy, than the white woman to whom Cocke had hired out her labor.¹⁷⁶ In the

¹⁷³ A reference to "rival geography" coined by Stephanie Camp in *Closer to Freedom*, 7, 93-94.

¹⁷⁴ Randall Miller, *Dear Master: Letters of a Slave Family* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 34.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 140.

¹⁷⁶ In his edited collection of the letters, Randall Miller highlights Lucy Skipwith's moral critique of whites and recognizes her role as a Christian model and "vehicle for the transmission of Cocke's evangelical Protestantism," but this is in order to show "house servant attitudes and assimilation of white

process, Lucy, an enslaved woman, claimed moral superiority to a white woman: “Her [Betsy’s] mistress has taken very little pains to bring her up right,” Lucy wrote, making a religious argument for her daughter to return to Hopewell; “it seems to be almost imposing [sic] upon you to ask the favor of you to let the Child come home, but I would thank you a thousand time if you did so. I want to give her religious instructions and try to be the means of saving her soul from death.”¹⁷⁷ Lucy’s claim to religious influence worked as Betsy was allowed to return to Hopewell, and several months later, Lucy wrote to Cocke that Betsy had made a public profession of her evangelical conversion.¹⁷⁸ Lucy credited this conversion to her Sunday school instructions. That same year she also criticized “Mrs. Lawrence,” the wife of the overseer, using this same language of the duties of Christian motherhood, claiming Mrs. Lawrence used snuff and Laudanum every day and “her children are spoilt as bad as ever.”¹⁷⁹ Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence were both to blame for the lack of religious influence on the plantation as Lucy claimed in 1855, “the white people that lives here takes no intress [sic] in prayer and it makes the people very backward indeed.”¹⁸⁰ Lucy, therefore, had to take on religious instruction to make up for what she saw as the religious failings of white people.

values” for personal and family benefit. Miller does not analyze how Skipwith laid claim to white ideals of Christian motherhood or how she expanded on them through Sunday school teaching in order to serve as a public leader and evangelizer in her community. See Miller, *Dear Master*, 184-185, 188-189, 211.

¹⁷⁷ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, June 9, 1859, box 157, Cocke Family Papers, MSS. 640, University of Virginia Special Collections Library, Charlottesville, Va., hereafter cited as UVA. Transcriptions of this collection of letters from Lucy Skipwith to John Cocke were completed by Randall Miller in *Dear Master*, 196-263.

¹⁷⁸ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, October 2, 1859, box 158, Cocke Family Papers.

¹⁷⁹ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, July 28, 1859, box 157, Cocke Family Papers.

¹⁸⁰ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, July 20, 1855, box 149, Cocke Family Papers.

Lucy also laid claim to this larger religious role that went beyond the traditional duties of Protestant motherhood by leading prayer and religious instruction for her entire community, including adults enslaved on the plantation. While male preachers came and went over these two decades, Lucy consistently offered Sunday school instruction almost every Sunday of the year and even when Cocke hired a Methodist minister to live and preach at Hopewell in 1855, Lucy remained in charge of the Sunday school.¹⁸¹ When Cocke hired a new white overseer, Smith Powell, in 1860, Lucy wrote, “Smith takes delight in assisting me in the Sabbath school,” asserting her own leadership within the space of the plantation classroom even over traditional white male authorities.¹⁸² During the Civil War, Lucy wrote that “some white people in the neighborhood has said that they would punish me if they caught me at it [teaching] and I have been afraid to carry it on unless some grown white man was living here, but I will commence Teaching again as soon as this talk dies out.”¹⁸³ She recognized the protection that a white male presence could offer her Sunday school class but expressed a willingness to defy local white authority in secret if necessary to maintain her religious responsibility to teach. It is unclear whether she attempted to resume teaching before the end of the war, but afterwards, at least as late as December 1865, she was still teaching at Hopewell to the children of newly freed sharecroppers and was making plans to organize a larger school in the next year that could teach both Christianity and literacy to neighboring

¹⁸¹ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, May 19, 1855, box 148, Cocke Family Papers.

¹⁸² Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, August 25, 1860, box 160, Cocke Family Papers.

¹⁸³ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, August 15, 1863, box 170, Cocke Family Papers.

sharecroppers' children.¹⁸⁴ Whether this endeavor succeeded or not, for Lucy Skipwith, both before and after freedom, the plantation was not only a public workspace but also the site of her public religious leadership.

Lucy was even responsible for choosing and sometimes writing the curriculum for her class. In August of 1857, she sent Cocke a copy of the Ten Commandments which she had turned into a rhyming poem in order to make it easier for her enslaved students to memorize orally.¹⁸⁵ She then made a request of Cocke: "I wish you would have them printed for me in a small track [sic]" that she could distribute, echoing the role of many white female Sunday school teachers in the Gulf South who had also served as authors and distributors of teaching materials for black and white Sunday schools.¹⁸⁶ Also like white Sunday school teachers, Lucy often reflected on her religious responsibilities as a teacher, writing to Cocke, "I am still trying to do my duty to God and to man."¹⁸⁷ Yet Lucy faced unique challenges, as well, because she and her students were enslaved laborers with little time to devote to school. In response to these challenges, she boldly complained to her absentee owners when cotton picking season kept her students from concentrating in class, writing "the children are so sleepy [sic] when they come from work, that I cannot keep their eyes open no time," and "they will have to rise very

¹⁸⁴ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, December 7, 1865, box 173, Cocke Family Papers. It is unclear what happened to Skipwith after this last letter to Cocke in December of 1865. Randall Miller suggests that perhaps she remained at Hopewell until 1866 when her daughter was forced to leave because of a falling out with the white overseer, R.D. Powell. Lucy's parents worked as sharecroppers in Green County at least until 1870. See Miller, *Dear Master*, 194.

¹⁸⁵ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, August 31, 1857, box 153, Cocke Family Papers.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, June 17, 1855, box 149, Cocke Family Papers.

early.”¹⁸⁸ Lucy Skipwith was able to use her religious responsibility as instructor to justify a critique of the working conditions for the enslaved on their plantation.

She also took credit when eleven of her enslaved Sunday school scholars converted at a Presbyterian revival.¹⁸⁹ As Lucy reported about those who converted, “there is not a grown person among them. They are all my Sabbath School Schollars. They have all professed that are large enough but two.”¹⁹⁰ As a woman, Lucy Skipwith was not allowed to evangelize through preaching, but she was allowed to evangelize through teaching, and proudly claimed success in contrast to the white preacher at the revival.

Lucy’s account is certainly exceptional as a rare glimpse of an enslaved woman’s perspective on her own religious practices written by a literate woman of color during the time of slavery. Her experience in the Gulf South, however, does leave open the possibility that other enslaved women, who perhaps received white religious instruction in the Upper South, then took on the role of religious educator when forced to move to the Gulf South, especially on plantations with absentee landlords and a lack of nearby churches or preaching. Perhaps, like Skipwith, other enslaved women found both spiritual and social power through this identity of Sunday school teacher, creating a rival spiritual purpose for the space of the enslaved laborers’ quarters in the process.

¹⁸⁸ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Coker, July 20, 1855, box 149, Coker Family Papers,.

¹⁸⁹ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Coker, October 2, 1859, box 158, Coker Family Papers.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Sunday Schools Beyond the Plantation

Women's involvement in the mission to the enslaved was not restricted to the slave quarters, chapels, and homes on the plantations themselves. Especially in areas with an established church and more concentrated population, women conducted Sunday schools for people of color within the space of the church or designated Sunday school classrooms. Some of these church Sunday schools for the enslaved existed not in towns but in plantation districts with majority enslaved populations, as was the case in the Alabama Black Belt. In 1854 Bishop Cobbs reported that at St. David's Church in Dallas County, "a Sunday School for colored persons has for many years been taught by Mrs. [Eliza] Pegues and her estimable daughters, who with untiring zeal and long suffering patience, have persevered in their work and labor of love, and who have thus effectually aided the Clergyman of the Parish."¹⁹¹ One female household took up this responsibility for Dallas County's only Episcopal Church, reaching a congregation of enslaved persons beyond their own large plantation, and received recognition from their bishop for their efforts which helped lead sixteen people of color to confirmation that year.¹⁹² In Madison County, Mississippi, Mrs. Margaret Johnston, a widow, not only funded the erection of an Episcopal church, but also directed the catechism class at that church for enslaved children "from adjoining plantations" and is listed as the only Sunday school teacher for seventy-five students of color. The rector, Henry Samson, reported, "her labors of love, will never be forgotten by many in this world, nor will they be unrewarded in the world

¹⁹¹ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-third Annual Convention*, 25-26.

¹⁹² Ibid. See also Tom Blake, "Dallas County, Alabama: Largest Slaveholders from 1860 Slave Census Schedules and Surname Matches for African Americans on 1870 Census," May 2001, <https://sites.rootsweb.com/~ajac/aldallas.htm>.

that is to come.”¹⁹³ As on the plantation, slaveholding women’s efforts to instruct the enslaved in church buildings were tied to their image as benevolent Christian mistresses in life and to their own salvation in the afterlife.

At large biracial congregations in plantation districts like the Eutaw Presbyterian Church in Green County, Alabama, an entire teaching staff of women volunteered each year to teach the enslaved female population, with male volunteers teaching the enslaved male population.¹⁹⁴ In 1862, the rector of St. Mary’s Episcopal Church in the Black Belt town of Camden, Alabama reported that “five or six ladies of the congregation” led religious instruction for all free and enslaved parishioners every Sunday with an average attendance of “not less than 80.”¹⁹⁵ Many of the female teachers at Eutaw taught at both the white Sunday school in the morning and the black Sunday school in the afternoon, embracing both as part of their public religious duty on Sundays. In these situations, women worked together to teach several classes of different ages and had an opportunity to form a religious community through their shared work.

The church-directed Sunday school for people of color was especially common, however, in towns and cities in the Gulf South. In the 1840s and 50s, at biracial churches in Mobile, Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, Natchez, Vicksburg, Columbus, and New Orleans—among others—white women worked together to direct the religious

¹⁹³ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-ninth Annual Convention*, 86.

¹⁹⁴ Session Book, January 26, 1853, December 10, 1854, First Presbyterian Church, Eutaw, Alabama Records, CPTS. For Methodist examples, see “Annual of the Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Second Session, 1848,” *Annals of the Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1847-1861*, digital collection, Centenary, <https://archive.org/details/minutesoflouisia1848meth>.

¹⁹⁵ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of an Adjourned Meeting of the Thirty-first Annual Convention*, 40.

instruction of free and enslaved people of color.¹⁹⁶ Using the same language as at plantation schools of praising the teacher and her sincere effort rather than the students and their conversions, leaders of urban churches pointed to these white women as exemplars of Christian duty. Albert Muller of Trinity Episcopal, Natchez commended the “excellent female members of his congregation,” proclaiming that God would “give his grace and heavenly benediction to those who have labored with him in the Gospel, and that their names may be written in the book of life.”¹⁹⁷ Likewise in Montgomery, Alabama, “Mrs. William Knox” received praise in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* for conducting a Methodist Sunday school of over 180 free and enslaved scholars: “This excellent lady is doing much for the children of color in this city. May the Lord bless her and give us many more for this great work.”¹⁹⁸ White women who volunteered in these church Sunday schools were examples to other church members, not necessarily of how to save the souls of the enslaved but of how to save their own souls through a sincere evangelizing effort.

While the vast majority of evidence points to white female teachers at these biracial church Sunday schools, southern Louisiana in and around New Orleans presented a unique opportunity for women of color to teach, particularly at Episcopal churches.

¹⁹⁶ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Fourteenth Annual Convention*, 22, 23, 18; Roach, Diary, December 24, 1859, December 25, 1860, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers; Minutes, vol. 4, Presbytery of South Alabama Minutes, 216-217; Session Book 2, April 1860, First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa Records; Asenath A. Copes to Joseph Copes, July 1, 1837, Copes Papers; Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Annual of the Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Second Session,” *Annals*, 22; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Convention*, 56, 58.

¹⁹⁷ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1828), 4-5.

¹⁹⁸ J.W. Brown "Montgomery Mission," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 14, 1856.

Previous scholars have shown that under the guidance of Bishop Polk, the late antebellum Diocese of Louisiana was especially active in the mission to the enslaved, but scholars have missed the diocesan records where women of color are listed not just as students but as teachers.¹⁹⁹ It is unclear from the records whether these women were free or enslaved, but their nameless inclusion in these documents is significant, regardless. In 1857, Christ Church, Covington's annual report to the diocese recorded one woman of color as a Sunday school teacher with eight other white women, ensuring that there was almost certainly white supervision of her class in some capacity, even if they did not sit in on her lessons every week.²⁰⁰ At Emmanuel, Plaquemines, in 1858, however, women of color outnumbered white women in the teaching staff of the mission, with the teachers listed as "females, white, 1; colored, 2-3."²⁰¹ This accounting acknowledges the extra difficulty for women of color to have the time (or perhaps, white permission) to devote to teaching. In New Orleans that same year, at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, a majority black church with a white priest, the Sunday school teaching staff listed two men and eleven women of color as teachers for forty-two male and eighty-five female students.²⁰² Not only were there no white Sunday school teachers at this Sunday school, but also women of color clearly outnumbered the male teaching staff. While Lucy Skipwith directed religious instruction on the plantation, these lower Louisiana churches offered women of color a leadership opportunity off the plantation yet to be found in surviving antebellum records

¹⁹⁹ See Robbins, *Bishop of the Old South*, 110; Goldston, "The Gospel of the Rich."

²⁰⁰ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Nineteenth Annual Convention*, 50.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1858), 51.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 57.

elsewhere, in biracial Episcopal churches but also at the semi-autonomous “Fourth African Church of New Orleans” which held a Sunday school every Sunday according to their 1859 church minutes.²⁰³ Even before the Civil War and the arrival of Freedmen’s Bureau teachers, women of color teaching Sunday school in the Gulf South received white sanction, and at least in a city like New Orleans, some sense of autonomy. At the same time, it gave these women a clear leadership position in their churches beyond the space of the plantation and a claim to the benevolent Christian identity dominated in almost every other setting by white women.

Conclusions

In 1862, at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church for the Confederate States of America, the all-male committee on Sunday schools thanked “the pious women of our Churches,” who filled in for male Sunday school and Bible class teachers fighting in the war, praising these women for “nobly exerting themselves to keep alive these institutions for the impartation of Christian knowledge to the young.”²⁰⁴ In the Gulf South, however, Protestant women were volunteering to teach male and female Sunday school classes, organizing new schools, and “keeping alive” black and white religious instruction for decades before the Civil War. In fact, in the Gulf South, white and black Sunday school classes were often more consistently held and better attended than male preaching, thanks to resident churchwomen who made teaching a priority every

²⁰³ Albert E. Casey, comp., *Amite County, Mississippi, 1699-1865*, vol. 2 (Birmingham, AL: Amite County Historical Fund, 1950), 392.

²⁰⁴ Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America. With an Appendix*, (Augusta, GA: Steam Power Press Chronicle & Sentinel, 1862), 5.

Sunday.²⁰⁵ Sunday school teaching offered Protestant women a way to create a public identity as evangelizer and activist for benevolent and missionary causes and find religious community among their fellow teachers outside of the family circle. In Sunday schools for the enslaved, white women found both religious and political purpose as the front line of pro-slavery Christian propaganda, helping to create through their teaching and writing the image of the benevolent female slaveholder. Their success in this respect is evident in the long-lasting power of this image, which originated before the Civil War but continues in memoirs and fiction to the present day. For women of color, teaching at Sunday schools offered a rare opportunity for white-sanctioned religious leadership in the urban South and on absentee plantations and a chance to claim moral superiority, even, as Lucy Skipwith shows, over white women in their communities. While some women focused solely on their work in the classroom, for other women teaching children was a stepping-stone to evangelizing to adults—leading and speaking in public religious spaces like prayer meetings, missionary societies, and worship services. Like their northern counterparts, Protestant women in the antebellum Gulf South made teaching Sunday school an avenue for a larger public life in the church.

²⁰⁵ Mary Susan Ker, Diary, April 7, 1850, June 9, 1850, Ker (John and Family) Papers, Mss. 3539, LLMVC; Lucy Skipwith to John Cocke, July 26, 1857, August 25, 1860, Copes Papers; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth Anniversary*, 20-21; Roach, Diary, October 26, 1855, November 2, 1856, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers; Markham, Diary, August 11, 1859, Markham Papers.

CHAPTER THREE

“Her Piety Was a Living Oracle:” Public Speaking and Service in the Meetings of the Church

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law.

—1 Corinthians 14:35 (King James Version)

A true and devout Christian, her piety was a living oracle—speaking at the fireside, the class or prayer meeting, in the Sanctuary, or on the encampment—at all times and places.

—William Scales, *New Orleans Christian Advocate*

In 1860 when Agnes Hanna, a Methodist preacher’s wife from West Feliciana, Louisiana died, the minister and author of her obituary, William Scales, praised her for being a “Christian exemplar” for forty years. He particularly highlighted her speaking roles, not only in private family prayer but also at public class, prayer, and camp meetings, and even during Sunday service—“at all times and places.”¹ Hanna’s public speaking in church meetings was in direct contrast to the Pauline injunction “let your women keep silence in the churches,” which most scholars assume southern churches enforced, at least by 1830 with the rise of mainstream Protestantism and the decline of lay participation popular during the Great Awakenings.² While women might serve as

¹ William H. Scales, "Obituaries," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 22, 1860.

² Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 131; Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 113; Labbé, "Helpers in the Gospel;" Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 193; Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 210; Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 107; Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 167. Some scholars have offered scattered examples of Protestant women continuing to speak publicly but argue that it became increasingly

Protestant academy and Sunday school teachers evangelizing and leading *children* as a public extension of their domestic duty, leadership over *adults* was another matter—a threat to the patriarchal order of respectable churches and southern society.³ Officially, women were certainly excluded from public speaking and leadership positions, being barred from both the clergy and elected lay office holding. Unofficially, however, outside of these male-only positions, some meeting spaces in the Gulf South remained flexible, even for women of color. Ultimately, the kind of speech or leadership acceptable for women depended on the environment: the type and location of the meeting and the race, gender, and class of the audience. Women in informal or temporary positions in mixed company spaces and more permanent positions in homosocial spaces claimed a public religious duty to serve as church organizers, advisors, exhorters, prayer leaders, musicians, and voters. These women—far from remaining the silent majority—spoke, led, and served in new church institutions created to meet the spiritual needs of a scattered Gulf South population, growing the membership of their churches in the process.

Women as Church Founders and Organizers

Since the earliest years of Protestant church formation in the Gulf South, women served as “founding members” of congregations and some of the first missionaries in the region reported preaching to congregations whose membership was entirely female.⁴

harder and limit their discussion to exceptional camp meetings or female groups. See Sparks, “Good Sisters,” 42, 52; Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 180-181; Nguyen, “Active Faith,” 101, 118.

³ Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 159; Schneider, *Way of the Cross*, xxvii.

⁴ Benjamin Drake, *Sketch of the Life of Rev. Elijah Steele* (Cincinnati: 1843), 54; A.C. Ramsey, *The Autobiography of A.C. Ramsey*, ed. Jean Strickland (Moss Point, MS: 1879), 106; Esther Wright Boyd, *Reminiscences*, Jesse D. Wright Papers, 8; “Disproportion of Male and Female in the Church,” *New*

When, for example, Methodists formed their first congregation in Montgomery, Alabama in 1829 by breaking away from the multi-denominational “union church,” nine of the ten founding members were women.⁵ While it is unclear from founding member lists how much influence they might have had in the decision to form a separate congregation, the fact that many were listed without their husbands or fathers is a significant indication of choice in the matter. Women received more explicit credit in obituaries for not only being an original member but also for “organizing” their churches, like Elizabeth Springer who was credited with helping to organize the Baptist Church in Vicksburg in 1840.⁶ The author of her obituary wrote “in the struggles of that church during the first years of its existence, she was prominent in its counsels, and efficient in its labors.”⁷ St. John’s Episcopal Church in Montgomery, Alabama recognized a group of women including “Mrs. John H. Sommerville, Mrs. Jesse P. Taylor, [and] Mrs. Elizabeth Thornton Meriwether Lewis Mathews” with informally organizing the first Episcopal congregation in the town in the early 1830s, rotating meetings between each other’s homes and inviting priests who gave communion.⁸ In 1833, three men and the three women listed above met to officially organize into a parish. While two of the women signed with their husbands’ names, one woman, Elizabeth Mathews, asserted even more clearly her

Orleans Christian Advocate, March 17, 1855; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 3, 11.

⁵ “1829-1900: Establishing the Vision,” First United Methodist Church, Montgomery, accessed May 21, 2018, <http://www.fumcmontgomery.org/who-we-are/fumcs-185th-year/>.

⁶ “Biographical,” *Mississippi Baptist*, March 24, 1859.

⁷ *Ibid.* See also, “Obituaries,” *South Western Baptist*, May, 14, 1857; Joshua T. Heard, “Obituary Notices,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 28, 1852.

⁸ Mattie Pegues Wood, *The Life of St. John's Parish, A History of St. John's Episcopal Church from 1834 to 1955* (Montgomery, AL: The Black Belt Press, 1955), 3-5.

independence in choosing to form this congregation by signing her own first name.⁹

Likewise in 1832 at Unity Presbyterian Church in Amite County, Mississippi, while men served officially as church elders and pastors, three women served as founding members, signing their own first and last names on the charter.¹⁰

These founding member lists for what were commonly biracial churches often included both white women and free and enslaved women of color. The list of founding members in 1818 for Canaan Baptist Church in Alabama, for instance, included “a slave girl, Jane,” listed with no indication of what choice she might have had in the matter or whether her slaveholder was also a member.¹¹ In Monroe, Louisiana in 1826, on the other hand, one enslaved woman who worked in the home of a French Catholic family reportedly “became deeply interested on the subject of religion and asked her owners the privilege of joining” the Methodist Church.¹² Since there was no such church in Monroe, the Reverend John Jones visited her and declared her “the first person ever known to join a Protestant church in that ancient town,” and the original member of the Methodist preaching station in Monroe.¹³ Women of color in the rural Gulf South, like white women, often had to take the initiative to found a congregation for their denomination of choice.

⁹ Wood, *The Life of St. John's Parish*, 5.

¹⁰ Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:401-402. See also Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 45.

¹¹ Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 26.

¹² John G. Jones, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, Jones (John G. and John A.B.) Journals, MSS. Z1321.001, MDAH, 154-155.

¹³ *Ibid.*

As Protestant settlement in the Gulf South expanded in the 1840s and 1850s, so too did the desire for more churches, and women continued to lead the way in organizing new congregations. In 1855 six women formed the Methodist congregation in Clinton, Louisiana.¹⁴ Bethesda Baptist Church of Hinds County, Mississippi, organized in 1846, included enslaved women Peggy and Lucy, listed as “servants of J. H. Collins [church member]” among their founding members on their charter.¹⁵ Women also helped organize new churches when original congregations became too large to meet the needs of their communities. In 1851, seven female and ten male members of Bethel Presbyterian Church in Rodney, Mississippi signed a petition to the Presbytery of Mississippi requesting that they be organized into a separate church, not because of theological differences or ill will, but in order “to promote their own spiritual good & more effectually to advance the cause of religion in the village of Rodney and its vicinity.”¹⁶ All of the women who signed the petition except one signed with their own first names, despite being married. Some are listed as members alongside their husbands, but some joined on their own. As denominations expanded, women continued to help found new churches, publicly asserting their support by signing petitions and founding documents.

Women also played a crucial role in letting denominational authorities know about the preaching needs of their new congregations and convincing preachers to come

¹⁴ J.J. Wheat, "Home Correspondence, Clinton, La.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 29, 1855.

¹⁵ “Names of the members who went into the organization,” 1846, Church Meeting Minutes, Bethesda Baptist Church, Hinds County, Records, MBHC.

¹⁶ "Minutes," Presbytery of Mississippi Records, 160-161.

serve in their communities. Missionaries from national denominational societies, including the Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the 1830s and the Baptist Home Mission Society in the 1840s, received letters from Gulf South women requesting preaching in their neighborhoods, often detailing how many months it had been since their neighborhood had last heard a sermon.¹⁷ Some Protestant women who moved to the Gulf South from the East Coast sent letters to their former ministers and bishops asking for help recruiting preachers to their new locations.¹⁸ Once itinerants were stationed in the region, women turned their appeals for preaching directly to them. In 1842, when a new Methodist congregation was organized in Jackson, Alabama, Mrs. A. C. Taylor reportedly “induced the nearest itinerant preacher she could find to take the place into his circuit.”¹⁹ An Episcopal woman in Benton, Alabama wrote a priest stationed elsewhere in Alabama, William Barnwell, asking him to, as Barnwell explained, “interest myself in some way for the purpose of securing the services of an Episcopal minister in that place” to meet “the spiritual wants of the neighborhood.”²⁰ Likewise in 1845, Jane Copes acted as the go-between for her community in China Grove, Mississippi and the Presbyterian preacher L. J. Halsey in Vicksburg who she hoped to convince to add China Grove to his preaching circuit.²¹ These women used their

¹⁷ American Baptist Home Mission Society *The Eighth Report of the American Baptist Home Mission Society* (New York, 1840), 18; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 1 (Burlington, NJ, 1836), 238.

¹⁸ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention*, 17; E.O. Martin to Absalom Peters, March 15, 1834, Incoming Correspondence, Alabama, AHMS.

¹⁹ Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama* (Nashville, 1893), 580.

²⁰ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 2 (New York, 1837), 299.

²¹ Jane H. Copes to Mary Ann Copes, January 7, 1845, Copes Papers.

connections to clergy and laymen either on the East Coast or in the Gulf South to request preaching visits and served as contact persons for their communities' pastoral needs.

While most letters were sent by individual women, some women worked collectively to make appeals for preaching and to organize congregations for worship services. In 1843, several Baptist women from the Florida Parishes of Louisiana traveled together to the Baptist association meeting in their state in order to make a direct appeal to church leaders to send a preacher to their community.²² Even in the 1850s, Episcopal women in rural parts of their dioceses received credit from their bishops for their collective labors to get preachers. Bishop William Green used reports of women's collective action in Osyka and Terry, Mississippi to critique the lack of male concern for organizing congregations in rural areas of the Gulf South, declaring in his 1859 address to the Diocese of Mississippi, "God be praised, if the husbands and fathers of our day *will* withhold themselves from His service, the wife and the mother cannot equally hold back."²³ In Louisiana in 1858, an Episcopal missionary stationed in Cheneyville and Holmesville reported to his diocese that "much praise is due to the few pious and devoted ladies at whose insistence this mission was commenced."²⁴ While these women's specific actions to make this mission happen are unknown, it is clear that even on the eve of the Civil War there were areas of the Gulf South that did not have established churches and relied on women to organize new congregations and make appeals for preaching visits.

²² American Baptist Home Mission Society, *The Eleventh Report of the American Baptist Home Mission Society* (New York, 1843), 65.

²³ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-third Annual Convention*, 39.

²⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Twentieth Annual Convention*, 59.

Some women used the public platform of writing to local newspapers to request and organize preaching events in their neighborhoods. A Baptist “good lady,” cited only as “Mrs. M” from the rural countryside outside Marion, Alabama, was quoted in the *Alabama Baptist* in 1846 complaining about the lack of preaching in her neighborhood.²⁵ Making a case for rural church services rather than forcing residents to travel into town to hear a preacher, she argued that “there are so many ministers in Marion, I should think some of them might come out and preach to us.”²⁶ The editor of the paper, James DeVotie, agreed with her call for an expansion of preaching in the region. Rural Protestant women were not the only ones using newspapers to request preachers. Writing under the pseudonym “Lutha Fontella,” one Baptist woman in Baton Rouge in 1860 was given her own column in the *Mississippi Baptist* after she complained in a published letter to the editor, “Surely such a place as Baton Rouge, the capital of the State of Louisiana, ought to be supplied with a pure gospel.”²⁷ Even in 1860, Baptists in the capital had no organized congregation or preaching, and Fontella, as the “correspondent” from the region, was responsible for this public notice directed through the newspaper to the missionary board of the national Baptist Church.²⁸

In addition to making requests for preaching, women helped make these visits easier by offering up their homes as places where a congregation could gather, turning their parlors and dining rooms into public spaces for religious practice. While previous

²⁵ "Editorial Correspondence," *Alabama Baptist*, August 29, 1846.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ "Defects of Female Education," *Mississippi Baptist*, February 23, 1860

²⁸ *Ibid.*

scholars have acknowledged that evangelical Protestant women hosted worship in the early nineteenth-century, this role remained necessary in rural areas of the Gulf South like Rapides and Lafourche Parishes in Louisiana and Amite, Holmes, Noxubee, and Washington Counties in Mississippi even through the 1850s and 1860s.²⁹ Sometimes women invited preachers to preach in their homes, as was the case for Methodist John Jones in Pine Hills, Louisiana and Presbyterian minister Robert Caldwell outside of Centreville, Alabama.³⁰ On other occasions preachers made the request. Ann Raney Thomas of Point Coupee, Louisiana recalled when a Presbyterian minister in the 1840s asked, “if I could get a congregation on the Sabbath at my house, ” which she agreed to do in exchange for him baptizing her daughter as well as several enslaved children on her plantation.³¹ Although Thomas was Methodist, the lack of any Protestant churches in the area made this arrangement appealing for her as well as for her neighbors who crowded into her house on Sunday in response to her invitations. Even though Thomas was married, this minister turned to a woman to organize a congregation rather than to her husband, perhaps recognizing that she, more than her husband, felt a religious duty to make sure her children and those enslaved on her plantation received the sacrament of baptism, even if not within her own denomination.

²⁹ Ann Finlay, “An Old Letter,” Recollections of Mrs. Ann Finlay, Eunice J. Stockwell Papers, MSS. Z/0629.000/F, MDAH; Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 2:230; Lewis Alexander Sims, Diary, vol. 2, November 13, 1850, Lewis Alexander Sims Papers, MSS. 17, Centenary; Eliza Magruder, Diary, May 25, 1856; Robert T. Parish, “1861 Diary of Robert T. Parish,” ed. Randy DeCuir, <https://www.la-umc.org/1861diaryofrevrobertparish/>; “First Year of an Itinerant in Louisiana Interior—Description of Country—State of Methodism,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, March 15, 1851; “Bishop’s Journal and Address,” *Church Herald*, July 23, 1852.

³⁰ John G. Jones, Autobiography, vol. 2, Jones (John G. and John A.B.) Journals, 156-157; Robert Caldwell to Absalom Peters, December 15, 1837, Incoming Correspondence, Alabama, AHMS.

³¹ Coleman, Reminiscences, Coleman Papers, 12-13.

Episcopal women felt this obligation as well, requesting that priests visit their homes and plantation chapels for biracial preaching services for enslaved laborers, family members, and neighbors, black and white. Episcopal Bishop William Green of Mississippi recalled his visits to the plantations of “Mrs. Griffith” and Mrs. Matilda Railey in Adams County, describing both as locations for services for “a number of her servants, a few of her friends and neighbors.”³² Rather than require Griffith to travel the eight miles to Trinity Church in Natchez on Sundays, the bishop agreed to make a personal preaching trip for the benefit of Griffith and her neighbors as well as to reach a large enslaved population on her property.

Other Protestant women made specific requests for preaching directed to their enslaved laborers as an extension of their “Christian duty” as slaveholders. Kate Stone, a Methodist slaveholder in northeast Louisiana across the Mississippi River from Vicksburg, recorded in her diary her mother’s requests for preaching in 1861: “Mamma has the minister to preach to our Negroes when he can find time, but that is not as often as we wish.”³³ In 1842, Martha Douglass of Jackson, Louisiana wrote her friend, the Reverend William Winans, to ask him about appointing a preacher to the enslaved for the Methodist Feliciana Mission and he responded by sending her names of potential candidates.³⁴ Protestant white women in the Gulf South used their contacts with leading clergymen to make preaching happen, not only for themselves and their neighbors but

³² Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention*, 47; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Thirty-fifth Annual Convention*, 57-58.

³³ Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone 1861-1868*, ed. John Q. Anderson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), 41.

³⁴ William Winans to Martha E.H. Douglass, December 15, 1842, Winans Papers.

also for the enslaved in their communities. At the same time, by inviting preachers to their plantations instead of taking enslaved laborers to church, these slaveholding women reinforced their position of control and mastery through spatial containment of enslaved religious practice to their own property.

Lucy Skipwith, the enslaved Sunday school teacher of Hopewell Plantation in Greene County, Alabama, also used letter writing to shrewdly ask her absentee owner back in Virginia for more consistent preaching from itinerants. When a Methodist employed by the “Greensboro Colored Mission” added Hopewell Plantation to his circuit in 1855, Skipwith wrote to report how many times (or more importantly, how few times) the preacher visited. In a complaint about her white overseer in the same letter, she wrote, “I would give any thing in the world if there was one white person on this plantation that was a friend to God and to the works of God. I know that every thing would go on better.”³⁵ Appealing to the slaveholder’s material interests, she argued that a more consistent religious presence would make the plantation run more smoothly and productively, while also implying that this would improve the quality of life for those enslaved as well.

Eventually Cocke hired a permanent missionary to the enslaved to be stationed at Hopewell, Francis Crane. When he died and the plantation reverted back to itinerant missionaries, Skipwith wrote again to complain “we have no preaching in the Chapple for nearly two months.”³⁶ Within a year, Cocke had hired another local preacher.³⁷ Whether

³⁵ Lucy Skipwith to John Cocke, July 20, 1855, Cocke Family Papers.

³⁶ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, August 25, 1860, Cocke Family Papers.

³⁷ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, May 1, 1861, box 163, Cocke Family Papers.

Cocke was motivated by Skipwith's appeals or not, the fact that Skipwith used her ability to write to make veiled requests for more preaching reveals her own religious priorities as well as her recourse to try and do something about it. Skipwith used a method common among white women and a rhetoric that would appeal to white interests.

Even when not hosting preaching themselves, women helped organize preaching services and acted as personal advisors to visiting preachers with inside information about the religious needs of their communities. "Sister Mallory" performed these duties for Methodists in the state capital of Jackson, Mississippi until 1839. When itinerant preacher John Jones arrived in Jackson to preach in 1837, he first spoke with a local preacher, Dr. Stuart, whom Jones hoped would give him advice on how to go about setting up preaching appointments in town. Stuart explained that Jones needed to meet with Sister Mallory and he even offered to officially introduce them. While Mr. and Mrs. Mallory ran a hotel in town together, it was Mrs. Mallory who had been organizing a meeting space in the state house for preaching in the past. Mrs. Mallory told Jones that "she would have the usual concert of hotel bells ring for preaching at 4 P.M." and after the meeting it was Mrs. Mallory who consulted with Jones when a group troublemakers interrupted their service, or as Jones described them, "Satan, assisted by whiskey."³⁸ Mrs. Mallory turned the courthouse, a secular political space, into a worship space and served as an essential leader and organizer in that public space, recognized as such by local and itinerant clergy.

In his *History of Methodism in Mississippi*, Jones also included Priscilla Jefferies as a valuable congregational organizer in the 1830s who often met with the leaders of the

³⁸ John G. Jones, *Autobiography*, vol. 2, Jones (John G. and John A.B.) Journals, 38-39.

church—“her advice sought in regard to its [Methodism’s] increased prosperity.”³⁹ Even established rectors like Episcopalian Henry Lay in Huntsville, Alabama relied on their wives to help spread the news about preaching services in the area. In 1850 while Henry Lay was at the national convention for the Episcopal Church in 1850, his wife, Eliza, spent an afternoon traveling to eleven different places in town “to give notice” of the guest preacher they had that week, and when Bishop Nicholas Cobbs visited in 1854, Henry looked again to Eliza to make sure a notice of his visit would be posted in the local newspaper.⁴⁰ Preachers relied on women not only to fill the pews for Sunday services but also to spread the news about these services to friends and neighbors, ensuring their preaching reached a larger audience.

Women consistently showed an awareness of the needs of their congregations and made their opinions known, not only about the quantity of preaching available but also the quality. Some expressed their concerns by walking out of the service. Madeline Edwards of New Orleans left in the middle of worship because the preacher read from a printed sermon instead of preaching from memory, a method, Madeline declared, “I can not endure.”⁴¹ Episcopalian Eliza Robertson of New Iberia, Louisiana also made her preaching preferences known with a public walk out, writing in her diary in 1855 that she left church in the middle of the service, “when I heard Mr. Jenkins was going to preach”

³⁹ Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 2:296.

⁴⁰ Eliza Lay to Henry C Lay, September 28, 1850, March 5, 1854, Lay Papers.

⁴¹ Madeline Edwards, “Man,” in *Madeline: Love and Survival in Antebellum New Orleans*, ed. Dell Upton (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 118.

because “I could do better by staying at home.”⁴² Some protested by attending other denomination’s services, often after hearing from female friends of better preaching in a different church, even if it meant more travel time.⁴³ Other women complained to male church leaders, including one Methodist woman in Clinton, Mississippi who told John Jones “that the Conference had better sent no one” than their current choice, and that she “wanted a preacher able to counteract the Presbyterian influence.”⁴⁴ Jones complained that this woman was too concerned with denominational politics, but never suggested that it was improper for a woman to speak out against her minister. Even in the rural Gulf South where options were limited, women were discerning shoppers when it came to preaching expectations.

Critiquing preaching in private diary entries and letters to friends and family was very common, but some women took their critiques public by writing to the editors of their local newspapers. In the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* in 1855, one female writer, “Mary,” wrote in to complain about the “scolding in the pulpit” her Methodist minister gave every week, which she saw as counterproductive to inspiring conversions.⁴⁵ Her original letter in April inspired a forum in the newspaper that lasted through the summer with several male and female contributors weighing in on this

⁴² Eliza Ann Marsh Robertson, Diary, April 15, 1855, Eliza Ann Marsh Robertson Papers MSS. 1181-z, SHC.

⁴³ Anna Butler to Sarah Butler, March 12, 1854, Sarah and Ann Butler Correspondence, MSS. 581, LLMVC; Henry C Lay to Eliza Lay, August 7, 1853, Lay Papers; Eliza Magruder, Diary, August 11, 1849, September 9, 1849, April 20, 1850.

⁴⁴ John G. Jones, Journal, Jones (John G.) Journal, MSS. Z1321.000, MDAH, 56.

⁴⁵ Mary, "Scolding in the Pulpit," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, April 14, 1855.

preaching style.⁴⁶ One woman, “Suzette” used this public forum to recount her own spiritual journey of being denied membership in the Presbyterian Church by a deacon who “crushed my wounded spirit” like “one of Mary’s ‘scolding preachers’” and years later converting to the Methodist Church thanks to a more a supportive Methodist preacher.⁴⁷ Other women used newspapers to anonymously critique preachers by name, as in 1850 when a “Sarah Bluestocking,” the pseudonym used by Presbyterian female academy governess “Mrs. D. Macaulay” of New Orleans, criticized the infamous preacher Theodore Clapp in the *Delta* for his unorthodox preaching as a former Presbyterian now identifying as Unitarian. Macaulay’s husband, David, sent the newspaper clipping to his Presbyterian friends, writing “‘Sarah’ has commenced in the *Delta* and opened up a war” and praising “the ability of ‘Sarah’ to drive off Mr. C. from the field.”⁴⁸ Even when there were few preaching options on a given Sunday many women were not content to accept whatever minister they were given, nor were they afraid of getting involved in church politics on a public platform, especially under the anonymity of a newspaper pseudonym.

Professing Religion, Joining the Church

Beyond simply attending worship services, white women as well as women of color were also more likely than their male counterparts to make the conscious choice to become official church members by professing conversion in evangelical denominations or, in the Episcopal tradition, by publicly confirming their faith through the rite of

⁴⁶ "Scolding in the Pulpit," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 2, 1855; "Pulpit Scolding," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 14, 1855.

⁴⁷ Suzette, "Christian Experience," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 21, 1855.

⁴⁸ Dr. David Macaulay to Joseph S. Copes, June 3, 1850, Copes Papers; "New Orleans Female Institute," *The Daily Crescent* (New Orleans, LA), October 26, 1850.

confirmation.⁴⁹ While husbands and wives often attended the same church, wives were more likely to seek membership and some, as during the earlier Great Awakenings, continued to join congregations different from their husbands, asserting an independent religious identity in the process. Sometimes this led to marital tension. Nathan Cornell, a Methodist minister in Warrenton, Mississippi, recorded an incident in 1859 of an overseer's wife, "Sister Fisher," joining the church against the wishes of her husband. When her husband approached the local minister to demand her name be taken off the membership list, she found support from the women of the church, who "commenced talking to Fisher's wife persuading her to allow her name to remain."⁵⁰ Other wives, like Ann Raney Thomas of Point Coupee, Louisiana, expected criticism from their husbands when they joined churches and were pleasantly surprised to find none. While Thomas's husband did not join the Methodist Church, she was the first person in her community to do so, writing later that her neighbors "wanted me to set the first example of not being ashamed of my Saviour, but to confess him before men."⁵¹ Her initiative led to several other adult conversions that day. Free women of color, when their status was noted, also appear on membership roles and Episcopal confirmation lists independently of men, indicating a freedom of choice similar to their white counterparts.⁵² Enslaved women of

⁴⁹ For scholarship on the female majority in church membership, see footnote 4; Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 19; Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 162.

⁵⁰ Nathan Cornell to Mary Chamberlain, February 3, 1859, Chamberlain-Cornell Correspondence, LSUS.

⁵¹ Coleman, *Reminiscences*, Coleman Papers, 13.

⁵² Parish Records, vol. B., May 11, 1851, April 18, 1856, Grace Episcopal Church, St. Francisville, Archives of Grace Episcopal Church, St. Francisville, LA, transcribed by Lorris Jessup, January 1862. For Presbyterian examples, see Session Minutes, April 7, 1843, First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans Records, PCHS; Session Minutes, November 30, 1845, August 16, 1859, First Presbyterian Church, Selma, Records, PCHS.

color, certainly by the 1840s, were denied this freedom, as churches enforced the requirement that they have the permission of their slaveholder to become an official church member. Free women, at least, had the legal opportunity to request membership and join churches independently of the family patriarch, and even if facing backlash at home, were praised by preachers, male church leaders, and their new female religious community for doing so.

Women also took the initiative to request these membership rites from a church, whether that was by standing up and presenting letters of good standing from their previous churches at congregational meetings, or as new converts presenting themselves for examination and declaring themselves ready to receive these rites. Like many students at Protestant female academies, women across race and class lines in the Gulf South found that professing conversion or asserting one's faith through confirmation provided a unique opportunity to speak publicly in front of mixed company. Where this happened and how much flexibility individual women had in what they said varied by denomination. In Presbyterian and Baptist churches, women "professed religion" or shared their conversion stories in separate church business meetings that were not part of the worship service. Baptist women spoke at the church meeting—usually held on Saturdays—in front of the entire body of male and female members who attended that week and who voted on whether to extend membership. In the Presbyterian Church, on the other hand, women gave their declaration of faith at session meetings, which were only attended by the pastor and church elders. This male governing body alone examined their answers and determined whether or not to admit the candidate. While most Presbyterian Churches allowed women the flexibility to speak extemporaneously about

their conversion, at least one Presbyterian Church in the Gulf South, Concord Presbyterian Church in Pine Ridge, Mississippi, determined that male converts would face an examination while women only recited the shorter catechism.⁵³ Other Presbyterian Church records, however, indicate that women were first examined by the male session but then allowed to make a public profession of their faith in front of the entire congregation, as was the case by the 1840s at Bethany Presbyterian Church in Amite County.⁵⁴ Individual church processes varied.

Methodist professions of faith generally had more flexibility in content and location. They might begin during a worship service when the minister called “mourners” or “seekers” up to the altar to pray for conversion, but these men and women were considered probationers until they could prove themselves and profess, usually in a separate class meeting. While female mourners were at the altar, other women were allowed to come up and encourage and pray for them, but usually in personal conversations to the mourner rather than speaking to the entire congregation.⁵⁵ In the Episcopal Church, women made public declarations of their faith as part of their confirmation during an actual worship service in front of a congregation of men and women. As Bishop Leonidas Polk wrote of a majority female confirmation service in St. Francisville, Louisiana, women spoke in order to “ratify, in this sacred and impressive

⁵³ "History of Concord Church," Cornelius Grafton Papers, MDAH, 12.

⁵⁴ Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:182.

⁵⁵ For examples of obituaries of Methodist women praise for encouraging mourners at the altar, see "Deaths," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 4, 1856; "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, January 19, 1856; Joshua T. Heard, "Obituary Notices," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 28, 1852.

rite, the vows of their Baptismal covenant.”⁵⁶ Episcopal confirmands, however, like the female converts at Concord Presbyterian Church, had to follow a set liturgical script that left little room for extemporaneous additions.

Confirmation also made Episcopal women eligible to serve as godparents or confirmation sponsors for others, a temporary liturgical role in church services which required women to stand up in front of the congregation and make a vow to support the spiritual education of the child or adult they sponsored. Women like Eliza Clitherall in Montgomery, Alabama took this public declaration as godparent seriously, writing in her diary in 1860, “Oh may I henceforth do my duty by her & preform my vows when I stood for her at the Altar—I feel it now, conscientiously I made vows, in her behalf at the font of Baptism, & feel how great is my responsibility.”⁵⁷ While Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal slaveholding women often took up the role of godparent for those enslaved on their property, sometimes without their husbands as godfathers, free and enslaved women of color had the opportunity to make this public vow as well.⁵⁸ Historian Cynthia Lyerly has argued that in the Methodist Church, godparenting was symbolically powerful for enslaved mothers who were able to sponsor their own children and publicly delineate “motherhood as a sacred relationship,” and “demonstrate their affection, love, and

⁵⁶ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Eighteenth Annual Convention*, 30.

⁵⁷ Clitherall, Diary, vol. 17, September 3, 1860, Clitherall Diaries.

⁵⁸ For examples of slaveholding women as both owners and godparents of enslaved members, see Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1854), 16; “Baptisms,” Register, March 15, 1846, August 5, 1849, April 8, 1849, September 22, 1850, April 20, 1851, December 18, 1853, St. David's Episcopal Church Records, Episcopal Diocese of Alabama Records, BPL; “Baptisms,” Parish Register, Christ Church (Protestant Episcopal), Church Hill, MS Records, MDAH; “Baptisms of Colored Children,” “Baptisms of Colored Adults,” St. Philip's Episcopal Church (Madison County, MS) Parish Register, 1848-1898, MDAH, 400-403, 411-412.

concern for their children.”⁵⁹ This accurately describes a case recorded in the session minutes for a Presbyterian church in Monroe, Mississippi, when Dinah, an enslaved woman belonging to church member James Gunn, “having previously expressed a desire to have her children baptized, and having given us satisfactory evidence as to her knowledge of the holy ordinance, presented her three children – Chloe, William, and Lucy, and dedicated them to God in baptism.”⁶⁰ On several occasions, however, notably in churches in majority black counties like St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in Madison County, Mississippi; Christ Episcopal Church in Jefferson County, Mississippi; and St. David’s Episcopal Church in Dallas County, Alabama, enslaved women served as godparents for other adult women and children that were not their own.⁶¹ This rite served to confirm fictive kinship ties on the plantation or in the church in a public religious ceremony, either because biological mothers were not church members themselves or because they were separated from their children by sale. Becoming a church member not only meant making a public statement of one’s own faith, but it also opened up this possibility of serving as a public religious sponsor for others.

Women of color across denominations, however, often faced added restrictions on

⁵⁹ Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 203, 217.

⁶⁰ R. Milton Winter, trans., “Record of the Church Session at Monroe, Chickasaw Nation, 1823-1842,” 2008, accessed May 25, 2018, http://www.standrewpresbytery.org/monroe-mission-records-1823-1842/attachments/Monroe_Mission_Records.pdf. For other examples of free and enslaved women of color as godparents of their own children, see: Session Minutes, October 27, 1849, Mt. Moriah Presbyterian Church, Newton County, MS, Records, MDAH; Session Minutes, 1835, Pine Ridge (Presbyterian) Church Records, 136; “Baptisms,” Register, May 29, 1857, Christ Church, Church Hill, Records; “Baptisms of Colored Children,” St. Philip’s Episcopal Church Register, 400.

⁶¹ “Baptisms of Colored Children,” St. Philip’s Episcopal Church, Register, 401, 402; “Baptisms,” Parish Register, October 17, 1847, Christ Church, Church Hill Records; “Baptisms,” Parish Register, March 29, 1857, St. David’s Episcopal Church Records. For the Catholic equivalent in the Gulf South, see Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 177-187.

their public professions of faith. For enslaved women, white slaveholders had the authority to speak up against their request and deny them membership. In 1841 in Clarke County, Mississippi, when Charlotte, an enslaved laborer of Loammi Granberry, “presented herself for membership” to Hepzibah Baptist Church and publicly shared her “conviction” of faith, “her master [was] not fully satisfied” by her profession, and the church determined that her membership be postponed “until Brother Granberry may think it expedient to mention it to the conference.”⁶² Charlotte’s slaveholder had the power to deny the legitimacy of her religious experience as she had declared it and delay, perhaps indefinitely, her inclusion in the church. Some formerly enslaved persons recalled a much more restricted script for sharing their experiences than their white counterparts. Sarah Douglas, enslaved in Alabama, reported that any enslaved person at the biracial church she attended who wanted to become a member had to publicly recite the following: “I feel that the Lord have forgiven me for my sins. I have prayed and I feel that I am a better girl. I belong to master so and so and I am so old.” After this, “the white preacher would then ask our miss and master what they thought about it and if they could see any change. They would get up and say: ‘I notice she don’t steal and I notice she don’t lie as much and I notice she works better.’ Then they let us join.”⁶³ Lillie Johnson enslaved on a sugar plantation in Louisiana reported, “before we could be baptized, we had to get up before de congregation and confess what we had done wrong.”⁶⁴ For both Johnson and

⁶² Minutes, September 1841, Hepzibah Baptist Church (Clarke County) Records, MBHC.

⁶³ Rawick, ed., *American Slave*, Arkansas Narratives, vol. 8, 191.

⁶⁴ Ronnie W. Clayton, ed., *Mother Wit: The Ex-Slave Narratives of the Louisiana Writers' Project* (New York: P. Lang, 1990), 133.

Douglas, church membership meant public speaking but specifically as it related to whether they met white standards of Christian slave behavior.

It also became increasingly common for churches in the 1850s and early 1860s to establish separate committees to examine black candidates for membership apart from the congregation, and at Pea River Presbyterian Church in Barbour County, Alabama, the minister alone examined people of color in private.⁶⁵ In 1857, East Fork Baptist Church in Amite County, Mississippi designated a separate committee of five white male members “for the purpose of examining and receiving the black members” rather than allow them to speak in front of the entire church body on Saturday.⁶⁶ By law, white male church leaders could also exercise oversight when semi-independent black congregations in the urban Gulf South met and could enforce slaveholder requests that membership not be extended to enslaved professors. When white women and women of color presented themselves for profession and examination together, reports of longer instruction periods or delayed approval of membership were much more common for women of color, as white committees were more likely to doubt their sincerity or ability to understand the principles of their faith.⁶⁷ The same infantilization rhetoric used to justify white control over adult religious instruction in Sunday Schools was also used to justify white control over when and how enslaved people could join a religious community.

⁶⁵ Millis, trans. *Transcript of the Pea River Presbyterian Church*, November 23, 1855.

⁶⁶ Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:24-33. For more examples see, *ibid.*, 241; Minutes, February 1856, Bethesda Baptist Church Records; Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 139; Minutes, Vol. 1, June 4, 1837, Hepzibah Church Record Books, MSS. 678, LLMVC.

⁶⁷ Session Minutes, March 15, 1845, September 24, 1848, Mt. Moriah Presbyterian Church Records; Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:185-186, 194-196; Session Minutes, November 4, 1843, Oak Grove Presbyterian Church Records, Alabama Church and Synagogue Records Collection, ADAH.

Despite these extra restrictions, there is evidence that many women of color persevered, continuing to present themselves for church membership and speak publicly about their spiritual journey when given the chance. In urban black churches like Rose Hill Baptist Church in Natchez, black women professed religion in front of a black church body with limited white oversight, but even biracial churches on the eve of the Civil War continued to list women of color who, “came forward and related what the Lord had done for her soul” and were received as members.⁶⁸ In 1859 in the urban Presbyterian church of Selma, Alabama, both “Martha Townsend a free woman of colour and Mary a coloured woman belonging to Robert Hall,” after “examination & profession of their faith were received as members.”⁶⁹ In the Episcopal Church, even when restricted to liturgical responses, Eliza Magruder of Jefferson County, Mississippi reported one Sunday in 1856 “four Ladies of colour were confirmed, I pray God they may be sincere in their profession,” indicating the power of a public declaration of faith even when following a set script.⁷⁰ These women made a conscious choice to come forward and despite a potentially rigorous examination, professed their faith. Their willingness to persevere reflects the social and spiritual value they placed on church membership and the advantages being a part of this community might bring in life to combat the dehumanization of enslavement and in the promise of an afterlife.

⁶⁸ Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 137-138; Minutes, November 1838, November 1841, March 1847, First Baptist Church, Louisville, Records. For similar wording, see Minutes, July 1856, Bogue Chitto Baptist Church, Lincoln County Records, MBHC; Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:179, 191, 241; Session Minutes, February 18, 1855, June 12, 1858, Edmondson Presbyterian Church Records, Desoto County, MS, CPTS; Session Minutes, April 4, 1858, First Presbyterian Church, Vicksburg Records.

⁶⁹ Session Minutes, August 16, 1859, First Presbyterian Church, Selma Records.

⁷⁰ Eliza Magruder, Diary, March 3, 1856.

Speaking Up in Church Services

In all of these cases of declarations of faith, for white women and women of color, female public speaking in the church was acceptable because it was about their own personal experiences but also because they were *temporary* speaking roles, usually one time events to join the church. On several other temporary occasions Episcopal women were able to take on public speaking roles by reading the liturgy for Sunday services, but only when no adult man was present to do so. In 1858 at the Mobile Bay resort of Point Clear, Alabama, Eliza Clitherall read the Episcopal service for “the young members” who attended when no priest was in the area, writing in her diary “Lord help me, to do what I can, & by indirect influence, be an humble instrument in thy hands . . . to promote Thy glory, in leading others to keep the sabbath.”⁷¹ In 1855 in Huntsville, Alabama when rector Henry Lay was away and the guest priest was ill, a “Miss Judkin read the service & a sermon” for a group of women who attended church that Sunday.⁷² This leadership and public speaking role was acceptable because of its temporary nature as well as the gender of the congregation gathered. Lay’s wife, Eliza, who was concerned that the Presbyterian revival in town was drawing too many of their members away, advocated for this Episcopal service even if that meant having a female member lead and read a published sermon. Eliza reported that they “had a delightful service” and that one of the congregants who attended the Presbyterian church that Sunday “wished so much she had known of our service & that she didn’t mean to go over here to the Pres. Church

⁷¹ Clitherall, Diary, vol. 16, July 11, 1858, Clitherall Diaries.

⁷² Eliza Lay to Henry Lay, December 10, 1855, Lay Papers.

any more.”⁷³ Women like Clitherall, Lay, and Judkin saw it as their duty to keep Episcopal Sunday services going when the church lacked its normal male leadership.

Male church leaders were more likely to criticize female public speaking or evangelical “shouting” in church services when it occurred outside of professing conversion or temporary all-female congregations. Writing from Natchez in 1840, John Jones complained to a fellow Methodist minister about the “parcel of illfamed women” he found in services there who repeatedly came up to the altar and disrupted his service: “the most noisy while at it . . . they are mourners by profession indefinitely—for they never get religion.”⁷⁴ These women tried to turn their temporarily acceptable speaking roles as seekers of conversion into a weekly opportunity to participate vocally in the service, and for crossing this line of acceptable speech, Jones denounced as “evil” their efforts at trying to be “professionals.”⁷⁵ In 1842 in Baton Rouge, Methodist preacher William Winans complained about an older Baptist woman at his service who “annoyed me very much by her loquacity” while Samuel Agnew, a Presbyterian preacher in rural northern Mississippi in the early 1860s complained about a “Miss Hoskins” who during his sermon “commenced squalling and acting very foolishly” and then just before he dismissed his congregation “an old lady dressed in black . . . commenced a scene.”⁷⁶ Agnew wrote in his diary that both of these incidents made him “think of Paul’s command ‘Let your women keep silent in the Churches,’” noting of the incidents of

⁷³ Eliza Lay to Henry Lay, December 10, 1855, Lay Papers.

⁷⁴ J. G. Jones to Benjamin Drake, May 6 1840, Benjamin M. Drake Papers.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Winans, Journal, May 8, 1842, Winans Papers; Samuel Agnew, Diary, September 6, 1865, transcript, Samuel Andrew Agnew Diary, MSS. 923, SHC.

female speech, “I do not think that such things are right. Confusion should not prevail in the house of God.”⁷⁷ While these women, like their predecessors during the Great Awakenings, felt inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak out and justified their speech as religious fervor, male preachers became increasingly dismissive of female speech in church outside of the time set aside for profession. Speech that interrupted or challenged male ministers’ professional authority within the space of the service, they declared, was not the work of the Holy Spirit.

Women of color also faced criticism from white preachers for speaking up during church services. In 1835 in Fayette, Mississippi, John Jones noted an incident while preaching in which “an old negro woman in the rear of the congregation began to clap her hands and shout and talk about her children in heaven—which appeared to destroy or prevent all the good effect of my discourse.”⁷⁸ Dismissing her religious enthusiasm as “untimely yelling” and as “the result of ignorance on her part,” Jones also presented himself as the authority on acceptable religious speech; he declared that while his preaching had divine favor, as he was called to offer “awful warnings to the wicked,” this woman, due to both her gender and race, was not the recipient of divine inspiration: “he [God] did not make this old woman to make such an ado – for God is not the author of such confusion.”⁷⁹ Formerly enslaved workers also recalled restrictions against black speech in white services, like Mary Grandberry, enslaved in Barton, Alabama who recalled, “us didn’t git no pleasure outten goin’ to church, ‘caze we warn’t ‘lowed to say

⁷⁷ Agnew, Diary, September 6, 1865.

⁷⁸ John G. Jones, Journal, June 7, 1835, Jones (John G.) Journal.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

nothin.”⁸⁰ When Sarah Fitzpatrick was interviewed about her life as a enslaved domestic worker in Tuskegee by Thomas Campbell of the Tuskegee Institute, she reported that while they were discouraged from shouting in the white church, her aunt did so anyways: “My a’nt use’ta tare loose in day white church an’ shout, my! She sho’ could shout!”⁸¹ Despite criticism from men in biracial services, some women of color like Campbell’s aunt continued to speak up when they felt inspired to do so, publicly challenging white preachers’ authority to determine what was the work of the Holy Spirit and what was not.

At majority-black Sunday services with black preachers, in urban black churches as well as the separate worship services held by enslaved laborers in slave quarters or in the wooded spaces between plantations, speaking up, clapping, and “shouting” during a service was more culturally acceptable, including for women.⁸² Emily Dixon enslaved in Westville, Mississippi recalled that while she was allowed to attend the white church, she preferred their separate black services in the woods: “us wanted ter go whar we could sing all de way through an’ hum long an’ shout, yo’ all known, just turn loose lak.”⁸³ Enslaved women like Dixon helped create a “rival” religious geography to their white slaveholders’, making wooded areas on the outskirts of or in between plantations central

⁸⁰ Rawick, ed., *American Slave*, Alabama Narratives, vol. 6, 160.

⁸¹ John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 643.

⁸² For scholarship on black evangelical worship services offering more opportunities for expressive female speech than white services, see Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “The Politics of Silence: Dual-Sex Political Systems and Women’s Traditions of Conflict in African American Religion,” in *African American Christianity: Essays in History*, ed. Paul E. Johnson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 99; Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 127; Nguyen, “Active Faith,” 105.

⁸³ Rawick, ed., *American Slave*, Mississippi Narratives, vol. 7, 623.

to religious expression and, in her case, more valuable than white-controlled spaces of plantation chapels or biracial churches.⁸⁴

White observers at the time also confirmed these preferences in urban black churches. In 1848, the Episcopal priest in Jackson, Mississippi reported that they had failed to organize a black Episcopal congregation with a white preacher in town, “because they have a house of their own, where they go and make as much noise as they please.”⁸⁵ This environment, which encouraged extemporaneous speech more generally, proved more welcoming to female speech as well. In the 1850s, Frederick Law Olmstead attended a Sunday service at a Methodist church in New Orleans, a church with a black preacher and a majority black congregation with only three other white people in attendance. Here he witnessed an older woman of color who in the middle of the preacher’s sermon, stood up in the gallery and “began dancing and clapping her hands; at first with a slow and measured movement, and then with increasing rapidity, at the same time beginning to shout “Ha! Ha!”⁸⁶ Throughout the service, the male preacher and other male worship leaders addressed the congregation from the pulpit, while multiple women—excluded from the pulpit—nevertheless stood up at their seats and vocalized their religious enthusiasm, at times overpowering the men speaking from the pulpit and inspiring the rest of the congregation to join in “shouting and laughing aloud”—what

⁸⁴ For enslaved “rival geography,” see Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 7, 61. See also Kaye, *Joining Places*, 1, 21, 39-41.

⁸⁵ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 13, 73.

⁸⁶ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States*, vol. 1 (New York, 1861), 312.

some called the “holy laugh,” as it was considered the work of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁷ In 1850, white Baptist Martha Foster Crawford attended an outdoor church service of enslaved laborers in rural Tuscaloosa County, Alabama where “one old lady, a native of Africa praised her Savior aloud.”⁸⁸ This was the only reference Foster made to speech during the service besides the preacher, and rather than criticizing this outburst, she found “the faint image of our Lord could be traced in some of them,” including this woman.⁸⁹ This majority black worship service invited spontaneous female speech in a way that a Sunday service at a white meetinghouse did not.

Song Leaders, Choir Members, Musicians

While female speech was restricted in white and biracial churches, vocal participation in the service through music was acceptable and very common. Both liturgical and evangelical Protestant churches often expected the entire congregation to join in the collective singing of certain hymns or spirituals during the service. Whether they received formal musical training at Protestant academies or learned songs in Sunday school—in both cases often taught by women—or simply imitated their mothers, women learned from other women how to sing church music at a young age. Protestant children as well as adults in the antebellum Gulf South also attended “singing schools” which taught participants how to sight-read hymns or gospel music, and in evangelical churches often employed the “shape note” method, a simplified musical note system for untrained

⁸⁷ Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 313-317; Thomas W. Caskey, *Seventy Years in Dixie: Recollections and Sayings* (Nashville, 1893), 226.

⁸⁸ Crawford, Diary, April 14, 1850, Crawford Diaries.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

singers.⁹⁰ Some of these singing schools were mixed gender classes directed by preachers that met at church during the week or after Sunday service, but women were often the majority of participants and many reported attending with their female community of churchgoers.⁹¹ In Warrenton, Mississippi, the Methodist minister Nathan Cornell reported that several women directed the singing school efforts and “think if they could have the opportunity they could learn me to sing in a short time” rather than the other way around.⁹²

Women also directed more informal singing classes for free and enslaved men and women of color. At a Methodist mission to the enslaved in Jefferson County, Mississippi, Jane, the wife of missionary John G. Jones, reportedly led singing at their meetings, teaching songs as part of the service.⁹³ In 1855, the white Episcopal missionary “to the colored population” in Mobile, Alabama, J. J. Scott, reported to the diocese that his congregation of free and enslaved people of color was “invited to meet once a week for the purpose of learning and practicing the chants and tunes, to be used in the succeeding Service, and from fifteen to fifty attend, under the direction of a lady,” implying with the use of “lady” that the music teacher was a white woman.⁹⁴ On cotton

⁹⁰ For more on singing schools, see Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 29.

⁹¹ For examples, see Sarah Rousseau Espy Diary, February 18, 1850; February 19, 1850; May 13, 1860, SPR2, ADAH; Eliza Lay to Henry C. Lay, February 19, 1848, Lay Papers; Wightman, Diary, March 17, 1854; Agnew, Diary, October 6, 1854; Phelia to Lissie Hendry, February 7, 1858, Henry Family Correspondence, MSS. 383, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA (hereafter cited as HNOC); “Letter from Elibi to her mother and sister,” June 5, 1841, Alexander K. Hall Family Papers, ADAH, <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/voices/id/1640/rec/7>;

⁹² Nathan Cornell to Mary Chamberlain, May 23, 1859, Chamberlain-Cornell Correspondence.

⁹³ John G. Jones, *Autobiography*, vol. 2, Jones (John G. and John A.B.) Journals, 91.

⁹⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention* (Mobile, 1855), 19. See Elizabeth Varon's discussion of the term “lady” in southern society as

and sugar plantations in the Gulf South, formerly enslaved persons recalled a combination of white female slaveholders and older enslaved women directing their informal church music education. Sometimes this was part of Sunday school, but also, as William Wheeler and Hattie Clayton recalled, enslaved women exposed those who did not attend church to spirituals by singing while working, turning the workspace into a space for communal religious practice.⁹⁵ Music was a crucial part of that Protestant oral tradition that enslaved women brought to the Gulf South when forced to emigrate and which enslaved women expanded on in biracial and black church communities in the region on and off the plantation.

Free and enslaved women were not only the majority in the pews on Sundays and thus the majority of lay singers, but some also became “song leaders,” responsible for beginning or lining out the hymns for the rest of the congregation to follow. Sometimes this was as a soloist as Baptist minister Basil Manly reported in 1846 in rural Enon, Alabama: “there were no hymnals, except for one pulled from a pocket by a lady who began the service.”⁹⁶ Other times women performed the role of song leader together. At a Presbyterian church in Sumterville, Alabama, the minister and churchwomen began the singing before the men entered the church and at a Methodist church in New Orleans, a group of female members customarily began the singing even before the preacher

an indicator of whiteness and wealth that excluded women of color, in *We Mean to Be Counted: White Woman and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 5, 7.

⁹⁵ Rawick, ed., *American Slave*, Mississippi Narratives, vol. 9, 2274-2275, Alabama Narratives, vol. 1, 50-51, 99; Sarah R. Right to Mary Wright, September 18, 1853, Wright-Boyd Papers.

⁹⁶ Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy*, 191.

arrived.⁹⁷ These women were responsible for opening the church service, defining through song the beginning of the ritual time and space reserved for worship. Other women led congregational singing as the service continued, including, as one Methodist from the Mississippi Delta reported of his mother, “when the men’s hearts failed them.”⁹⁸ John Jones, writing in to the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* in 1856, even referred to female song leadership as a “heavenly calling,” using the same language as one describing male leadership roles in the church like the call to preach.⁹⁹ At the service Olmsted attended at the almost entirely black Methodist church in New Orleans, he reported that women of color not only shouted and danced, but also, when the congregation sang collectively, “the voices of one or two women rose above the rest, and one of those soon began to introduce variations,” improvising their own song lyrics.¹⁰⁰ All of these women were praised for their service to the church, as singing offered them acceptable leadership roles, even over adult men.

In the 1840s and 1850s, more and more churches, especially in wealthier and urban parts of the Gulf South, began to use separate choirs in their services, which often took the place of congregational singing and female song leaders, despite sometimes facing criticism from the older members of their congregations. Baptist and Methodist ministers wrote to denominational newspapers complaining about choirs which took over

⁹⁷ Robertson, “Diary,” September 14, 1854; Moss, Diary, December 21, 1855.

⁹⁸ Augustus Hervey Mecklin, “Autobiography of Augustus Hervey Mecklin,” typescript, Mecklin (Augustus Hervey) Papers, MDAH, 3.

⁹⁹ “Some Account of the Work of God in Fayette District, Miss. Conf.,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 8, 1856.

¹⁰⁰ Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 315.

the service, leaving the congregation cold to the workings of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰¹ Even in the Episcopal Church which had a longer tradition of choirs than their evangelical counterparts, women like Eliza Clitherall in Mobile complained about the lack of congregational participation in both the songs and liturgy as a sign of spiritual decline: “In this church all appear to suppose they seek Heaven by Proxy—No responses, not even in the Creed!—The singing hired, & theatrical confin’d to the choir.”¹⁰² Yet rather than simply being evidence of decline or the loss of women’s liturgical role in church services, this transition actually allowed some women to take on even more official leadership positions, not only as members of the choir but also as soloists and choir directors.¹⁰³

Most choirs were made up of male and female volunteers (some of the larger churches held auditions) and met during the week at the church or choir members’ homes to practice, creating weekly events where women would gather to participate in the work of preparing for Sunday services.¹⁰⁴ Sometimes husbands and wives joined the choir together, like Presbyterians Joseph and Mary Copes when they moved to New Orleans.¹⁰⁵ Female choir members received praise for singing solos and duets on Sundays and a few

¹⁰¹ Organs, Melodeons, Etc.," *Mississippi Baptist*, April 22, 1858; Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 3:81-82.

¹⁰² Clitherall, *Diary*, vol. 10, March 21, 1853, Clitherall Diaries.

¹⁰³ For the transition from congregational to choral singing as evidence of decline in women’s participation in church services, see Sparks, *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks*, 107.

¹⁰⁴ Session Minutes, August 1, 1857, First Presbyterian Church, Selma; Luther Field Tower, *Diary*, November 14, 1845, December 5, 1845, December 19, 1846, L.F. Tower *Diary*, MSS. 765, LLMVC; Mrs. Julia H. Howe to Ellen Howe, Oct. 19, 1853, Howe Papers; Eliza Magruder, *Diary*, April 16, 1855; Maria Ann Cruse to Maria Hopkins Walker, April 27, 1845, Rice (Nannie Herndon) Family Papers, MSS. 24, MSU.

¹⁰⁵ Jane H. Copes to Joseph S. Copes, November 9, 1842, Copes Papers.

female soloists were listed as paid employees of the church.¹⁰⁶ In 1841 at Christ Episcopal Church, Mobile, the vestry “resolved that one Hundred and Fifty Dollars be appropriated to Mrs. Moore and Miss Shemns as a salary for one Year, for services to be performed by them as Singers in the Choir,” a significant sum for what was volunteer labor in most churches.¹⁰⁷ Some female choir members even wrote their own hymns, including a “Miss Sigurney” who wrote a hymn used by the choir at the consecration of Christ Episcopal Church in New Orleans in 1837 and republished in the Louisiana diocesan journal.¹⁰⁸ Women also served as choir assistants and leaders within their soprano or alto sections and some even worked as directors of entire choirs.¹⁰⁹ The employment status offered to female directors varied; some worked as temporary replacements when men could not be found or as full time volunteers in smaller rural churches that could not afford to pay.¹¹⁰ Other churches, most notably in urban New Orleans and Mobile, hired female choir directors as salaried employees.¹¹¹ In the case of

¹⁰⁶ Tower, Diary, November 14, 1845, December 5, 1845; Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans, Being Recollections of my Girlhood* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1912), 121.

¹⁰⁷ Vestry Minutes, May 21, 1841, Christ Church, Episcopal (Baldwin County, AL) Church Records, 1832-1912, microfilm, roll MFS 858, Alabama Baptist Historical Collection, Samford University, Birmingham, AL (hereafter cited as Samford).

¹⁰⁸ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fourth Convention of the Diocese of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1842), 38. Baptist writer and minister’s wife, Margaret Furman of Tuscaloosa, published religious poetry and hymns in the *Alabama Baptist*; see Margaret A.E. Furman, Poems, Richard and Margaret Furman Papers, MSS. 0549, Hoole.

¹⁰⁹ Maria Ann Cruse to Maria Hopkins Walker, May 21, 1844, Rice Papers; Vestry Minutes, May 7, 1855, Christ Episcopal Church, Tuscaloosa Records.

¹¹⁰ Vestry Minutes, April 24, 1855, Christ Episcopal Church, Tuscaloosa Records; Emily Caroline Douglas, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, Emily Caroline Douglas Papers, MSS. 566, LLMVC, 114-115.

¹¹¹ Vestry Minutes, October 20, 1860, Calvary Church - Vestry Minutes, 1860 June-1888 April, vol. 1, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana Records, 1805-1998, MSS. 558, LARC; Vestry Minutes, April 10, 1836, January 14, 1839, April 30, 1846, Christ Church, Episcopal (Baldwin County, AL) Records.

the Episcopal Church in Huntsville, Alabama, the singing school turned into a majority-female choir over the course of several years. Eliza Lay, the rector's wife, praised the choir's Sunday performance, giving credit to the female choir director: "it was all owing to Miss Williams—she certainly had the most perfect command over that choir. They follow every modulating of her voice."¹¹² Many of these women, especially in Presbyterian and Episcopal churches, did not oppose the transition to choral music, but rather saw it as an opportunity for female religious community and leadership.

A similar range of opportunities and employee statuses applied to women who played the organ or melodeon for their churches. Some church women certainly opposed the introduction of instrumental music in place of lay singing in their services—most notably a group of Methodist women in rural Mississippi who left a church meeting in protest after a vote passed to buy a melodeon.¹¹³ Other Protestant women, however, particularly those who had the musical training, took advantage of this transition to musical accompaniment as an opportunity to serve in a more official capacity on Sundays. Many of these musically talented women were the product of musical training at Protestant female academies, early on in the North but increasingly in the South by the 1850s and 1860s. Learning to play an instrument was an acceptable part of female education in the antebellum South, and even in the Baptist Church where many traditionalists resisted instrumental music, Sereno Taylor, principal of Baptist female academies in Clinton, Louisiana, and Mississippi City, offered classes in harp, melodeon,

¹¹² Eliza Lay to Henry C Lay, February 21, 1848, Lay Papers.

¹¹³ Alexander, Diary, August 11, 1865.

and organ.¹¹⁴ In response to accusations that teaching students to play church instruments “may offend others,” Taylor argued that playing music was an act of religious service, an act of humility and devotion, which made it acceptable for women to perform: when it comes to offering a “penitent heart” in worship, instrumental music “it appears to me is its best manifestation.”¹¹⁵ Still, female musicians remained more common in Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches in the Gulf South. These churches often took advantage of the fact that women would volunteer as organists as temporary replacements. At St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Columbus, Mississippi, Louisa Pescott was given a gift by the vestry for serving as temporary organist in 1858, “with thanks for her acceptable services gratuitously rendered to the congregation,” while male applicants to the permanent position expected a salary.¹¹⁶ When Charles Fey applied to be the rector of the Episcopal Church in Bayou Goula, he wrote the vestry to tell them that his wife was “eminently fitted to be useful” because “as an organist & an orchestral singer, she ranks among the very first” and her labor as musician and singer would be included for free with the cost of hiring the male rector.¹¹⁷ At First Presbyterian Church, Selma, “Miss Tredwell” began as a temporary volunteer organist in 1856 but when the session realized how much a male organist would cost, resolved to hire her full time, making no reference to a salary.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Sereno Taylor, Diary, February 1, 1855, Sereno Taylor Papers; Catalog, Silliman Female Collegiate Institute, 1854-1855, Hunter-Taylor Family Papers; Sereno Taylor to Calvin Taylor, May 16, 1858, Calvin Taylor and Family Papers.

¹¹⁵ Sereno Taylor to Calvin Taylor, March 31, 1857, Calvin Taylor and Family Papers.

¹¹⁶ Vestry Minutes, September 6, 1858, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church (Columbus, MS) Records, 1840-1969, MDAH.

¹¹⁷ Charles Fey to Lucius Duncan Esq., October 12, 1844, Christ Church Cathedral – New Orleans Records, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana Records, LARC.

¹¹⁸ Session Minutes, December 15, 1856, First Presbyterian Church, Selma Records.

Women served as full-time and back-up organists throughout the Gulf South, in large urban churches in Montgomery and Baton Rouge, in towns like Port Gibson, Mississippi, and in smaller rural churches in Hernando, Mississippi and Williamsport, Louisiana.¹¹⁹

Many churches hired women because they found they were more willing to do the work of both an organist and a choir director than their male counterparts. In New Iberia, Emily Douglas, sister of the Episcopal rector, served as organist, choir director, and Sunday school choir teacher—all on a volunteer basis.¹²⁰ When they were paid, women were also more willing to work for a lower salary than men. In 1841 at Christ Episcopal Church, Mobile, the vestry considered hiring a “Mr. Unger” as organist for \$400, but he refused to also serve as choir director for that sum.¹²¹ A “Mrs. Kawelski,” on the other hand, agreed to do both, which the vestry happily accepted recording that this hiring choice “will reduce the expenses of the choir below last year the amount of \$200.”¹²² Kawelski served as the organist and choir director at Christ Church for over thirty-seven years.¹²³ Not only was it completely normal to pay women less for more work and to refer to any compensation as a “gift” rather than a salary, but also many of these women

¹¹⁹ Wood, *The Life of St. John's Parish*, 35; Town, Diary, February 13, 1853; Artemas W. Williams to Joseph S. Copes, September 19, 1844, Copes Papers; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 12, 70; Duncan, *The Diocese of Louisiana*, 166.

¹²⁰ Douglas, Autobiography, Emily Caroline Douglas Papers, 97-101. See also, Vestry Minutes, November 9, 1859, St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Columbus, MS) Records.

¹²¹ Vestry Minutes, April 30, 1846, Christ Church, Episcopal (Baldwin County, AL) Records. This salary of \$400 is equivalent to the average annual income of a private tutor in the antebellum Gulf South, but is about half of the average annual salary of a female assistant teacher in an academy in New Orleans. These statistics can be found in Hyde, *Schooling in the Antebellum South*, 15, 79.

¹²² Vestry Minutes, April 30, 1846, Christ Church, Episcopal (Baldwin County, AL) Records.

¹²³ "History of Christ Church, Taken from Volume Four of Christ Church Parish Register, 1883," in Christ Church, Mobile Records.

felt they were doing their religious duty in performing this service for the church on Sundays rather than going to a job. Churches in the Gulf South were able to invest in the musical trappings of respectable modern churches with choirs, soloists, organs, and melodeons and save money in the process thanks to this spiritual devotion of their musically talented female members. While acapella female singing still dominated in many rural Baptist and Methodist churches on the eve of the Civil War, across all four major Protestant denominations the most likely avenue for permanent female service and leadership in church every Sunday was as song leaders in the congregation, choir singers, choir directors, or organists.

Camp, Protracted, and Revival Meetings

Beyond these accepted liturgical roles as singers and musicians, female public speech and leadership was much more common in church meetings that happened outside of the weekly Sunday service. In evangelical Protestant denominations, seasonal events like revivals or camp meetings where participants camped outside and attended preaching, communion services, and prayer meetings for several days provided more flexibility for women to move beyond their prescribed roles back home and in the pews on an average Sunday.¹²⁴ While especially popular in the early nineteenth century during the Second Great Awakening, these events continued in the Gulf South even through the 1850s and 1860s.¹²⁵ In the Methodist tradition, “protracted meetings” or “basket-

¹²⁴ Nguyen, “Active Faith,” 118-119; Joe L. Kincheloe, Jr., “Transcending Role Restrictions: Women at Camp Meetings and Political Rallies Source,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 159; Frederick A. Bode, “A Common Sphere: White Evangelicals and Gender in Antebellum Georgia.” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 802.

¹²⁵ John Quist argues that in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama revivalism peaked in the late 1830s and early 1840s, but revivals still continued through the 1850s, in *Restless Visionaries*, 26.

meetings” became popular in the 1850s, where participants came for a full day of preaching events at a camp ground or nearby church, ate their picnic basket dinner, and returned home at night.¹²⁶ While not camping in tents, these events could still last for days with participants returning each day. Presbyterians typically held seasonal communion meetings, some at campgrounds and others inside local churches, that took on the feel of a revival, and Methodists held their own communion-centered protracted meetings called “Love Feasts.”¹²⁷ Revivals in all of their denominational variations remained more common in rural areas of the Gulf South with available campgrounds. Methodist preacher of Mississippi, John Jones, reported that meetings like these actually helped organize new churches in rural areas as participants converted and began looking for a church to join nearby. Makeshift campgrounds could even become the physical site of a new church building.¹²⁸ Women from established churches also traveled for miles to attend camp meetings or went to protracted meetings in populated cotton towns like Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1849; Columbus, Mississippi in 1858; and just outside Vicksburg in 1859.¹²⁹ Whether they occurred outside or in a church, seasonal revival meetings remained popular across the region and provided free and enslaved Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian women with opportunities to speak and serve in both homosocial and mixed company settings.

¹²⁶ Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 3:106-107.

¹²⁷ Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 60.

¹²⁸ Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 3:106-107.

¹²⁹ "Protracted Meeting in Tuscaloosa," *Independent Monitor* (Tuscaloosa, AL), January 4, 1849; Nathan Cornell to Mary Chamberlain, August 18, 1859, Chamberlain-Cornell Correspondence; James Lyon, Journal, typescript, Lyon (James Adair) family Papers, MSS. 9, MSU, 213-216.

As was the case for early preaching visits to the region, women also served as local advisors to clergy and hosts for participants of revivals, responsible for making sure these events actually happened. Baptist preacher, E. B. Teague, for instance, credited “Sister Washington” of Sumter County, Alabama for pressuring him to hold a protracted meeting at Providence Church in 1851, despite his concerns that they needed more preachers and no one would attend. Teague wrote, "Sister W insisted that a meeting must be held, and said we needed no preacher but myself. I felt sure she was wrong, but the more earnestly I insisted upon my notions the more earnest she became in her apparent determination that we should have a meeting."¹³⁰ Washington knew her religious community better than Teague, and with the help of another female church member, convinced Teague the event would succeed. She even organized advertising efforts and sent out an enslaved laborer on horseback to “send the notice all around the neighborhood.”¹³¹ When the morning of the protracted meeting arrived, Teague was amazed at how many people came, thanks to these two churchwomen: “my distrust vanished; I went in to the pulpit chastened and hopeful” and almost the entire congregation “came into the church by experience and baptism,” including four of Sister Washington’s adult children.¹³² While Teague ultimately presented Washington as a model Christian mother responsible for bringing her offspring into the church, her role in growing the Baptist Church in the region through her public activism to organize this meeting went much further than her own family.

¹³⁰ Teague, "Autobiography," Teague Papers, 21.

¹³¹ Ibid., 50.

¹³² Ibid.

Some women helped ensure these meetings went smoothly on the ground, like Cordelia McLeod of Yazoo County, Mississippi, credited in her obituary in 1858 with playing “a prominent part in sustaining a camp-meeting of nine days” held only a few months before her death.¹³³ Others received praise specifically for their hospitality as an extension of their domestic duties for a religious cause. At Washington’s protracted meeting at Providence Church, a group of churchwomen provided both lunch and supper for the congregation for two days, ensuring that participants could stay for all of Teague’s preaching sessions.¹³⁴ Enslaved women did not receive credit for the domestic labor they performed at camp meetings, but Kate Curry recalled attending a white camp meeting near Caddo, Louisiana in order to make and clean up after meals while the white participants socialized.¹³⁵ As was the case on plantations, enslaved female laborers performed necessary work at revivals for which white women took credit as the hostesses.¹³⁶

In addition to these logistically necessary acts of service, women also took advantage of the unique environment of a revival to speak out about their religious experiences and evangelize to both male and female attendees. Churches organized protracted meetings and revivals with the specific intent of stirring up emotional responses and inspiring conversions, making female speech more acceptable as a

¹³³ "Obituaries," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, December 8, 1858.

¹³⁴ Teague, "Autobiography," Teague Papers, 50. For another example, see “Recollections of North Alabama Methodism, no. 18,” *Alabama Christian Advocate* (Birmingham, AL), October 5, 1881.

¹³⁵ Rawick, ed., *American Slave*, Texas Narratives, vol. 4, 1013.

¹³⁶ For scholarship on female slaveholders claiming the domestic labor completed by enslaved laborers as their own, see: Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 128-129; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 21.

response to these conditions.¹³⁷ Women remained the majority of converts at revivals and newspaper and personal accounts reported women shouting or praising God aloud as they went through a conversion experience in this public setting with an even larger audience than their home churches.¹³⁸ It was at a camp meeting in 1849 that one Baptist woman in Walker County, Alabama who had “been a mourner for a great while, was enabled, while at this meeting, to rise and praise God aloud,” and at another Methodist camp meeting in 1847 on Bayou Bartholomew in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana that “the wife of a lawyer” finally “arose in ecstasy and joy and said she felt assured that all the sins were forgiven and that her peace was made with God” which John Jones claimed “was the Work of the Spirit.”¹³⁹ Other Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian women shouted collectively in response to powerful revival sermons and found less criticism in this setting than if they had done so during a regular Sunday sermon.¹⁴⁰ One “Cambellite lady” who attended a Methodist camp meeting in 1851 on Athens Circuit in Alabama even changed her mind on the appropriateness of vocally expressing her religious experience within the context of a revival, having “shouted loudly, praising God, although she was previously opposed to shouting.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Julia Nguyen makes a similar argument in “Active Faith,” 120.

¹³⁸ For evidence of the female majority of revival converts as the norm in the Gulf South, see W.J. Powers, “Belmont Circuit, Ala., Conf.,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 14, 1852; McCorkle, *Diary*, vol. 1, McCorkle Papers, 17; Nguyen, “Active Faith,” 118.

¹³⁹ John G. Jones, *Autobiography*, vol. 2, Jones (John G. and John A.B.) Journals, 84.

¹⁴⁰ Basil Manly, Sr. to Sarah Manly, September 11, 1846, Manly Family Papers; “Mississippi Conference, Attala Circuit,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 5, 1859; Wightman, *Diary*, October 7, 1853; Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, 77.

¹⁴¹ Denis B. Leyne, “Athens Circuit, Ala. Conf.,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, December 22, 1851.

Shouting and praising God could also turn into sharing or “testifying” about one’s religious experience to the crowd. Reporting in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* in 1852 about a Methodist revival on the Columbus Circuit in Alabama, S. H. Cox wrote of women finding not only conversion but also sanctification or “Christian perfection” and “testified to all that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin.”¹⁴² The flexibility of revival meetings that allowed women to share their experiences in the middle of the service also extended to women of color. As Polly Shine recalled about annual camp meetings held outside of Shreveport, Louisiana, “every body would get happy and shout both black and white, this is one time they would let the negro talk about his or her religion.”¹⁴³ Shine saw revivals as an exceptional biracial environment where free and enslaved women of color were actually encouraged by white evangelicals to make their voices heard.

This public sharing could also inspire others to have spiritual experiences. In 1856, when a young white woman professed religion at a revival in Montevallo, Alabama, a newspaper correspondent reported, “one sister was blest of God and praised him aloud; the gracious influence extended to others, who also shouted the praise of God.”¹⁴⁴ Women who had previously joined a church also found a way to be useful by speaking to seekers and praying with them during the meeting. Most common at Methodist revivals, women were praised for joining others at the mourners’ bench, like Ann Smith who attended a revival meeting in Oakland, Mississippi in 1855 and “when

¹⁴² S.H. Cox, "Revival Intelligence, Columbus Circuit, Ala. Conf.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 23, 1852.

¹⁴³ Rawick, *American Slave*, Texas Narratives, vol. 9, 3518.

¹⁴⁴ "An Old Fashioned Class Meeting, and the Sequel to It," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 15, 1856.

mourners were called, she would go with them, and fan them and point them to Jesus.”¹⁴⁵

Women also worked alongside men to encourage and counsel potential converts during revivals. In 1856 at a revival at Wesley Chapel in Holmes County, Mississippi, Thomas Rayner reported “the young men and women did become teachers of the people—going through the congregation in search of their associates, bringing them to the altar.”¹⁴⁶

These women were praised for doing the work of public evangelization usually reserved for male preachers.

That same year near Fayette, Mississippi, John Jones reported, “Many also of our lay members, both male and female, have been of great service in our revivals, especially about the altar, and in selected prayermeetings [sic] in the woods and elsewhere.”¹⁴⁷

Methodist camp meetings traditionally included time for separate prayer meetings for men and women and in these homosocial spaces churchwomen took the place of the preacher in leading the meeting and evangelizing to the group. John Jones recounted such an occasion in 1836 at a camp meeting in Madison County, Mississippi through the experience of one seeker of conversion, Elizabeth Dear. As Jones told it, “The working sisterhood took her case, as well as others, into special consideration and invited her to accompany them to their woods prayer-meeting. They talked of Jesus and his love, sung and prayed; then called for all who wished a special interest in prayer to kneel down on

¹⁴⁵ J. Landrum, "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 29, 1855. See also Wightman, *Diary*, April 13, 1853, April 17, 1853.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Rayner, "Revivals, Wesley Chapel, Holmes Circuit, Miss. Conference," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 13, 1856.

¹⁴⁷ J. G. Jones, "Some Account of the Work of God in Fayette District, Miss. Conf.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 8, 1856.

the autumnal leaves.”¹⁴⁸ While Jones’ wife Jane “was leading in prayer with extraordinary liberty and faith the power of the Holy Spirit overwhelmed the prayer group” and Elizabeth Dear stood up and professed religion.¹⁴⁹ Meeting separately in the woods rather than in the meeting space designated for male-directed worship, women like Jane Jones were empowered to direct the collective evangelization efforts of other women, ministering to the spiritual needs of a female congregation as part of the “working sisterhood.”

Women also received credit from male church leaders for this work. In 1852 at a revival on Crystal Springs Circuit in Mississippi, during a prayer meeting held “by a good sister, with her female friends in the grove, five obtained the blessing of pardon.”¹⁵⁰ In Cahaba, Alabama a group of five women who led such a prayer meeting, Catherine Hoot, Leathea Wood, Jane Gwin, and a “Mrs. Luke and Mrs. Bush” ultimately received credit for the success of the entire protracted meeting; “the extensive work of grace had in 1848 was traceable to a prayer-meeting held by those true and godly women.”¹⁵¹ For some women their crowning achievement in their obituaries was not raising Christian children, but instead, their work during these female prayer meetings at revivals—inviting women to come, leading prayer, calling for mourners, and exhorting their female audience to seek religion—inspiring the entire camp in the process.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 3:66.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ "Crystal Springs Circuit, Miss. Conf.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 11, 1852.

¹⁵¹ West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 674.

¹⁵² For examples, see "Obituaries," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 22, 1860, April 4, 1860, February 9, 1859.

Some revivals proved to be so flexible that white women were able to stand up and speak to male audiences, not just sharing their personal stories but leading extemporaneous prayers and exhorting the crowds to seek conversion. In 1851, William Winans witnessed a Sister Thomas stand up in front of the entire congregation at a camp meeting and “gave an excellent talk on Sunday morning.”¹⁵³ Likewise, Mary Evans at a revival in St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana in 1853 received praise for “her fervent prayers in the great congregation for the conversion of sinners, her urgent and affectionate exhortations to the mourners, and the gracious words of encouragement to Christians young and old” which she brought into the church through her oral testimony.¹⁵⁴ Some preachers even relied on women to inspire when their own sermons failed. At a protracted meeting sometime between 1834 and 1837 at “Center Camp Ground” in Jefferson County, Mississippi, presiding elder Benjamin Drake reported that several ministers preached “rather by rote” to little success, until “Elizabeth Osteen arose and began to rehearse in glowing terms what wonderful things the Lord had done for her. She became inspired by the Spirit of God and, turning to the congregation, gave a powerful impromptu exhortation, called for mourners, and soon had the altar crowded.”¹⁵⁵ Within the exceptional space of a camp meeting Osteen could be an assertive and successful public evangelizer.

¹⁵³ William Winans to Benjamin Drake, August 25, 1851, Benjamin Drake Papers.

¹⁵⁴ T.W. Mathews, "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 12, 1853.

¹⁵⁵ Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 2:295. Jones notes that Drake was a presiding the elder at the time, dating this meeting to sometime between 1834 and 1837. See “M9 DRAKE (Benjamin Michael) Papers,” Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism, Millsaps College, accessed December 2, 2014, http://www.millsaps.edu/_resources/author_files/library_cain_DrakeBenjaminInventory.pdf

Usually women like Evans and Osteen were referred to as exhorters, which implied a more informal speaking role than the officially recognized role of preacher, which traditionally involved Biblical exegesis.¹⁵⁶ While no woman was ever licensed to “preach” in the antebellum South, some women unofficially crossed this line at revival meetings, receiving the title of “preacher.” At one meeting near Greensboro, Alabama in 1852, E. V. Levert reported that “male and female, turned preachers, and their labors were not in vain.”¹⁵⁷ Although previous scholars have found that women in the late antebellum South no longer received credit when conversions happened like they did in the Great Awakenings and their evangelizing was as Cynthia Lyerly argued, “more diffuse and hidden” or only among other women and children, evidence from the Gulf South proves otherwise.¹⁵⁸ Church leaders continued to praise white women for their public evangelization efforts when they happened within the extraordinary space of a revival meeting. Minister’s wives often filled this role, like Jane Jones who not only exhorted at the separate female prayer meetings but also was called on to speak to the entire congregation because of her “extraordinary prayers of faith and power for which she was so noted in revival meetings” and afterwards was credited with bringing about

¹⁵⁶ Catherine Brekus gives a helpful explanation of the difference between exhorting which was “spontaneous and informal” and preaching which is “much more authoritative” and a more formally recognized role, in *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 130. Christine Heyrman argues that only Quaker women were allowed to “preach” in the South, which she defined as entailing “expounding on a biblical text,” in *Southern Cross*, 167.

¹⁵⁷ “Revival Intelligence,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 9, 1852.

¹⁵⁸ Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 181. Several scholars argue that camp meetings remained spaces for women to speak publically, but qualify their claims saying it became increasingly difficult after 1830 for them to do so in front of adult men, see Sparks, “The Good Sisters,” 42; Nguyen, “Active Faith,” 118-120.

conversions “through her instrumentality.”¹⁵⁹ Alice Suratt, wife of a Methodist minister in Louisiana, was praised as “an efficient laborer” for her powerful prayers at a revival meeting in 1858.¹⁶⁰ One minister reported in the local newspaper how they called on her to pray in front of the congregation, and when she did so “the whole soul was poured forth into the ears of the Almighty, while, apparently, everything else was lost sight of; and the prayer ended, as hers usually did, in hallelujahs and united in the song of praise.”¹⁶¹ Though excluded from ordination and the official title of preacher, white evangelical women found that at revival meetings they could evangelize to adult seekers and still receive the credit and praise from male leaders for their public activism in doing so.

Prayer Meetings

Weekly or monthly prayer meetings provided more consistent opportunities across Protestant denominations for women to lead, pray publicly, and evangelize to other adults than an annual or one-time revival. While declension narrative scholars claim that private family prayer generally replaced public prayer meetings and Methodist class meetings by 1830, Protestants in both the urban and rural Gulf South continued to rely on regular mixed company and female-only prayer groups to meet the spiritual needs of the region.¹⁶² As was the case with Sunday services, women were often instrumental in organizing the events. In 1859, a group of churchwomen helped church elder George W.

¹⁵⁹ John G. Jones, *Autobiography*, vol. 2, Jones (John G. and John A.B.) Journals, 90; John G. Jones, *Journal*, 39, Jones (John G.) Journal, 39.

¹⁶⁰ J. Pipes, "Obituaries," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 9, 1859.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² See Schneider, *Way of the Cross*, xxvii; Graham, “Evangelicals and 'Domestic Felicity.'”

Baynard organize a Sunday evening prayer meeting at the Methodist Church in Kingston, Mississippi outside of Natchez. One observer, Mary Chamberlain, noted “I wondered a little how he managed to give it much interest or profit with no one to help him” until she heard “that the ladies assisted him” in organizing and publicizing.¹⁶³ In 1849, another Methodist woman living outside of Tuscaloosa, Alabama convinced her father to begin holding prayer meeting for their neighbors at their home, and at least seven people converted during them.¹⁶⁴ Other women served as prayer meeting hosts, turning their homes into public spaces for religious practice and fellowship. Some rural communities required that homes serve as meeting spaces because of a lack of churches, but even in a city like Natchez which had several church buildings, Presbyterian women in the late 1840s and early 1850s continued to volunteer to host prayer meetings for mixed company in the more intimate setting of their homes.¹⁶⁵ Even when not responsible for hosting or organizing, women were frequently the majority of attendees. When Presbyterian rector Joseph Stratton moved the Natchez prayer meeting into the church in 1854, he still reported that “mostly females attended the weekly meeting.”¹⁶⁶ On the rural Spring Hill Circuit in Marengo County, Alabama, Methodist minister Joseph Cottrell reflected on the lack of regular male attendees at the class meeting in his diary, writing “God bless the

¹⁶³ Mary Chamberlain to Nathan Cornell, June 21, 1859, Chamberlain-Cornell Correspondence.

¹⁶⁴ "Protracted Meeting in Tuscaloosa," *Independent Monitor*, January 4, 1849.

¹⁶⁵ Joseph B. Stratton, *Diary*, vol. 1, April 11, 1849-September 11, 1849, Joseph B. Stratton Papers, MSS. 464, LLMVC.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, January 18, 1854.

women who are so faithful” who kept the meeting going despite the absence of men.¹⁶⁷ It was common for advertised mixed company prayer meetings to be in practice a group of women and their minister, or only women who appointed a temporary prayer leader amongst them.¹⁶⁸

Women also organized separate female prayer or female class meetings in the region, often independently of preachers or male church leaders. The same Martha Foster who taught at a Protestant day school and Sunday School began her public religious activism by organizing female prayer meetings for adults, first in her family’s rural neighborhood in Tuscaloosa County and then in Clinton, Alabama with the help of a “Mrs. Paschall” and “Miss Drusilla” who she met while teaching there.¹⁶⁹ Despite concerns that only a few of the women who attended were “bold enough to pray publicly” and she was forced to lead all of their meetings, Foster persisted, praying in her diary, “Bless our efforts, O Lord, may it be the means of establishing a common prayer meeting” for men and women.¹⁷⁰ Other women expressed more positive experiences of finding religious fulfillment when called on to lead or pray in the group. In 1861, Methodist Myra Smith of Greenville, Mississippi, wrote in her diary “I attended and led the first prayer meeting I ever attended. I can truly say my Saviour was present with me

¹⁶⁷ Joseph Benson Cottrell, Diary, July 8, 1856, transcript, Joseph Benson Cottrell Papers, 1854-1892, MSS. 00184-z, SHC, https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/00184/#folder_1#1.

¹⁶⁸ Wightman, Diary, December 4, 1850; Jane H. Criswell to Joseph S. Copes, January 21, 1858, Copes Papers; Clitherall, Diary, vol. 13, March 6, 1858, March 19, 1856, July 11, 1858, Clitherall Diaries; Eliza Lay to Henry Lay, December 10, 1855, Lay Papers.

¹⁶⁹ Crawford, Diary, June 15, 1850; September 14, 1850, September 15, 1850, Crawford Diaries.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, June 15, 1850.

abundantly a favorable impression of a female prayer meeting.”¹⁷¹ In the midst of a yellow fever outbreak in Mobile, Eliza Clitherall found spiritual comfort and community through the prayers of a churchwoman at their female prayer group and Bible class at the Episcopal Church just outside of town. Historian Diana Hochstedt Butler has argued that Bible classes provided a unique opportunity for Episcopal women to voice their opinions about a religious text in a public setting, a practice usually reserved for preachers.¹⁷²

Clitherall wrote in her diary that she “felt both gratified & instructed, the prayers put up by Miss Nixon was comforting & spoke what must be the language of a Xtian [Christian].”¹⁷³ Clitherall also recalled hosting meetings in her home with visiting female friends and relatives where they took turns reading aloud from devotional tracts.

Reflecting on the new women who participated Clitherall wrote, “Oh how pleasant to meet Xtian [Christian] professors who act up to their Profession.”¹⁷⁴ Clitherall found Christian female fellowship and speaking opportunities in both the official meeting held at the church and her own religious gathering among visitors in her parlor.

While Monroe, Louisiana did not always have Protestant preaching on Sundays in the 1830s, a group of Presbyterian women organized and maintained a weekly female prayer meeting held at “Mrs. Butler’s” home, which member Caroline Poole described as

¹⁷¹ S. Myra Cox Smith, Diary, November 30, 1861, typescript, Somerville and Howorth family papers, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, MA.

¹⁷² Diana Hochstedt Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 35. See also Hoffert, “Earnest Efforts to Be Friends,” 822.

¹⁷³ Clitherall, Diary, vol. 12, July 21, 1853, Clitherall Diaries.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 10, March 3, 1852. March 4, 1852.

“an hour of singing, prayer, reading” spent “with a few [women] who love holy time.”¹⁷⁵ Prayer meetings continued even when preaching became more regular. In Summerfield, Alabama, what began as a weekly female prayer meeting at a member’s home eventually moved into the basement of the new church.¹⁷⁶ In 1846, preacher’s wife Lucila McCorkle of Talladega, Alabama helped organize a “Maternal Association” with five other women which met at the Presbyterian Church and functioned as a “mothers prayer meeting.”¹⁷⁷ Writing of their opening meeting in her diary, McCorkle declared “We craved the benediction of Jehovah upon our project” which, like its more common northern counterparts, offered a Christian support group for mothers at the church to pray together and encourage each other on their spiritual journeys.¹⁷⁸ In Tuscaloosa, however, the maternal association of evangelical women also reinforced slave society norms by including in their constitution “that servants in their respective families be affectionately remembered in the prayers of the association.”¹⁷⁹ Southern maternal associations brought the domestic duty of Christian mothers praying for their children—and infantilized enslaved population—into the public sphere and made it a shared activity for a community of churchwomen. Women in the late antebellum Gulf South formed female prayer meetings at churches in cities like New Orleans, Mobile, and Montgomery; in smaller cotton towns like Greensboro, Alabama and Macon, Mississippi; and in rural

¹⁷⁵ Poole, “Yankee School Teacher in LA,” October 16, 1836, October 23, 1836.

¹⁷⁶ James O. Andrew, “Endowment of Centenary Institute,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 26, 1856.

¹⁷⁷ McCorkle, Diary, vol. 1, August 23, 1846, McCorkle Papers.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ “Constitution of the Tuscaloosa Maternal Association,” *Flag of the Union* (Tuscaloosa, AL), October 10, 1838.

plantation regions where they turned their parlors into public spaces for collective female prayer.¹⁸⁰

While scholars have noted that women had more flexibility to lead and speak in homosocial spaces like female prayer meetings, there is evidence in the Gulf South that calling on women to pray in mixed gender prayer groups was also standard practice, even if women were more hesitant to do so in this situation. In 1851, William Winans recorded that at a prayer meeting in Midway, Mississippi, he “called upon four sisters who declined – Sister Greenway, one of them was much affected about it.”¹⁸¹ Maria Dyer Davies of Macon, Mississippi also expressed self-deprecating concerns about the weight of responsibility in praying publicly in front of men and women, but did so anyways, comparing herself to a Biblical apostle and treating speaking as a religious duty: “Mr. Foote called on me to pray. I did not pray profitably I fear, for I was not altogether right . . . I am such a Thomas always doubting, fearing & therefore weeping.”¹⁸² Other women, especially when it came to Methodist class meetings, were praised for their public prayers. Elijah Steele wrote in 1841 about “Sister R” at his class meeting in New Orleans, declaring, “I have seldom heard a more spiritual and appropriate prayer by the most experienced, than was hers. She prayed aloud, so that all could hear her distinctly.”¹⁸³ Class meetings also allowed Methodist women to testify about their religious journey,

¹⁸⁰ Moss, Diary, February 1, 1854; Clitherall, Diary, vol. 13, Clitherall Diaries; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Seventh Annual Convention*, 15; A.H. Mitchell, "Obituaries," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 26, 1859; Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, 170; Wightman, Diary, October 24, 1851-September 27, 1853; A. Spencer to M.A. Keener, December 6, 1847, Keener Family Papers; E.O. Martin to Absalom Peters, January 29, 1834, AHMS.

¹⁸¹ Winans, Journal, March 16, 1851, Winans Papers.

¹⁸² Wightman, Diary, May 4, 1852.

¹⁸³ Drake, *A Sketch of the Life*, 177.

and many received praise in their obituaries for this public speech.¹⁸⁴ On several occasions, women were even appointed as temporary class and prayer leaders when men did not volunteer to perform the duty. Abigail Griffing Scott took over as prayer leader at the mixed company prayer meetings she held in her home in Jefferson County, Mississippi after her husband died in 1830, and in 1858 Presbyterian teacher Jane Copes found herself “making an effort” to lead at the meeting in Brookhaven, Mississippi because “only one of our Elders pray in public and he has not attended yet.”¹⁸⁵ Sarah Pearson of St. Helena Parish, Louisiana, on the other hand, was “known to lead the class”—a meeting of men and women—“in the absence of her husband” who was the official class leader.¹⁸⁶ Temporarily, at least, Pearson not only lead prayers but also offered pastoral care to class members, advising seekers on their spiritual journeys and encouraging members to follow Methodist discipline and share their experiences with the group.¹⁸⁷ Couched in the language of female humility or duty to husband, women, as the majority of attendees at these meetings, frequently responded to the call to pray and lead in public.

While far less likely to speak in biracial prayer meetings, enslaved women of color regularly took on the responsibility of leading prayer meetings in enslaved living quarters and plantation chapels, not only for separate women-only meetings but also for

¹⁸⁴ See obituaries in *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 10, 1852, October 9, 1852, February 19, 1853, October 15, 1853, May 6, 1854, September 29, 1855, July 3, 1858,

¹⁸⁵ John G. Jones, *A Concise History of the Introduction of Protestantism into the Mississippi and the Southwest* (St. Louis, MO, 1866), 49-50, 194; Jane H. Criswell to Joseph S. Copes, January 21, 1858, Copes Papers.

¹⁸⁶ "Obituaries," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 6, 1858.

¹⁸⁷ Charles C. Keys, *The Class Leader's Manual: Or, an Essay on the Duties, Difficulties, Qualifications, Motives and Encouragements of Class Leaders* (New York, 1856), 47-101.

the entire community.¹⁸⁸ Formerly enslaved Mark Oliver recalled “Aunt Olivia,” an enslaved laborer in Washington County, Mississippi, who “gave the lecture” when they had prayer meetings in the quarters, even declaring “She was the only preacher we knewed anything about.”¹⁸⁹ Enslaved women led prayer meetings in secret and on other occasions with white permission and sponsorship. In addition to teaching Sunday School, Lucy Skipwith led what she modestly called “family prayer” for the entire enslaved population of Hopewell Plantation which also included reading Bible passages to the group. Skipwith reported to her absentee slaveholder John Coker that even if attendance wavered, “it shall never be neglected if there is but one other besides myself.”¹⁹⁰ She used the same language of the duty of motherhood to lead “family” prayer that white women used both to justify her leadership role in mixed company and in deference to the plantation-as-family rhetoric common among slaveholders at the time. Skipwith’s role as prayer meeting leader put her in a precarious position of authority that sometimes led her to side with her enslaver in order to defend this position. In 1854, for instance, Skipwith wrote to Coker to defend her attempts “to carry on Family prayers by the plans laid down by you” complaining that “som has thought free to pray their own prayers at times, and as you did not say that this was to be done it makes me feel uneasy” despite knowing “that I will be blamed by some of the people for mentioning this to you.”¹⁹¹ At the same time,

¹⁸⁸ Deborah Grey White cited female prayer meetings on the plantation as a source of enslaved female religious leadership, but did not discuss women leading mixed gender meetings. See White, *Ar’n’t I A Woman*, 123, 141.

¹⁸⁹ Rawick, ed., *American Slave*, vol. 9, 1665.

¹⁹⁰ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Coker, November 18, 1855, box 149, Coker Family Papers,.

¹⁹¹ Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Coker, August 17, 1854, box 146, Coker Family Papers.

Skipwith continued to express sincere concern for her community's religious practice, especially since preaching on the plantation was so irregular and "the old people do not improve as much as the Children," but pledged "they are still striveing [sic], and I am willing to do my duty by them all as far as I am able."¹⁹²

While Skipwith sided with her absentee landlord to defend her religious leadership role, Jane Lee, enslaved on a sugar plantation in lower Louisiana, acted in secret to lead prayer meetings in the slave quarters without white approval. Formerly enslaved Charlotte Brooks, interviewed in 1879, recalled that "Aunt Jane" (a title implying fictive kinship and deference to elders) used to sneak off her own plantation to visit her and "would hold prayer meeting in my house whenever she would come to see me."¹⁹³ On several occasions Brooks faced punishment for participating; "my white folks did not want me even to pray and would whip me for praying" and even though "if old marster heard us he would put me in jail the next Sunday morning," Brooks declared "that did not stop me; I was always ready for the prayer meeting."¹⁹⁴ For Brooks, attending these prayer meetings became an act of resistance: "he did not want us to pray, but we would have our little prayer-meeting anyhow."¹⁹⁵ Jane Lee was responsible for organizing these meetings, challenging her own enslaver's attempt to contain her movement, but she also inspired Charlotte Brooks to speak up and lead as well, with

¹⁹² Lucy Skipwith to John Hartwell Cocke, June 17, 1855, box 149, Cocke Family Papers.

¹⁹³ Albert, ed., *The House of Bondage*, 11.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

Brooks declaring, “Sometimes I felt like preaching myself.”¹⁹⁶ When Brooks was forced to move to Texas with her enslaver, she continued these prayer meetings, recalling a group of “seven sisters and four brethren” who met regularly in her cabin.¹⁹⁷ As with Sunday schools in the enslaved living quarters, enslaved women turned domestic spaces into public spaces for collective religious practice, challenging white oversight of their spiritual lives in the process. While never given official approval to “preach” like some of their male counterparts, these enslaved women found speaking and leadership opportunities in these prayer meetings, not only over enslaved children but also over adult men and women in their communities.¹⁹⁸

Enslaved women also exhorted in their workspaces, creating a “rival” and *religious* geography of the fields, white homes, and plantation outbuildings that slaveholders had designated for their physical labor.¹⁹⁹ Presbyterian Benjamin Chase recorded the account of a black slave driver, “Sam,” brought into the church near St. Francisville, Louisiana in the 1820s thanks to the exhortations of an enslaved woman, “Susan,” who repeatedly called him a “sick sinner fore God” as she worked. Even though Sam whipped and cursed her, Susan continued until, according to Sam, “such strange

¹⁹⁶ Albert, ed., *The House of Bondage*, 12.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁹⁸ Like scholarship on black public speech in churches, scholarship on “hush harbors” and enslaved religious practice outside of the church also tends to focus on men, especially the enslaved male “preacher.” See Raboteau, *Slave Religion*; Young, *Rituals of Resistance*; Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures*. For the Gulf South, see: Kaye, *Joining Places*, 1, 21, 39-41. Most scholarship on female enslaved religious practice outside of the church focuses on private prayer or women’s roles as Christian mothers directing the religious instruction of children: see White, *Ar’n’t I A Woman*, 56-61; Stevenson, “Marsa Never Sot Aunt Rebecca down,” 353-355; Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 95, 109, 164; Nguyen, “Active Faith,” 110-111.

¹⁹⁹ For secular “rival geography” creation on and between plantations, see Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 7, 61.

feelin come over me.” Afterwards he felt consumed by Susan’s religious critique: “everywhere I go, Susan words dare too” until “by and by I gin to see it was true . . . I was sorry I was so wicked, and pray de Lord have mercy on sich poor sinner as me.”²⁰⁰ Susan’s speech out in the fields, her insistence despite physical punishment in her workspace, was key to her slave driver’s conversion.

Charlotte Brooks recalled a similar desire to exhort while working on the sugar plantation, noting “It seemed I wanted to ask every body if they loved Jesus when I first got converted.”²⁰¹ Brooks not only spoke to other enslaved laborers but also exhorted the brother of her slaveholder when he was sick. In what was his bedroom and her workspace, Brooks told him, “I will pray for you, but you must touch the hem of the Saviour’s garment yourself.”²⁰² Brooks received backlash from her Catholic slaveholders, but Hannah Eager, a Methodist slaveholder in Summit, Mississippi, wrote to the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* to praise her “pious and faithful servant,” an enslaved woman who “spoke often of the condescension of Christ” to anyone on the plantation who would listen.²⁰³ As with prayer meetings, enslaved evangelizing in plantation workspaces could happen with or without white knowledge or approval.

Rituals around the sickbed and deathbed also took on the aura of public prayer meetings when black and white women invited ministers and friends to their bedside and exhorted to them. Previous scholars have highlighted the deathbed scene as a domestic

²⁰⁰ Benjamin Chase, Journal, Chase (Benjamin Dorrance) Papers, MDAH, 360.

²⁰¹ Albert, ed., *The House of Bondage*, 12.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁰³ Hannah Eager, "Sketch of the Life and Death of a Pious and Faithful Servant," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 17, 1860.

ritual emblematic of Christian motherhood, with dying mothers exhorting their children and husbands to be good Christians and meet them in heaven.²⁰⁴ Obituaries for evangelical women living in the Gulf South, however, are also filled with glorified accounts of women spending their final hours giving religious counsel to adult friends and neighbors.²⁰⁵ Methodist Sarah Love in Sparta, Louisiana evangelized to several friends on her deathbed and received credit for the evangelizing successes in her obituary: “some who saw her die and heard her words, fled to God immediately. Several who had become cold, said they were determined by grace to fall back no more.”²⁰⁶ Julia Morgan, a Baptist from Tuscaloosa County, Alabama, even evangelized to her doctor while on her deathbed, “and in the earnestness of her dying hours exhorted him to seek the salvation of his soul, prepare for death and meet her in the judgment bar of God.”²⁰⁷

Evangelical women like Mary Kidd of Shelby County, Alabama also received praise in their obituaries for offering religious advice on their deathbeds to their enslaved workers: “taking them by the hand, one by one, with great calmness, and with surprising accuracy, she adapted her exhortations to the conditions of them all, solemnly warning

²⁰⁴ See Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 183-220; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 16-18; Randy Sparks, “The Southern Way of Death: The Meaning of Death in Antebellum White Evangelical Culture,” *Southern Quarterly* 44 (Fall 2006): 32-50; Friedman, *Enclosed Garden*, 5; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 200-226; Sally McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 172-175.

²⁰⁵ “Obituaries,” *South Western Baptist*, May 15, 1856. See also, H.A. Morse, “Obituary Notice,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, April 26, 1851; “Obituary Notices,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 15, 1852; “Obituary,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 4, 1854; “Obituary,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 14, 1855.

²⁰⁶ “Obituary,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*. October 20, 1855.

²⁰⁷ “Obituary,” *South Western Baptist*, July 22, 1853.

those that were wicked, to flee the wrath to come, and encouraging others to be faithful unto death.”²⁰⁸ While whites may have seen her exhorting as domestic—evidence of her benevolent slaveholder-mother identity—Kidd’s deathbed was a public workspace for the enslaved and her religious advice to them overlapped with white standards of ideal slave behavior, the reprimands of an employer to an employee.

On several occasions enslaved woman were able to take advantage of this deathbed evangelizing opportunity as well. One Presbyterian woman enslaved near Dayton, Alabama requested that a white missionary make a visit to her deathbed, and he described the scene of her taking “affectionate farewell of white and black, and heartily recommending that religion by which she had been comforted and sustained for forty years past and exhorting all to meet her where parting is no more.”²⁰⁹ Another enslaved woman on her deathbed, identified in white correspondence as “Old Rachel” of Cottage Hill plantation near Mobile, Alabama, held an impromptu prayer meeting with other enslaved laborers where “she professed to be happy.”²¹⁰ Cornelia, an enslaved woman and Presbyterian convert laboring near Tokshish, Mississippi, spent her final days on earth “going from cabin to cabin, exhorting all the impenitent she found to flee from the wrath of the offended God, and encouraging Christians to increased fidelity in the service

²⁰⁸ "Obituaries," *South Western Baptist*, November 16, 1854. For more examples, see "Mortuary," *South Western Baptist*, February 18, 1852; J. C. Keener, "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, December 10, 1853; T. Moody, "Obituary," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 20, 1855; Thomas H. Foster, "Biographical Sketch, Mary E. Glover," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, April 22, 1854.

²⁰⁹ A. McBride, F. Jeter, "Dayton Colored Mission, Alabama Conference," *New Orleans Christian Advocate* May, 31, 1856.

²¹⁰ M.A. Keener to Mary Anna Keener October 16, 1853, Keener Family Papers.

of their Saviour.”²¹¹ Motivated by impending death, women who otherwise might have doubted their ability to or the propriety in exhorting to other adults were praised for using their final hours to evangelize to friends and neighbors. In the process, they turned the private, domestic spaces of enslaved living quarters into public sites of religious exhorting, with enslaved women as the speakers and leaders asserting a rival purpose for these spaces on the plantation than slaveholders had intended.

Church Business Meetings and Conferences

While camp and prayer meetings provided women with opportunities to speak in public as evangelizers, congregational businesses meetings and regional denominational conferences gave some women the chance to speak or influence the day-to-day affairs of their churches. Previous scholars have downplayed women’s roles in these male-dominated meetings because lay and ordained church office holding was entirely limited to men and regional associations only accepted male delegates to their meetings.²¹² Yet even though they were often not required to attend, many women still considered it their religious duty to do so. Baptist churches were more likely to enforce male attendance than female at their congregational meetings, but Baptist women regularly attended congregational meetings and received praise in their obituaries for going.²¹³ Women across all mainstream Protestant denominations frequently attended associational meetings, especially female relatives of clergy and delegates, and some found

²¹¹ Winter, trans., “Church Session at Monroe.”

²¹² Friedman, *Enclosed Garden*, 13; Gregory Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 51-53; Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 187.

²¹³ For examples, see M.P. Jewett, "Obituary," *South Western Baptist*, July 92, 1851; J.J. Sessions, "Mortuary," *South Western Baptist*, March 9, 1854; Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:13.

opportunities there to meet with other churchwomen from across the region. Frances Bestor, daughter of Alabama Baptist preacher, Daniel Bestor, attended the Bigby River Baptist Association meeting in 1851 and not only reunited with some of her former classmates, but also held an all-female Bible reading and prayer meeting at night with four other women that came to the association with their families.²¹⁴ Like camp meetings, conferences provided women with opportunities for religious fellowship with women beyond their home churches.

In contrast to these regional conferences with only male delegates voting, at least some individual churches allowed women to speak publicly at their monthly business meetings and even vote on church matters, an important symbolic right in an era before political female suffrage.²¹⁵ While individual church policies varied even in the same denomination, in general Baptist churches in the region offered the broadest possible voting and speaking rights to women. Several Baptist churches had blanket statements in their “rules of decorum” that gave female members the right to vote. The 1836 rules of decorum for Hebron Baptist Church in Mississippi, for instance, stated that “the sisters shall have the privilege of speaking in conference or voting on any subject, they may feel it their wish,” and when Center Hill Baptist Church was established in 1850 in DeStoto County, Mississippi, their rules included that “the Sisters shall have the right of voting on

²¹⁴ Robertson, “Diary,” October 25, 1851, October 26, 1851.

²¹⁵ Angela Boswell and Randy Sparks argue that some churches in the late antebellum Gulf South (especially Baptist and Methodist) allowed women to vote on certain matters, especially having to do with finances or moral discipline, but this was often not consistent across the region and remained a point of contention in congregations: see Boswell, “The Meaning of Participation, 98; Sparks, “Good Sisters,” 43-44; Sparks, *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks*, 50-51.

all questions.”²¹⁶ Other churches restricted female voting and speech, like First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, which ruled that while “each male member shall have an equal right to speak, . . . the sisters shall not have a right to lay before the church any burden that bears on their minds.”²¹⁷ Most common among Baptist Churches were policies that allowed women to speak at these meetings only during the moment of their professing conversion and to vote only on church membership decisions, which often included the requirement of unanimous approval. Some of the Baptist churches that had separate black congregations also had separate business meetings, which allowed both men and women of color to vote on new members to their own congregation, still with some white oversight of the process.²¹⁸

A few Baptist churches extended voting rights beyond membership decisions but only to the choice of a new pastor.²¹⁹ In 1844, the *Alabama Baptist* reprinted an article from the Richmond, Virginia Baptist newspaper, *Religious Herald*, which argued that while “the ordinary business of the church should be confined to the male membership,” female members, as the usual majority in churches, ought to be allowed to vote on who will be the “spiritual guide and instructor of the church.” “The female members,” continued the article, “must be as deeply interested, as the male members, in the choice of

²¹⁶ “Rules of Decorum,” 1836, Old Hebron Baptist Church Records, MBHC, 92; “Rules of Decorum, 1850,” Center Hill Baptist Church, DeSoto County Records, MBHC.

²¹⁷ “Rules of Decorum, 1818,” typescript, First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa Records, MSS. 0517, Hoole.

²¹⁸ For examples, see Minutes, , January 1845, Concord Baptist Church of Christ (Choctaw County, MS), Minutes, 1837-1861, MSS. 63 MSU; Minutes, March 11, 1850, typescript, First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa Records. See also Sparks, *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks*, 138, 141; Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 38; Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 60.

²¹⁹ For examples, see Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:28; Concord Baptist Church, Choctaw County, Minutes, 1837-1861.

a suitable man, and we think that they may justly claim the right of voting, at least in this instance.”²²⁰ Even when given the right to vote on the new pastor, however, women’s votes did not always have the same weight as men’s. In 1848, First Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa decided that while all members were allowed to vote on the new pastor, the job would go to the candidate who won the majority *male* vote, making female votes only a way to gauge broader church opinion.²²¹ In 1839 at the Baptist Church in Marion, Alabama, women may not have been allowed to vote in the election of Milo Jewett as their new pastor, but a group of women expressed their opinion vocally during the meeting nonetheless. As James DeVotie recorded, after the vote passed, “Mrs. Young Tarrant, Mrs. Griffin, Lockhart, and a dozen other sisters burst into a flood of tears, tears of joy and gratitude to God” which he interpreted as their expression of wholehearted approval.²²² These women may not have had official power through voting, but did speak up collectively to make their opinions known.

Several Presbyterian and Episcopal churches, on the other hand, denominations where business meetings typically consisted only of male elders and officeholders, extended voting rights to women when electing new leaders, but only to female pewholders.²²³ In these instances financial support of the church through paying pew rents gave wealthy upper-class women the right to vote which was denied to lower-class

²²⁰ "Shall the Females Vote in Church Meetings?" *Alabama Baptist*, September 7, 1844.

²²¹ Minutes, October 9, 1848, First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa Records.

²²² M.P. Hewett to James H. DeVotie, December 7, 1839, DeVotie Papers; Bode, "A Common Sphere," 784.

²²³ "Extracts from Oct. 1829 to Jan. 1832," Presbytery of Mississippi Records, 1816-1942; Bond, *St. James Episcopal Church*, 18. For more on female financial support of clergy overlapping with voting rights, see chapter four of this dissertation.

women and women of color. Other Episcopal women who were excluded from even attending business meetings expressed their opinions on hiring decisions by writing letters or signing petitions to their church leaders which were read at the male vestry meetings. In 1844, Episcopalian Sarah King of Bayou Goula, Louisiana wrote the selection committee at her old church in New Orleans requesting that they hire her friend and “sound churchman,” a “Mr. Fay,” as their temporary rector.²²⁴ Other women petitioned collectively, like the women of Christ Church, Episcopal in Mobile who wrote their vestry in 1854 to request that they elect their temporary rector, B. P. Leacock, as the permanent hire.²²⁵ In a nod to the power and influence of the female majority, many of whom had wealth and social status, the vestry took their advice and hired Leacock, despite a different recommendation from the male pewholders of the church.²²⁶

When they had no success in their own congregational meetings, some women chose to petition the larger governing bodies of their denominations. When Natalbany Baptist Church in Louisiana voted to break away from the mainstream Mississippi Baptist Association, a group of women from the church wrote a letter petitioning the association to continue to “recognize a part of said church, Mary Adison, Elizabeth Paxton, and Piety Whitton to be orthodox” missionary Baptists when the male-led congregation voted to leave the association. The association agreed to women’s’ request,

²²⁴ Sarah King to Lucius Duncan Esq., October 12, 1844, September 26, 1844, Christ Church Cathedral, New Orleans Records.

²²⁵ Vestry Minutes, March 23, 1854, Christ Church, Episcopal (Baldwin County, AL), Records.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, March 30, 1854.

recommending they join another missionary Baptist church.²²⁷ In 1856, a group of Methodist women in Shreveport petitioned the Louisiana Conference and Bishop Hubbard Kavanaugh to allow their current itinerant minister, Linus Parker, stay at his post another year instead of being transferred to a new location as was still the custom there in the 1850s. In the petition the women claimed to “speak, for ourself [sic] when we say that his return would be cordially welcomed” and argued that allowing him to stay was crucial to the continued advancement of their church in the region.²²⁸ Excluded from voting or speaking during the regional conference proceedings, women assumed the right to petition an associational body in order to make their voices heard at these male-dominated meetings. While the conference ultimately denied the request, the “Ladies of Shreveport Petition” was reprinted in multiple Louisiana newspapers, giving their collective opinion on church policy an even larger public audience.²²⁹

Moral Discipline Trials in Evangelical Churches

For evangelical Protestant women, church discipline and morality trials provided an exceptional space within the church business meeting where women were allowed to speak publicly as accusers, defendants, and witnesses. Common charges for both men and women in these church trials included moral issues like dancing, drinking, or sexual misconduct as well as doctrinal issues of non-attendance, leaving the church for another denomination, or holding unorthodox opinions that contradicted church doctrine. Baptist church trials offered the most flexibility for female speech as they occurred during the

²²⁷ *Minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association, assembled at East Fork Meeting House* (1834), 4. Orthodox Missionary Baptist as opposed to Primitive Baptist, a breakaway sect.

²²⁸ "Rev. L. Parker," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, January 12, 1856.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

congregational meeting attended by all members and conviction often required a unanimous vote, women included. In Baptist churches throughout the Gulf South, women spoke in defense or in apology for their actions, testified as witnesses for others, and some women served on committees to visit accused members in order to take their testimony and try to mediate the situation before bringing it to the church.²³⁰ While male visiting committees still remained the norm throughout the region, some churches allowed women to serve on all-female committees to visit other accused women and then read their reports in front of the congregational meeting.²³¹ In several cases women in Baptist and Presbyterian churches served on committees made up of men and women to visit accused male church members, especially if the case involved adultery or marital conflict.²³² Women who served on these discipline committees not only aided their church courts by collecting testimony, but also played an important pastoral role of exercising “watchcare” over members and “laboring” with accused sinners to bring about confessions and restore them to right relationship with the church.²³³ These female

²³⁰ For examples in Baptist church meeting records see, see Minutes, July 1839, August 1839, March 1851, April 1851, July 1855, Mt. Hebron Baptist Church (Jefferson Co. Ala.) Church Records, 1819-1959, Samford; Minutes, December 15, 1842, Mount Sinai Baptist Church Records, MBHC; Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:1-55, 266, 327, 336; Minutes, 1848, Old Wahalak Baptist Church Records, MBHC; Minutes, April 1837, Bogue Chitto Baptist Church Records; Minutes, October-December 1837, Baptist Church of Christ at Hephzibah, LA, Books, vol. 1, MSS. 678, LLMVC; Minutes, June 1831, July 1842, First Baptist Church, Huntsville Records, Samford.

²³¹ For examples of all-female visiting committees, see Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:1-55, 266; Minutes, March 1851, April 1852, Mt. Hebron Baptist Church Records, (Jefferson Co. Ala.); Minutes, June 1831, July 1842, First Baptist Church, Huntsville Records; Minutes, vol. 1, October 2, 1837, November 1837, December 1837, Baptist Church of Christ at Hephzibah, LA Books.

²³² For examples of co-ed committees visiting men, see Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:71, 232; Session Minutes, June 20, 1840, First Presbyterian Church, Lexington, MS Records MSU. For co-ed committees that visited women, see Minutes, August 1835, First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Records; Minutes, 1852, First Baptist Church, Uniontown Records, Samford.

²³³ For example see Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:11, 19.

committee members who were usually older and respected women in the church used the parlors and dining rooms of members' homes to perform a public ministry for the good of the entire congregation.

Methodist trials often occurred during a preaching circuit's quarterly conference and Presbyterian trials during a church session or presbytery meeting directed by the male church elders. In these churches women also testified in public as witnesses and defendants.²³⁴ At a quarterly conference in Macon County, Alabama in the 1850s, a "Mrs. Green" spoke in the trial of the missionary to the enslaved, Charles L. Hayes, who was accused of using a catechism filled with "the doctrine of the Abolitionists."²³⁵ She defended Hayes, and as nineteenth-century historian Anson West put it, "Mrs. Green spoke in a decided tone and declared she was not convinced that the Catechism contained unsound or unsafe doctrine, and her slaves should still be instructed in them."²³⁶ Green gave her opinion on controversial doctrinal issues in a public forum and her experience as one of the many women who took charge of enslaved Sunday schools in the Gulf South gave her an air of expertise on the matter.

When it came to who actually made the accusation, male members appear much more often as the accusers listed in the church records regardless of whether the accused

²³⁴ For examples, see Coles Creek Quarterly Conference, October 8, 1856, Cane Ridge, Bayou Pierre, et al (Fayette d.) Quarterly Conference Records; "Documents relating to the journals (Annual Conference Minutes), 1853, Louisiana Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Records, Centenary; Session Minutes, September 16, 1837, First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa Records; Session Minutes, October 9, 1844, Oak Grove Presbyterian Church (Aliceville, Ala.) Session Records, PCHS; Session Minutes, November 6, 1858, Montrose Presbyterian Church, Jasper County, MS Records, 1841-1868, MDAH; Presbytery of South Alabama Minutes, vol. 5, 197; Session Minutes, December 9, 1850, January 15, 1851, Eutaw Presbyterian Church, Green County, AL Records, CPTS.

²³⁵ West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 711.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

was male or female.²³⁷ Yet when women felt especially concerned about another member's behavior or were personally involved, they were allowed to bring up charges in this public forum.²³⁸ There are even several cases of women in the Gulf South charging their own preachers for immoral conduct or unorthodox preaching. In 1836 at First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Alabama, Sarah Echols brought charges against her pastor, William Manning, "for preaching contrary to the Word of God."²³⁹ Presbyterian women were called as witnesses in trials against the preachers at Oak Grove Presbyterian Church in Aliceville, Alabama and at annual presbytery meetings for the Presbyteries of New Orleans and South Alabama.²⁴⁰ In 1853 at Galilee Baptist Church in Amite County, Mississippi, four women and six men served on a mixed gender committee to visit and investigate "Pastor A. Mackenzie" who was accused of adultery, drunkenness, and "abusing his family."²⁴¹ These women turned an acceptable domestic, moral concern for the welfare of women and children into a public religious leadership role that ultimately challenged the absolute patriarchal authority of the father over his family.

While Episcopal churches did not have regular discipline trials like their evangelical counterparts there is at least one instance of an Episcopal woman in

²³⁷ In the church records of Zion Hill Baptist Church in Amite County, Mississippi from 1830 to 1861, men are listed as accusers eighteen times, while women brought up charges only five times. During the same time period, out of dozens of male committees, there was only one all-female visiting committee and one mixed gender committee. See Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:326-348.

²³⁸ For an example of a Baptist laywoman charging a layman for unchristian conduct, see Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:333.

²³⁹ Minutes, July 3, 1836, First Baptist Church, Huntsville Records.

²⁴⁰ Session Minutes, October 9, 1844, Oak Grove Presbyterian Church Records; Presbytery of New Orleans Minutes, November 1855; Presbytery of South Alabama Records, vol. 5, 197; *ibid.*, vol. 8, 266.

²⁴¹ Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:232.

Columbus, Mississippi accusing her priest, Edward Fontaine, of “scandalous” relations with a woman of color.²⁴² Fontaine recognized that white women, as arbiters on moral behavior in their communities, could turn the church against him, writing in his diary, “I have found one or more of these ‘possessed of Devils’ women where I have preached. Mrs. Smith in Columbus, Mrs. Shields in Canton, Mrs. Rawlins in Austin, Mrs. Foot in Algiers & etc.,” had “been laboring very hard to prejudice the minds of some of the community against me.”²⁴³ In discipline and morality trials, women not only had a public forum to critique or defend the morality of their fellow church members, but they could even weigh in on the morality or orthodoxy of their preachers.

When it came to women as defendants in these church discipline cases, previous scholars have found that race was a stronger determinant for being charged than gender, and despite being held to a higher standard of moral behavior than men, white women were not brought before the court at a higher rate than male church members.²⁴⁴ White women also had the power to complain to male church officials about the outcome of the vote and write petitions requesting new trials.²⁴⁵ Women of color, on the other hand, were more likely to be disciplined in a church trial than their white counterparts, more likely to be accused of sexual misconduct, and unable to challenge decisions that led to

²⁴² Fontaine, Journal, January 25, 1849, Edward Fontaine Papers.

²⁴³ Ibid., February 15, 1848.

²⁴⁴ Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 160; Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 54; Bode, “A Common Sphere,” 800.

²⁴⁵ For examples, see Minutes, 1850, Bethany Baptist Church, Calhoun County Records, MBHC, 91; Minutes, August 1835, First Baptist Church, Huntsville Records; Minutes, vol. 3, Presbytery of East Alabama Minutes, 5, 25; Elizabeth Biggar to Joseph S. Copes, September 10, 1841, Copes Papers.

their exclusion from the church body.²⁴⁶ Most instances where women of color were allowed to speak in these trials were in acts of humility, when they made public apologies for sinful behavior and prayed for forgiveness.²⁴⁷ It was only after public admittance of guilt that they could rejoin the church congregation.

While churches mostly stayed out of what was seen as “private” issues between enslaved persons and slaveholders by the 1830s, there were several cases of white women, in particular, turning to church courts to enforce “proper” slave behavior when the enslaved was a church member and the charge was not criminal in nature. In 1841 at Hepzibah Baptist Church in Clarke County, Mississippi, an enslaved woman was excluded from membership after her female slaveholder accused her of being “in the habit of disobeying and contradicting her mistress.”²⁴⁸ In 1858 at Mount Moriah Presbyterian Church in Newton County, Mississippi, a Mrs. C. Evans reported to the session that her enslaved laborers Fortiner and Marilla “were not walking in the Gospel” and the session elders cited them for “disorderly conduct” for which they were expelled from the church.²⁴⁹ White women also served on visiting committees for accused woman of color, which was seen as an extension of their Christian “motherhood” duty to monitor the moral and religious lives of the enslaved.²⁵⁰ In response to charges, white church leaders were more likely to critique the testimony of women of color as unreliable or not

²⁴⁶ Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 170; Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 60.

²⁴⁷ Minutes, December 1841, Hepzibah Baptist Church, Clark County Records; Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:185-186, 189-190, 201; Session Minutes, July 6, 1845, Montrose Presbyterian Church Records.

²⁴⁸ Minutes, September 1841, Hepzibah Baptist Church, Clark County Records.

²⁴⁹ Session Minutes, January 31, 1858, Mt. Moriah Presbyterian Church Records.

²⁵⁰ Minutes, 1852, First Baptist Church, Uniontown Records.

allow them to testify at all. In 1850 at a Methodist church trial for sexual misconduct in Sharon, Mississippi, the church elders dismissed the earlier account of the incident given by an enslaved woman as the words of “an ignorant negress” who had slandered “a highly respectable and well connected young [white] lady.”²⁵¹ Women of color were usually only called to testify in church trials when the accused were also free or enslaved people of color or when speaking in defense of their slaveholder’s character rather than in critique.²⁵² While white women could publicly criticize the morality of white male behavior in late antebellum southern churches, women of color could not. As with other church meeting spaces, biracial church courts remained more restrictive for black female speech than separate black meetings.

Conclusions

Despite the common assumption among both modern scholars and contemporary church leaders that women remained silent participants in church services and only evangelized to children, late antebellum women continued to find spaces where they could speak and lead in church meetings throughout the Gulf South. In rural parts of the region, Protestant churches continued to rely on women to be hosts and organizers for preaching, revivals, and prayer meeting spaces and women volunteered to lead in prayer temporarily for mixed company and permanently for female meetings as part of their religious duty to evangelize. In urban regions where there was less of a need for women to host and organize services, women still served on Sundays as song leaders and musicians, organized their own weekly prayer meetings in their homes and churches, and

²⁵¹ Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 3:122.

²⁵² Casey, comp, *Amite County*, 2:189-190, 201; Minutes, January 1846, Presbytery of Louisiana Minutes; Minutes, March 11, 1850, First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa Records.

found ways to influence church court and business decisions, even when denied the formal power of voting. Women of color faced more restrictions on public religious speech and service, especially in biracial spaces when sharing conversion stories or testifying in morality trials. Separate majority-black services and informal prayer meetings on and often the plantation, however, remained more flexible for black female speech and leadership, even over other adult men in their community. Protestant churches in the late antebellum Gulf South maintained female majorities, but rather than treating them simply as the audience for male preachers, scholars must take into account the ways in which women worked publicly to inspire, rebuke, or lead other adults—male and female—in their churches. These women acted as unofficial ministers of the church. They served as public evangelizers but also as pastors offering spiritual and emotional support to their fellow Christians, whether they were new seekers of conversion, old church members who needed encouragement to maintain religious practice, or “sinners” who needed to be brought back into the fold. Ultimately, as these growing congregations sought permanent rectors and church buildings, the same evangelizing activism that inspired women’s revival, prayer meeting, church court, and Sunday service ministry also inspired financial support and stewardship.

CHAPTER FOUR

Time, Talent, and Treasure: Female Stewardship of the Church

And it came to pass afterward, that he [Jesus] went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him. And certain women . . . which ministered unto him of their substance.

—Luke 8:1-3 (King James Version)

During his public life women were the most assiduous attendants on his ministry. To them especially was allotted the honor and the pleasure of supplying his temporal necessities. They ministered to him ‘of their substance’ . . . The names of many other women are preserved in the New Testament, who are characterized by their sanctity and wisdom, and are eulogized by the inspired Apostles for the zeal, and talent, and liberality with which they helped them much in the Lord.

—Joseph Beaumont, “Female Excellence”

In 1852 the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* printed “Female Excellence” by British Methodist minister Joseph Beaumont in which he listed Biblical models for women in the nineteenth century to emulate, including the women who hosted, fed, and financed Jesus and the original apostles. Beaumont’s focus on women’s “zeal, talent, and liberality” closely resembles the old adage about church stewardship as using one’s “time, talent, and treasure” to meet the needs of the clergy and the church.¹ In antebellum America, church stewards across Protestant denominations were responsible for raising funds and advocating for construction, furnishing, and repairs for church buildings and salaries and housing for clergy. Although the official position of church steward was always male, women in the late antebellum Gulf South served as unofficial stewards,

¹ Joseph Beaumont, "Female Excellence," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, December 25, 1852.

performing the necessary labor to meet the earthly needs of their clergy and churches.

Not only did women support these projects with their own money, but they also collected subscriptions; formed female church aid societies; organized fundraiser fairs, suppers, and concerts; and even performed the physical labor to clean, furnish, and repair churches and parsonages.

Women of color performed these stewardship roles as well, some by choice for their own semi-independent churches and some as enslaved workers completing projects for white women as an extension of their enslaver's stewardship. Enslaved female labor in slaveholding households gave white women the free time to devote to church fundraising and furnishing projects, but enslaved women also often performed the most physically demanding tasks of church stewardship with white women overseeing the work and frequently taking the credit.² All of these women shaped the new Protestant landscape of the Gulf South, filled with settled clergy and respectable worship spaces that were crucial to the transition from itinerant missions to established churches.

This picture of late antebellum female stewardship challenges the prevailing historical narrative of southern Protestant development where itinerant ministers settling down and building churches by the 1830s coincided with the domestication of women's religious roles.³ Scholarship on southern female stewardship from 1830 to 1861 focuses

² For scholarship on female slaveholders taking credit for household labor performed by the enslaved, see: Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 128-129; Jones, *Labor of Love*, 21.

³ For scholarship that follows this narrative of early nineteenth-century female church stewardship for itinerants and the loss of these roles with the construction of churches in the 1830s, see Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 112-113, xvi; Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 96-98, 180-181; Labbé, "Helpers in the Gospel," 258; Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm* 157; Graham, "Evangelicals and 'Domestic Felicity.'" Some scholars claim southern antebellum women never held this public role, even in the early nineteenth century: see Friedman *The Enclosed Garden*, 6; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 70; McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 176.

only on the urban South or the private donations of wealthy widows.⁴ Not only does this timeline not hold up in the Gulf South, but no scholarship has acknowledged just how widespread and essential female stewardship was for all mainstream Protestant denominations throughout the region.⁵ Women's public church stewardship and a patriarchal slave society were not mutually exclusive; Gulf South women, like their northern counterparts, justified this work as both a religious duty and an expansion of their domestic duties, often receiving male praise for their piety-in-action in giving household chores like sewing, cleaning, and hosting a public religious purpose.⁶ Nor did it take a war effort for southern women to organize female associations like sewing societies.⁷ In the transition from missions to permanent churches, women expanded the physical spaces of their activism, often by working with other women. They continued to use their homes to support traveling clergy, but also turned their parlors into public meeting spaces for church aid societies and used the new church buildings they funded as

⁴ For scholarship with scattered examples of women's fundraising to build and furnish churches, almost always in urban areas, see Lebsack, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 225-226. For the Gulf South, in particular, see Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 54; Sparks, "The Good Sisters," 51-52; Vaughn, *Bishops, Bourbons, and Big Mules*: 20-27; Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 11, 96; Boswell, "The Meaning of Participation," 43-44; Jualynne E. Dodson, *Engendering Church: Women, Power and the AME Church* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 48; Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 57.

⁵ Scott Stephan gives a couple of examples of female church fundraising from the urban and rural South, but ultimately argues, "The patterns of female fund-raising across the South remain to be charted," in *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 44.

⁶ For women using Christian domestic ideals in order to challenge them and create a public religious identity in the antebellum North, see Cott, *Bond of Womanhood*, xxv, 149-159; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 98-104; Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 109, 130, 156; Hillah and Keller, eds., *Women in New Worlds* 13-25, 293-309.

⁷ LeeAnn Whites downplays the significance of antebellum female church societies, arguing that patriarchal church structures "limited their possibilities for independent development," and contrasts them with the widespread female activism in sewing and fundraising organizations during the Civil War, in *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 51-52. For scholarship that emphasizes postbellum female church societies, see Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 151-163; Julianna Liles Boudreaux, "A History of Philanthropy in New Orleans, 1835-1862," (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1961), 66-67.

sites for collective fundraising and furnishing. Women across race, class, and geographic divisions in the Gulf South invested in material expressions of their piety and leadership in the church, giving permanence and social status to their ministers and churches in the process.

Stewardship for Itinerant Preachers and Missionaries

Women's role as hosts and benefactors for traveling ministers is well documented in the North and the South during the Second Great Awakening and the early nineteenth century.⁸ Unlike the East Coast South, however, the Gulf South still depended on itinerant ministers and missionaries from other states to meet the needs of the region well beyond 1830 and in rural areas continuing through the Civil War. These traveling preachers in turn continued to depend on women to be hosts and financial patrons. Antebellum obituaries of laywomen, especially in Baptist and Methodist newspapers from the Gulf South, celebrated women's extension of their domestic duties to include providing free room and board for itinerant preachers while traveling between preaching stations. Many of these women were widows like "Mother Collins" of Bayou Boeuff, Louisiana whose house, according to her obituary, "was open to preachers of every denomination."⁹ Often, however, married women like Methodist Margaretta Hill of New Orleans received the credit in their obituaries for continuing to host these preachers rather than their husbands and were labeled a "mother in Israel" for their service.¹⁰ In the

⁸ See Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 96-101; Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 159-171.

⁹ "Obituaries," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, January 4, 1860.

¹⁰ J.B. Walker, "Biographical," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 7, 1853. For more examples in obituaries, see "Obituaries," *Tennessee Baptist*, June 2, 1860; "Obituaries," *South Western Baptist*, October 23, 1856; *ibid.*, May 20, 1858.

Baptist tradition, male deacons performed the work of stewardship for congregations, but their wives were expected to take care of traveling preachers. An address “To Deacon’s Wives” in the *Alabama Baptist* in 1844, declared, “If deacons must serve, their wives must set tables” and provide “entertainment and care of the itinerant preachers.”¹¹ Stewardship of itinerants remained an acceptable form of female religious duty and gave hostesses’ homes an important religious role by making missionary work possible in the region.

Journals and correspondence of itinerant ministers give more accurate dates as to the years in which they still relied on women to put them up on their journeys. In 1840, Methodist preacher Henry Harris stayed in the house of the overseer for Pickens’ Plantation in Jasper County, Mississippi where he was entertained by the overseer’s wife, “Mrs. Nelson,” and her friends. “These ladies were among my best friends ever afterward,” Harris noted in his autobiography, crediting them for his care on the preaching circuit: “I have many times since shared their hospitality—especially that of Mrs. Nelson, under whose roof I often lodged and whose board I have faired sumptuously.”¹² Presbyterian Samuel Agnew stayed at “Mrs. Nealy’s” on his preaching visits in Madison County, Mississippi in 1857, and even as late as 1861 in rural Rapides Parish, Louisiana, Robert Parish stayed at the homes of Methodists “Mrs. Wilson”, “Mrs. Newel,” and “Sister Kay.”¹³ Domestic duties in the home of extending invitations and

¹¹ Zethar, “To Deacon’s Wives,” *Alabama Baptist*, August 24, 1844.

¹² Henry Harris, Autobiography, transcript, Harris (Henry J.) Autobiography, 1882, MS. 11, Cain Archives, 14.

¹³ Agnew, Diary, January 18, 1857; Parish, “1861 Diary,” January 31, 1861-March 9, 1861. See also, Winans, Journal, 1847-1848, Winans Papers; Sims, Diary, vol. 1, June 16, 1847-Nov 24, 1847, Sims Papers.

preparing meals and beds continued to take on public religious significance throughout the rural Gulf South by ensuring traveling preachers could make their appointments.

Often hosting itinerant preachers overlapped with other types of financial patronage. Some women gave money—as when the Episcopal women of Natchitoches, Louisiana collectively paid the travel expenses for a visiting missionary in the early 1850s—but it was also common to give presents that would be useful for a preacher on the go, including traveling clothing, Bibles, and means of transportation.¹⁴ In 1849 the Episcopal priest Edward Fontaine borrowed “a buggy belonging to Mrs. Pipkin” to travel back and forth between preaching stations in Aberdeen and Canton, Mississippi, and in 1842 Methodist itinerant William Winans received a horse from “Sister Johns” to enable his visits around southern Louisiana.¹⁵ Other women personally escorted preachers to their appointments after they spent the night at their homes or sent their carriages to pick up visiting preachers for dinner.¹⁶ Itinerants continued to rely on women to make their regular preaching visits possible.

As with hosting, female gift giving involved acts of service. In addition to receiving clothing from women, Baptist Basil Manly wrote to tell his wife in 1846 that a “Sister Ashford” who hosted him outside of Tuscumbia, Alabama on his preaching route

¹⁴ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 18 (New York, 1853), 131. For late antebellum examples of gift-giving, see William Winans, Account Book, 1833-1855, Winans Papers; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1856), 18; John G. Jones, Journal, Jones (John G.) Journal, 53; West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 754-755.

¹⁵ Fontaine, Journal, May 30, 1849, Edward Fontaine Papers; Winans, Journal, June 21, 1842, Winans Papers.

¹⁶ Roach, Diary, May 7, 1854, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers; Fontaine, Journal, May 10, 1848, Edward Fontaine Papers.

also did his laundry.¹⁷ This conventional female labor took on a new religious purpose as a necessary service for traveling preachers. Most of the traveling clothing given as presents was also hand sewn or knit, another domestic labor now serving as a means of stewardship that combined time, talent, and treasure. In 1849 a Methodist itinerant minister in Alabama recorded his “presents received” that year which included around ten dollars from men followed by seven shirts, three pairs of socks, four pairs of pants, and four handkerchiefs made by women on his circuit.¹⁸ Presbyterian itinerant Samuel Agnew tried to pay one woman in Madison County, Mississippi for the traveling leggings she knit for him in 1857, “but she would not receive any remuneration” for what she certainly saw as a way she could be useful to her preacher.¹⁹ In urban areas like New Orleans, Natchez, and Washington, Mississippi, Methodist women in the 1830s worked collectively to donate money and boxes of clothing to traveling preachers which were presented annually at the state conference. The “Female Assistance Society” of Washington and the “Ladies’ Sewing Societies of New Orleans and Natchez,” a multi-city cooperative effort, were some of the earliest benevolent societies in the region and they were praised by male church members for using their household labor to meet a public religious need.²⁰

¹⁷ Basil Manly, Sr. to Sarah M. Manly, August 14, 1846, Manly Family Papers.

¹⁸ Anonymous, Minister's Memo Book, 1849-1851, MSS. SC 875, Samford.

¹⁹ Agnew, Diary, January 9, 1857.

²⁰ Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 2:116-117, 287, 305, 367. For more on sewing as a way women used a domestic role to take on a public role in the church in antebellum Mississippi, see Sparks, *Good Sisters*, 51. For throughout the antebellum U.S., see Ann Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 15.

Meeting the needs of itinerant preachers often extended to taking care of a preacher's wife and children while he was traveling for the church. In 1857 Methodist Joseph Cottrell recorded in his diary his sincere thanks to two young women on his Spring Hill Circuit in Alabama, Angy and Annie Blunt, "who stayed with my wife in my absence and assisted her by many offices of kindness and sympathy. They are indeed jewels to my church, and communion with them was reward abundant for the years of privations and trials."²¹ In the 1890s, historian Anson West, praised Sarah Rush, who moved to Macon County outside of Tuskegee with her husband in 1836, for her years of hospitality to Alabama's itinerant preachers and their families. Not only did she receive the credit instead of her husband for hosting preachers, giving them money, and making them clothing, but she also was praised for offering the household labor of an enslaved woman to preachers' wives when their husbands were away.²² This is certainly not the first time a white woman has received credit for an enslaved woman's domestic labor, but is a telling example of the role many unnamed women of color played in supporting itinerant Protestant ministers through compulsory domestic service. While white women's stewardship to itinerant preachers in the late antebellum South is often missing from scholarship, the silence with regards to the labor of women of color is even more glaring in both historical and eyewitness accounts. Who knows how many meals prepared, beds made, and clothes knit for traveling ministers were actually provided by the hands of enslaved women—some church members, but many most likely not.

²¹ Cottrell, *Diary*, January 1, 1857, Cottrell Papers.

²² West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 506.

Church membership or at least church attendance for women of color is easier to track in the scattered references to their monetary donations to itinerant preachers. Most often, however, such donations were listed collectively with no indication of the freedom status or gender of the donor. These donations also varied in size. In 1839, Methodist William Winans received \$50 four times a year “from Col[ore]d Society, New Orleans,” most likely a mix of free and enslaved members, while an anonymous Methodist itinerant in Alabama recorded “a collection among the Blacks—Donations to me \$5.55” and on another occasion, “cash from two colored persons, 45 [cents],” both in 1849.²³ As women of color often outnumbered men in these congregations, it is fair to say women probably contributed to these collective donations.²⁴ There is at least one specific reference to a woman of color donating to fund white Baptist itinerants in Mississippi. Listed in the “Coloured Persons” section of donations in 1824 at the Mississippi Baptist State Convention was a line for a woman named “Charity” who donated 12.5 cents.²⁵ Even these small donations offer a useful indication of what women of color valued and where they were willing to devote what few resources they had.²⁶ Women like Charity of Mississippi prioritized preaching, choosing to support the biracial Baptist Church in the region.

²³ Winans, *Account Book, 1833-1855*, Winans Papers; Anonymous, “Presents Received,” 1849, *Minister's Memo Book, 1849-1851*.

²⁴ Dodson, *Engendering Church*, 26.

²⁵ “Minutes (Typed) of Second Session of Miss. Baptist Convention, November 1824,” typescript, Mississippi Baptist State Convention Records, MBHC.

²⁶ For more on women of color choosing to fund Protestant churches with their time and money, see Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 119-207; Dodson, *Engendering Church*, 4, 66-67.

Stewardship of Church Construction

Even as parts of the Gulf South continued to rely on itinerant preaching to meet the spiritual needs of rural communities, other areas began to invest in building churches and hiring permanently stationed preachers. Beginning in the late 1830s but in earnest by the 1840s and 1850s, male church leaders in the Gulf South sought stability and respectability through building churches, both evangelicals transitioning from radical sects to mainstream denominations as well as Episcopalians wanting to establish themselves formally in the region.²⁷ Protestant women, in turn, motivated by similar desires for church legitimacy and social status, responded by acting publicly to encourage, fund, and fundraise for these church-building projects.

For the early years of Gulf South church construction in the 1830s, there are several reports of women acting as individual donors to male-directed projects with their names included on subscription lists among male church members.²⁸ Clergy often looked to wealthy widows to fund these projects, like Elizabeth Greenfield, the patron of the Methodist Elizabeth Female Academy, in Washington, Mississippi. Greenfield moved back to Philadelphia but received letters in 1837 from William Winans who, in appeals to her religious duty and benevolence, asked her to donate some \$15-20,000 (the equivalent

²⁷ For scholarship on this transition to church construction and settled clergy, see Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* 81-135; Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 87-114. For examples of male anxieties over church status, see Southern Baptist Convention, *Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Richmond, 1853), 63; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi *Journal of the Proceedings of the Thirtieth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi* (Natchez, 1856), 17.

²⁸ Conference Register, January 30, 1829, Washington Circuit Quarterly Conference Records, MSS. QC 42; Vestry Minutes, March 27, 1836, Christ Church, Church Hill Records; West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 534; Minutes, March, 1836, October 14, 1837, Antioch Primitive Baptist Church Records, MBHC.

of almost \$500,000 today) to fund Methodist church-building projects in New Orleans.²⁹ There are also at least two instances of women working collectively to fundraise for building projects in the 1830s in more populated areas, including in Florence, Alabama in the Tennessee River Valley and Columbus, Mississippi. In Florence in 1837, Episcopal woman held a fair and raised \$500 to build a church there, adding to \$1,500 raised in male and female subscriptions.³⁰ In Columbus, a Methodist Mrs. E. A. Wright reported in 1836 that “the ladies of each religious denomination form sewing societies, the proceeds of some are for missions, some to aid in erecting churches” which she hoped would serve as examples that would “spirit the gentlemen up a little to their duty.”³¹ In these two established cotton towns, women’s organized fundraising efforts led the way in church building.

By the mid-1840s, the Gulf South saw a dramatic increase both in the number of churches constructed and women’s involvement in these projects, not just in urban areas, but throughout the region including plantation districts and rural outposts. This was most evident in the Episcopal Church: in Louisiana in 1841 there were only three Episcopal church buildings, but by 1861 there were thirty-three; over the same two decades, Episcopalians built twenty-seven new church buildings in Alabama, and twenty-eight in

²⁹ William Winans to Mrs. Elizabeth Greenfield, January 1837, Letterbook, Winans Papers; “\$20,000 in 1837 → 2018, Inflation Calculator,” FinanceRef Inflation Calculator, Alioth Finance, accessed March 17, 2018, <http://www.in2013dollars.com/1837-dollars-in-2018?amount=20000>. For an example of a widow giving the property for a church building in the 1830s, see Stockwell Papers; “History of the First Methodist Church, Greenville, 1869-1903,” in Somerville and Howorth family papers.

³⁰ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1837), 4.

³¹ Mrs. E. A. Wright to Anne Burnham, October 29, 1836, Anne Burnham Letters, 1833-1838, MSS. 3947, LLMVC.

Mississippi.³² This was a result of the growing stability and wealth of church members in the region as well as new aesthetic priorities in Episcopal architecture. By the 1840s, The Episcopal Church in the United States as well as the Church of England embraced the Gothic Revival in church architecture as part of the Oxford and Cambridge Movements' renewed emphasis on the grandeur and ceremonial significance of the church building and the rituals performed there.³³ Episcopal churches in the Gulf South treated Gothic design elements of stone construction, vaulted arches, imposing altars, and stained glass windows as the ideal, even as the availability of materials meant settling for vernacular brick or wooden "Carpenter Gothic" alternatives.³⁴

While averaging fewer and less expensive building projects a year, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians began building more churches in the Gulf South in the 1840s as well. Rural evangelicals invested in log and wood frame structures with the traditional evangelical separate entrances and pews for men and women, and in cities and wealthier plantation districts evangelicals built larger brick structures, some adopting single entrances and family pew systems that confirmed social status.³⁵ Evangelical

³² Cope, *Diocese of Louisiana*, 14; Wood, *Life of St. John's Parish*, 30. Wood argues that Episcopal Church construction in Alabama from 1850 to 1860 averaged \$5,766 per building, for a total of 18 buildings.

³³ For the Gothic architectural revival in the Anglican Communion and the theological and aesthetic explanations for it as expressed in the Oxford and Cambridge movements, see James F. White, *The Cambridge Movement and the Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1962). For its particular expression in the antebellum South, see Peter W. Williams, *Houses of God: Region, Religion and Architecture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 103-118; Edward John Joyner, "The architecture of orthodox Anglicanism in the Antebellum South: the principles of Neo-Gothic parish church design and their application in the southern parish church architecture of Frank Wills and his Contemporaries," (PhD diss., Georgia Institute of Technology, 1998).

³⁴ White, *Cambridge Movement*, 92-103, 181-191.

³⁵ For examples, see Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 48, 100, 137; "The History of FUMC," First United Methodist Church, Montgomery, AL, accessed March 12, 2018,

denominations may have been less concerned with the “ritualistic propriety” of having a gothic-style church, but, responding in part to denominational competition, did prioritize having more permanent and respectable physical spaces for their congregations to meet and worship.³⁶ Building churches confirmed the stability and status of their denomination in the region as well as of the members of the congregation who funded them.

Among all four mainstream Protestant denominations, women were at the forefront of these efforts and were frequently included on subscription lists to pay for building costs. The amount women donated was often higher than the average church pledge and reflected the general scale based on average wealth of church members by denomination. A report published in the *Mississippian* in 1857 estimated that Baptist and Methodist families donated on average around \$3.40 a year to their churches, Presbyterian families \$7, and Episcopalians \$18.³⁷ In the 1850s, several Episcopal women gave from \$25 to \$100 to build a Gothic Revival church in Napoleonville, Louisiana and one white woman, Mrs. Josephine Pugh, pledged \$500.³⁸ That same decade, women’s building fund subscriptions at Third Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, ranged from \$2 to \$100 to replace a small wood frame church with an imposing

<http://www.fumcmontgomery.org/who-we-are/fumcs-185th-year/>; “Ackerville Baptist Church of Christ,” National Register of Historic Places, April 18, 2003, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/AssetDetail?assetID=aeb23702-7dce-4413-b650-0e595709a331>.

³⁶ White, *Cambridge Movement*, 92. For an example of denominational competition in church building projects in Holly Springs, MS, see Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi* (Natchez, 1851), 45-46.

³⁷ *The Mississippian* (Vicksburg, MS), July 15, 1857, cited in Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 4:283.

³⁸ Vestry Minutes, December 1, 1853, January 1, 1854, Christ Episcopal Church, Napoleonville, Records, MSS. 1619, LLMVC.

brick building and ninety-foot spire.³⁹ In 1854, women from Magnolia Baptist Church donated from \$1 to \$50 to construct their first permanent building, a wooden clapboard structure, in rural Claiborne County, Mississippi.⁴⁰ A willingness to subscribe more than the average pledge to build a church reflects that these women saw a pressing need for their congregation to have their own church buildings, while the aesthetics of the buildings varied by geography and denomination.

It was also common for women to donate land to be used for church building sites, not only alongside their husbands but also of their own accord, especially widows with control over their family estates.⁴¹ Again, donation size varied. In 1855, a churchwoman donated one town lot to Grace Episcopal Church, Monroe, Louisiana, while in 1860 “Mrs. Railey” of Adams County, Mississippi presented Bishop Green with a deed for forty-six acres of land with the request that it become the site of a new church and rectory.⁴² Evangelical women donated valuable real estate as well. “Sister Strawn” gave land to Galilee Baptist Church in Amite County, Mississippi in 1851 and the Methodist widow, Nancy Hooper, donated enough land in 1857 for a church and burial ground in Baker, Louisiana which included the spot where she buried her husband several

³⁹ Session Minutes, June 29, 1854, Third Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, Records, 1854-1942, PCHS; Richard Campanella, “Reconsidering the Christopher Inn: a Site History,” *Preservation in Print* (February 2017): <https://prcno.org/reconsidering-christopher-inn-site-history/>.

⁴⁰ Minutes, June 25, 1854, Magnolia Baptist Church, Claiborne County Records, MBHC; Richard J. Cawthon, *Lost Churches of Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 168.

⁴¹ For examples of husbands and wives donating church property together, see Donna Burge Adams, *Baptist and Methodist Records of the Louisiana, Florida Parishes*, vol. 6. (Baton Rouge: D.B. Adams, 1986), 5, 6, 60, 61; West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 672.

⁴² Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1855), 49; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-fifth Annual Convention*, 57.

years earlier.⁴³ Hooper requested this burial ground to accompany the church building, effectively making her husband's grave part of an officially recognized sacred space tied to the church.

Other women bequeathed church lands in their wills, a practice Suzanne Lebsock argues was more common among women than men in antebellum Petersburg, Virginia as well.⁴⁴ In 1848, Mary Peachy Gilmore, a wealthy Episcopal heiress who never married, left "a valuable amount of property," which she stipulated in her will was to be "for the establishment of the Church in the town at Gallatin" in Copiah County, Mississippi. Gilmer's will even specified that if this particular project was not possible then the property should be used for the "benefit of the Church in this diocese" more broadly. Ultimately the diocese sued the surviving family as some members, including her nephew and estate executor, Peachy R. Taliaferro, refused to turn over the bequest without a court order.⁴⁵ These women, even at the risk of upsetting male family members, made the choice to donate to their denominations and also made specific requests that their money and land be used to build new churches.

Regardless of family opinion, female donors often received public praise from their clergymen who considered their donations acts of piety in service to the church. In his address to the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi in 1852 and 1853, Bishop Green praised the "pious liberality" of Margaret Johnston who funded the construction of the

⁴³ "Minutes of Galilee Baptist Church," September 13, 1851, in Casey, comp., *Amite County*, vol. 2; "Blackwater United Methodist Church," Methodist Church Louisiana Conference - Church Histories Collection, MSS. 4, Centenary.

⁴⁴ Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 222.

⁴⁵ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-second Annual Convention*, 15.

Gothic Revival Chapel of the Cross in Madison County. In both years he went so far as to declare that the church was “erected by Margaret,” making her the principal actor in the building cause and a model church member for both men and women: “as it is approved of God, so should it call for the commendation, and where it may be, the imitation of us all, beloved brethren.”⁴⁶ Bishop Green also praised the pious liberality of Margaret Wilson who funded church construction in Early Grove, Marshall County, Mississippi in the 1850s. Before his death, Wilson’s husband had planed “to erect, at his own expense, a handsome Gothic church” to replace the “log-house” they had been using, but it was Margaret Wilson who carried out this work. Upon her death in 1857, Bishop Green referred to her as a “Mother in Israel,” Biblically inspired praise for “building up the Church of her fathers, and promoting the spiritual benefit of her friends and neighbors.”⁴⁷ Female financial patronage for church building projects took on public religious significance as the means to carrying out the mission of the denomination to solidify its presence in the region, and church leaders like Bishop Green recognized this.

Episcopal widows were also the most active and financially able when it came to funding the construction of chapels for the enslaved on their own plantations.⁴⁸ While the physical construction was certainly performed by enslaved laborers, white women

⁴⁶ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-sixth Annual Convention*, 22; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1853), 14; Bishop N.H. Cobbs to Henry C. Lay, April 1, 1855, Lay Papers.

⁴⁷ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-fifth Annual Convention*, 87; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Thirty-third Annual Convention*, 32. "Bishop's Journal and Address," *Church Herald*, July 23, 1852.

⁴⁸ Blake Touchstone argues that Episcopalians were the most likely to build plantation chapels of all Protestants in the antebellum Gulf South, counting four Episcopal plantation chapels in Alabama, six to ten in Mississippi, and twelve in Louisiana, in "Planters and Slave Religion," 118.

received the credit from their priests for their pious benevolence and Christian duty in providing this sacred space to facilitate the mission to the enslaved. In 1858, Bishop Green praised Mrs. Virginia Perkins Freeland of Warren County, Mississippi who, “with a becoming concern for the spiritual welfare of her dependents, is about to erect a suitable building for the express purpose of affording to them all the advantages of a preached Gospel and a common prayer.”⁴⁹ In 1861, Louisa Harrison, widowed owner of Faunsdale Plantation in Marengo County, Alabama, went a step further, writing a formal request to the bishop to consecrate her plantation chapel and thus officially make it a sacred space in the eyes of the Episcopal Church. Harrison wrote that she was “desirous of having the building solemnly set apart and consecrated for the holy purpose for which it was designed,” which included her Sunday school and confirmation classes for the enslaved.⁵⁰ Her bishop agreed to the request, reflecting both the social status of Harrison as a leading member of her church as well as her successful record of religious instruction to the enslaved. For Harrison, it was not enough just to declare this chapel building a sacred space herself. She wanted the recognition of a public authority—the head of her diocese—to confirm the space as sacred, blurring even further the line between public and private religious space on the property, and giving religious sanction to her position as mistress of the plantation.

In addition to giving their own money or property, Episcopal white women in the Gulf South also led the way in collecting subscriptions for church construction. While

⁴⁹ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention*, 45.

⁵⁰ “The Request of Mrs. Louisa M. Harrison for the Consecration of Faunsdale Chapel,” “Sentence of Consecration of Faunsdale Chapel, Marengo Co. Alabama,” in Church Materials: William A. Stickney, 1840-1897, MSS. AR765, Faunsdale Plantation Papers, BPL.

donations required having control over money to spend, usually a power reserved for wealthy widows and unmarried women, fundraising could be done by any woman with social connections to potential donors, regardless of her own financial situation. Women like “Mrs. Seay and Mrs. Wilson” in Madison County, Alabama raised money to build churches by appealing to wealthy friends in letters and personal visits, receiving praise from their clergy for their “earnest zeal” as “instruments” of the Church.⁵¹ Even when churches elected male churchwardens and building committees to officially raise subscriptions, churches still often relied on the unofficial efforts of women. In 1858, Francis Hanson, rector of St. John in-the-Prairie of Green County, Alabama, reported that Ann Paine Avery, widow of the church’s first rector John Avery, and her daughters “have taken charge of the business and promise to raise funds and have the church built.”⁵² Hanson praised the female members of this family for the “beautiful and substantial building” constructed “in early Gothic style” completed in 1860, which included a chancel window memorial to the family patriarch and original rector.⁵³ While motivated by a personal desire to honor a father and husband, these women acted publicly to increase the status of their family as well as their church in the community. Numerous other Episcopal women in the Gulf South were remembered in diocesan reports and

⁵¹ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1855), 25; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Twenty-fifth Annual Convention*, 19.

⁵² Hanson, Diary, transcript, 7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22; “Deaths,” *Raleigh Register and North-Carolina Gazette*, February 14, 1837, cited in “Reverend John Avery,” Find A Grave, last modified June 29, 2011, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/72193974#source>.

obituaries for their subscription collecting for church building projects with their actions described by their priests as “useful,” “pious,” and “exemplary.”⁵⁴

Jane Dalton, another Episcopalian, was the principal fundraiser for two different church-building projects in the Gulf South, first in 1845 in Livingston, Alabama, where she was declared her church’s “chief founder,” and then again in Aberdeen, Mississippi in the 1850s, where she raised almost \$3,000 for buildings costs.⁵⁵ Bishop Green praised Dalton’s “noble zeal” and “self-sacrificing labors” to raise these funds despite taking care of a large family and falling ill in the process.⁵⁶ Dalton’s church in Aberdeen was an impressive brick structure, “castellated Gothic with angles and sidewalls buttressed,” with a large altar space and three-part stained glass window.⁵⁷ Dalton also received assistance from five or six other women in the church, who as Ingraham praised, “prompted by pious zeal, had obtained personally, subscriptions to the amount of \$1,100 towards a lot and Church edifice.”⁵⁸ Although Dalton died before seeing the finished building, the congregation placed a memorial tablet that would “meet the view of each worshipper in that beautiful temple to tell them of the good done unto the House of God by Mrs. Jane M. Dalton.”⁵⁹ With this memorial tablet, Dalton effectively became part of the material culture of the sacred space she helped create.

⁵⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention*, 12; “Obituary,” *Church Herald*, December 9, 1853.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, *Journal of the Twenty-sixth Annual Convention*, 25-26; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention*, 68; Sparks, “The Good Sisters,” 51.

⁵⁶ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-sixth Annual Convention*, 25-26.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, *Journal of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention*, 68.

⁵⁸ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 18, 132-133.

⁵⁹ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention*, 33.

While examples of individual female subscription collectors appear more often in Episcopal church records, there are scattered examples of individual evangelical women collecting on a smaller scale and described by male church leaders as “instrumental” in building projects through fundraising.⁶⁰ Belleville Baptist Church of Conecuh County, Alabama, for instance, saw fit to include an obituary of a “Sister Williams” in the church meeting records in 1862, praising Williams for her service to the church which included going out on horseback “through the neighborhood to solicit contributions for religious objects,” and today, First Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi recognizes the wife of the Reverend L. B. Holloway as the leading fundraiser for their first church built in the 1840s.⁶¹ Nor was raising subscriptions only possible for white women. Betsy Crissman, a free woman of color who ran a boarding house in Jackson, Mississippi in the 1850s, used her connections in the urban free black community to collect money to build several black evangelical Protestant churches in town. While any antebellum evidence of her actions remains missing, Crissman described her efforts in an interview in 1866. As she explained, before her efforts, “we had to take boards for seats and go into the graveyard, rain or shine, cold or wind.” Crissman heard from a visitor staying at her boarding house that “colored folks had churches in other places, and I determined we would have one also, and set to work immediately.” She figured out how many men and women in her community could pay at least a dollar towards building a church and found a white man

⁶⁰ For examples see West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 534; “Revivals,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 15, 1860; Board of Trustees minutes, December 30, 1854, Louisiana Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, South (New Orleans, LA) Records, Centenary; Record Book, 1858-1888, Keatchie Presbyterian Church Records, LSUS, 30-32.

⁶¹ Minutes, 1862, Belleville Baptist Church Records (Conecuh County, AL), Alabama Church and Synagogue Records Collection; “Our Story,” First Baptist Church, Jackson, MS, accessed March 8, 2018, <https://www.firstbaptistjackson.org/plan-your-visit/our-story/>.

to write up a subscription paper for her which she then carried around to all her potential donors. Crissman did not stop there, claiming that she helped “put all I could into their treasuries, until every [church] house was finished, five in number.”⁶²

Crissman exemplifies what historians Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood in *Come Shouting to Zion* have described as efforts among antebellum black Americans to “express their sense of community, their sense of self-worth, and their sense of self respect” through how they used their resources of time and money to build churches. Not only did Crissman fund the “permanent physical symbols of common held beliefs and values, of a shared purpose and commitment” in the church buildings themselves, but she also claimed greater visibility and social status for herself within that community.⁶³

While Frey and Wood found evidence of this female church stewardship in Antigua and Savannah before 1830, Crissman stands out as a late antebellum example of this work in the Gulf South, despite increasing crackdowns on independent black churches and free people of color after Nat Turner’s Rebellion.⁶⁴ Certainly having connections within the free black community and a white male patron helped her cause, but Betsy Crissman took it upon herself to go out and raise the money. The value she placed on having physical church buildings for her community to gather and worship, a priority she shared with white women in the region, was essential to their ultimate success.

⁶² Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony*, 469.

⁶³ Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 202, 191.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 105, 202, 212.

Collective Female Fundraising

Protestant women in the Gulf South were also much more likely than their male counterparts to act collectively with other women in order to raise money for church building projects. Some women worked together to collect subscriptions and write letters appealing to potential donors, but even more common was using their time and talent to collectively organize fundraisers.⁶⁵ Giving new public religious significance to traditional domestic chores, churchwomen formed sewing groups that took in sewing work from the community and donated the profits to the church or sold handmade clothing items at fairs. Protestant “ladies’ fairs” where women ran booths to sell these items alongside refreshments and entertainment were routine events. While especially popular in antebellum cities like New Orleans, Mobile, Natchez, and Vicksburg, women also held church aid fairs in smaller towns across the Gulf South, including Pass Christian, Mississippi; Tuscaloosa, Alabama; and Baton Rouge, Louisiana and even rural outposts like Thibodaux in southern Louisiana, Wahalak and Salem in Mississippi, and the county churches of the Alabama Black Belt plantation districts.⁶⁶ Female-run fundraisers for church building and furnishing projects also included suppers, concerts, and at least on two occasions, a Methodist “strawberry party” in Demopolis, Alabama.⁶⁷ In that same

⁶⁵ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-eighth Annual Convention*, 17; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Thirty-first Annual Convention*, 37.

⁶⁶ For rural examples of Protestant “ladies’ fairs”, see "Selma Baptist Church," *Alabama Baptist*, March 14, 1849; The Reverend C.A. Foster, "Missionary Journal and Private Register," April 14, 1840, June 1, 1840, Christ Episcopal Church, Holly Springs Records, MDAH; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1841), 17; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1843), 7; John Harris, Diary, May 20, 1859, John Gideon Harris Diary, MSS. 03499-z, SHC.

⁶⁷ R. Spencer to Keeners, March 13, 1848, A. Spencer to M.A. Keener, May 5, 1849, Keener Family Papers; Vestry Minutes, April 26, 1849, Christ Church, Episcopal (Baldwin County, AL) Records;

year of 1849, the little Black Belt town of Demopolis also hosted two other church benefit suppers, one by the women of the Presbyterian Church in town and the other by the women of the Episcopal Church.⁶⁸ Residents across denominations were invited to attend all three.

As was the case with individual donations and collecting, Episcopal women raised the most money and surviving record of their events is the most prolific among all the mainstream Protestant denominations, especially in urban areas and wealthy plantation districts where they frequently raised over \$1,000 from a single event.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, churchwomen from evangelical denominations ran successful fundraisers as well, including Baptist women in the Alabama Black Belt who raised \$300 from their church fair in the 1840s, and Presbyterian women in Tuscaloosa in the 1840s and Vicksburg in the 1850s who each raised \$1,000 through fundraiser suppers to fund church building and renovation projects.⁷⁰ Even the Methodist Ladies' Sewing Society attached to the Elijah Steele Charge in New Orleans, despite male conference disapproval of "mirth-exciting"

Episcopal Diocese of Alabama *Journal of the Twenty-third Annual Convention*, 12; Basil Manly, Sr. to Sarah M. Manly, October 4, 1841, Manly Family Papers; Eliza Magruder, Diary, March 7, 1846.

⁶⁸ A. Spencer to M.A. Keener, May 5, 1849, Keener Family Papers.

⁶⁹ The women of Trinity Episcopal Church, Natchez raised \$2400 in one fair in 1838 and the women of the Episcopal Church in Florence, Alabama raised \$2,000 in a fair in 1837, see Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Sixth Annual Convention*, 4; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1838), 5.

⁷⁰ E.B. Teague, "An Outline Picture of the Baptist Denomination in Alabama in former times," Teague Papers, 79-81; Emma Balfour to Louisa Harrison, December 30, 1854, Faunsdale Plantation Papers; *Independent Monitor*, January 23, 1839, cited in Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 82-83.

fundraisers, raised close to \$1,000 from two different fairs in 1848.⁷¹ These fairs and suppers served as important public religious spaces for church stewardship—spaces created and directed by churchwomen.

Like the Methodist leaders in Louisiana who critiqued these types of fundraisers as irreligious, a Baptist newspaper in Mississippi in 1859 criticized women who participated in church sewing groups while remaining absent from Sunday services, reflecting the priority these women placed on their role as stewards and fundraisers and the religious fulfillment they found spending time with a community of like-minded women.⁷² Other clergy across-denominations expressed their embarrassment at the inability of their congregations to raise funds through regular means like pledges from male heads of households. As Baptist preacher, E. B. Teague wrote of a ladies' fair fundraiser for church repairs in the Alabama Black Belt, "why should repairs have required anything from such a wealthy congregation but collection?"⁷³ The fact that the Episcopal Ladies' Working Society in Greensboro, Alabama had to take in sewing work to raise money in 1840 to build a church was, according to the rector, "no inconsiderable testimony at the present crisis of general embarrassment."⁷⁴ The shame some men felt about relying on women to fundraise was also expressed through the silences found in official church records, where male building committees and clergy often took the credit.

⁷¹ N.A. Cravens, "Home Correspondence," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 26, 1854; "Minutes of the meetings of the Members and Friends of the Magazine St. Charge, 1846-1848," May 18, 1848-July 17, 1848, in Felicity United Methodist Church, New Orleans, Records, Centenary.

⁷² "Ladies' Department, Pastoral Rebuke," *Mississippi Baptist*, January 18, 1860.

⁷³ Teague, "An Outline Picture," Teague Papers, 79-81.

⁷⁴ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 5 (New York, 1840), 105, 171.

As John Quist found in his work on antebellum Tuscaloosa County, the ladies' fair advertised in the *Independent Monitor* in 1839 which raised over \$1,000 for First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa was never mentioned in the corresponding church minutes.⁷⁵ Other female fundraisers were recorded in diaries and letters but remain missing from church records, as was the case for Christ Episcopal Church, Church Hill, in Jefferson County, Mississippi.⁷⁶ Still other women only received public credit in published obituaries after their death.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, despite the criticism, embarrassment, and silences found in male sources, clergy and lay church officials still consistently relied on women's collective fundraising efforts for church building, furnishing, and improvements. From 1835 to 1860, at least 55 Episcopal, 22 Baptist, 17 Presbyterian, and 14 Methodist churches in the Gulf South—108 different churches in total—benefited from the *collective* fundraising efforts of their female church members and the majority of these occasions were, in fact, mentioned in male-authored sources. Furthermore, many of these women received male praise for their collective piety-in-action, like the Methodist women of Monticello, Mississippi, who, according to their rector, A. B. Nicholson, “persevered in spite of opposition and ridicule” in their fundraising efforts and “succeeded in completing a large, commodious, and well finished brick church, the most pleasant and beautiful in this part

⁷⁵ Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 82-83. See also Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 225-226.

⁷⁶ Eliza Magruder Diary, vol. 1, March 7, 1846, April 26, 1846. For a contrasting account in the church records, see Vestry Minutes, Christ Church, Church Hill Records; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention*, 59-60.

⁷⁷ For example, see Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention*, 12.

of the state[.]”⁷⁸ There were also the women of Trinity Episcopal Church, Demopolis who raised around \$900 over the course of ten years through sewing work, fairs, and dinners whose rector reported to the Diocese of Alabama in 1853 that their church building was finally complete, “which for years has been anxiously and perseveringly pursued by a few pious and zealous ladies.” The Reverend Hanson gave complete credit to these women who continued their efforts despite a lack of male subscription help: “they have often been discouraged, sometimes, in despair, but by patient perseverance they have at last accomplished their object.”⁷⁹ While easiest to track in the Episcopal Church because their female patrons consistently had more time and resources to put on these events as well as the social status to receive named recognition in published reports, collective female fundraising happened across all four major Protestant denominations in the Gulf South. Whether they raised \$100 or \$1,000, Protestant women sewed, cooked, organized, sold, and entertained together for the stewardship of their churches, and more often than not, received praise for turning domestic chores into acceptable public expressions of their religious devotion.

This continued need for female fundraising to support churches also led to the creation of more official female church aid organizations to plan and run fundraisers with names like “The Ladies’ Society,” “The Ladies’ Sewing Society,” “Female Financial Aid Association,” or “Female Auxiliary Society.”⁸⁰ Fundraising was such an important

⁷⁸ A.B. Nicholson, “News from our Home Work,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 20, 1858.

⁷⁹ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-second Annual Convention*, 10.

⁸⁰ For examples with these names, see: Minutes, vol. 2, Presbytery of Tuscaloosa Records, 229; “Origin, Constitution and Records of the Female Financial Association of Fayette Circuit,” in Fayette

priority that women began forming these societies almost as soon as congregations were formed. According to the Episcopal missionary in Salem, Mississippi, on April 14, 1839, the same day a congregation officially organized itself as St. Andrew's Church and elected a male vestry, the female church members "formed themselves into a Sewing Society" and in less than a year held a fundraising fair for a church building.⁸¹ These female organizations, created to aid their churches and ministers through fundraising, acted as parallel organizations to the all-male official governing bodies of Protestant churches. As such, many were modeled in their image with elected officers, constitutions, annual dues, and regular meetings. In Baton Rouge in 1843, the women of St. James Church formed an all-female "Episcopal Society" with twenty-five members in order "to aid the Episcopalians in their endeavor to build a church," and resolved to meet weekly at one of the member's homes where they would sew together in preparation for their fundraisers. As recorded in their society minutes at their first meeting, they elected a president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary as well as a board of collectors who were in charge of gathering dues from members to pay for sewing supplies as well as collecting subscriptions from community members "who do not belong to the society but who are willing to aid us in our work." That spring they held multiple fairs where they sold their sewing projects, raising over \$800 for church construction, and they continued

Quarterly Conference Registers, MSS. QC 93, Cain Archives; Choctaw Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Twenty-first Anniversary of the Choctaw Baptist Association*, (Jackson, 1859), 17.

⁸¹ Foster, "Missionary Journal and Private Register," April 14, 1839, February 20, 1840, in Christ Episcopal Church, Holly Springs Records. For another example, see Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 16, 504-505.

to fundraise to pay for repairs and debts on the building for years to come.⁸² When women organized the Methodist Fayette Female Financial Association in Mississippi in 1858 with nineteen members, they only elected female officers and a “financial committee” of collectors, but also adopted a constitution which made provisions for annual anniversary meetings where clergy would be invited to give a sermon and the outgoing female president would make a speech to the organization, a rare opportunity in the antebellum South for a woman to both hold a leadership role and speak publicly in this role.⁸³

From 1830 to 1861, the Gulf South saw at least twenty-six official female church aid societies tied to Episcopal Churches, fourteen Baptist female societies, nine Presbyterian, and six Methodist. While having the smallest number surviving in historical records, some of these Methodist societies were multi-church organizations that drew their membership from across the region.⁸⁴ Some female church aid societies were very small reflecting the size and rural location of the congregation, like the sewing society at St John’s Episcopal in Aberdeen, Mississippi, composed of the only six female communicants of the church which had seven communicants total.⁸⁵ Others were much larger like the society at First Presbyterian Church in Selma which elected over twice that

⁸² “Episcopal Society, Baton Rouge,” Minutes, January 26, 1843-April 6, 1843, in St. James Episcopal Church (Baton Rouge, LA) Papers, 1843-1895, LLMVC.

⁸³ “Origin, Constitution and Records,” September 27, 1858, Fayette Quarterly Conference Registers.

⁸⁴ For examples, see *ibid.*; Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 2:116-117, 271, 305, 367. This total not include benevolent and missionary societies which will be discussed in chapter five of this dissertation.

⁸⁵ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-second Annual Convention*, 34.

many women just to serve as dues collectors in 1861.⁸⁶ These named female societies were all in addition to the many more informal groups of “church ladies” who met and worked together for similar purposes and perhaps even saw themselves as a church society despite the lack of title in the mostly male-authored surviving records. All of these organizations are proof that it did not take the Civil War for rural and urban southern women to organize separate female church associations and sewing societies like their northern counterparts—they did so well before in order fund the construction and furnishing of permanent church buildings.

While the Fayette Female Financial Association met at the church parsonage, most of these societies met at various female members’ homes. In her diary from 1856, Frances Robertson reported attending the Baptist sewing society in Gainesville, Alabama at “Mrs. Minnier’s house” with her sister and the female society at First Presbyterian Church in Selma included a provision in their constitution that meetings would alternate between members’ homes.⁸⁷ Just as they gave domestic labors of cooking and sewing a public religious purpose, by meeting in women’s parlors and dining rooms they turned private family spaces into public spaces of religious activism and female community beyond family ties.

As with the parallel male governing bodies, some of these female societies reported evidence of conflict over which types of fundraisers to organize or who to elect in officer positions, often falling along class lines. Baptist Basil Manly reported a conflict in 1841 between “the Old Town & the New Town Ladies” of the Presbyterian Church in

⁸⁶ Session Minutes, May 1861, First Presbyterian Church, Selma Records, 37-38.

⁸⁷ Robertson, “Diary,” April 15, 1856, American Women's Diaries; Session Minutes, July 1858, First Presbyterian Church, Selma Records, 23.

Tuscaloosa who split over where to hold their fundraiser dinner.⁸⁸ In 1846 Eliza Ellis of St. John's Episcopal Church in Thibodaux, Louisiana complained to her friend Anna Butler about the "revolution in our Sewing Society" elections when the wife of Bishop Leonidas Polk stepped down as president and the society elected a tradesman's wife to replace her.⁸⁹ Ellis even compared their society elections to the U.S. presidential election bemoaning that "Democracy prevails in the land nowadays and it is not more strange that a mec[chanic]'s wife should want a seat that had been occupied by a Bishop's lady, than that James K. Polk should hold a station that Henry Clay aspired to."⁹⁰ Despite this case, it still remained much more common for wealthy slaveholding women to dominate in church aid society office holding. Even with these social divisions, most women found a sense of community in these meetings, united by a larger religious duty to support their churches and clergy. As Mattie Whitney, outgoing president of the Methodist Fayette Female Financial Association declared in her "valedictory address" in the anniversary meeting of 1859, "long have we been associated in this organization for the accomplishment of a common purpose, and our united and zealous exertions have bound us together by many tender and enduring ties."⁹¹ Through these church aid societies, women like Whitney were able to create institutional spaces within their churches, gain valuable experience in public leadership roles, and also work alongside other like-minded women for a cause greater than themselves or their families.

⁸⁸ Basil Manly, Sr. to Sarah M. Manly, October 4, 1841, Manly Family Papers.

⁸⁹ Eliza Ellis to Anna Butler, January 16, 1846, Anna and Sarah Butler Correspondence.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "Origin, Constitution and Records," November 7, 1859, Fayette Quarterly Conference Registers.

Women also encouraged their daughters to volunteer at their fundraiser events and form their own societies like the “Little Girls’ Sewing Society” at Christ Episcopal Church, Mobile.⁹² Like Sunday school classes and female academies, these adolescent sewing societies and church aid fundraisers served as opportunities to bring girls into active participation in the life of the church beyond simply attending Sunday service. With no counterpart for young boys and with the focus being the domestic duty of sewing, girl’s sewing societies reinforced traditional gender norms in the church. At the same, however, they also offered the next generation an acceptable public space to socialize with other young women outside of the family circle, take on leadership and fundraising roles, and work collectively to support church development.

Women also looked beyond their own churches to expand their female religious communities. In the early years of church building, some Gulf South church aid societies looked to women’s organizations from the East Coast for aid, like the “Sewing Society of St. Ann’s Church, Annapolis, Maryland,” which donated to St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Selma in 1842 when the St. Paul’s Ladies Working Society was struggling to raise their own funds.⁹³ Once they were more established, Gulf South societies were able to extend their support to the stewardship efforts of women in other churches, including other denominations. In 1855, for instance, Episcopal sewing society member Mahala Roach of Vicksburg donated flowers to the Vicksburg Methodist ladies supper in May

⁹² Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention*, 19; See also Roach, Diary, July 6, 1860, Roach and Eggleston Papers.

⁹³ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 4 (New York, 1839), 79-80; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1842), 19-20; Financial Record Book, January 22, 1842, St Paul’s Episcopal Church, Selma, Alabama Church and Synagogue Records Collection.

and the Presbyterian ladies supper in December.⁹⁴ Other female church societies worked to support female fundraising efforts occurring in other parts of the Gulf South. Jane Copes, the Presbyterian female academy teacher in Vicksburg; her sister-in-law Mary Ann Copes of Jackson; and Mary's sister-in-law Hester Alsworth of Canton, Mississippi were responsible for coordinating their respective sewing societies which helped each other put on fairs to fund the construction of Presbyterian churches in the 1840s. In 1843 and 1844, Jane regularly wrote to Mary asking her what items they still needed for the Jackson fair and when she could not attend herself, asked Mary to "let us know what sells best so that we may prepare the most useful things again." She also purposed that they might make more money by holding the next fair in a larger city, suggesting her city of Vicksburg or even New Orleans. "Our Ladies if managed rightly will work for another fair better and more inteligtly [sic]," Copes wrote, even offering to sell items at an Episcopal women's fair in Vicksburg if they did sell at the Presbyterian one Jackson.⁹⁵ After the Jackson churchwomen helped Canton's sewing society with donations for their fair for a church building, Hester wrote to Mary on official sewing society business, declaring, "I am authorized by the Ladies of Canton to tender their thanks to the Ladies of Jackson, for their presents to the Fair."⁹⁶ These women were connected by family ties but they also acted as representatives from their sewing societies, working collectively to employ a domestic chore like sewing for a public religious need—funding sacred space

⁹⁴ Roach, Diary, May 3, 1855, December 24, 1855, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers.

⁹⁵ Jane H. Copes to Joseph S. Copes and Mary Ann Copes, March 31, 1843, April 20, 1843, June 3, 1843, June 20, 1843, Copes Papers.

⁹⁶ A.G. and Hester Alsworth to Joseph and Mary Copes, June 24, 1844, Copes Papers; Jane Copes to Mary Ann Copes, May 25, 1844, Copes Papers.

construction across the region.

In 1849, even the male editors of the *Alabama Baptist* acknowledged this kind of multi-city female community when they reported that the Baptist “Ladies of Summerfield,” Alabama held a fair and concert to help “our good sisters of the Selma Baptist church, who have, now for a long time, manifested the most commendable zeal and perseverance, in their endeavors to get them up a suitable house of worship.” While these male authors declared that they “have, personally, no great predilection for this mode of raising money for religious purposes,” they acknowledged and praised the women of both of these churches “as the last resort” to build “a suitable house for church purposes.”⁹⁷ The dire need for funds for church construction outweighed the moral concerns over how the money was raised and, at the same time, forced male church leaders to admit they needed female fundraising help, often because of their own failures to raise money as members of all-male building and subscription committees. Churchwomen and their fundraising organizations were crucial to the mission of their churches to build and firmly establish themselves throughout the Gulf South.

Furthermore, because women’s church aid organizations proved so successful at fundraising, some of these organizations were able to influence the decisions of male governing bodies and exercise informal power over church financial affairs. Some used their power of petition to suggest where the money they raised went, like the Female Auxiliary Society of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Mississippi, which sent letters with their donations through male representatives to the Choctaw Baptist Association

⁹⁷ "Selma Baptist Church," *Alabama Baptist*, March 14, 1849.

meetings describing how the money should be spent.⁹⁸ Others exercised their influence in person, like the Ladies' Sewing Society of Elijah Steele Methodist Church in New Orleans. In 1848, the church held a meeting to discuss how to raise money for a new church, attended by nine men and eleven women. The female majority swayed the vote in favor of approving the sewing society's plans to host two fairs that spring and summer which made over \$1,000 in total.⁹⁹ The same women who attended the church meeting went on to sell tickets and run tables at the fair. William Johnson, who served as rector of St. John's Episcopal Church, Montgomery in 1838 and rector of St. Peter's of rural Lowndes County, Alabama in 1840 reported that in both churches the female sewing societies had at least some say on where the money they raised went. In Montgomery, Johnson reported to the diocese that he was still waiting to hear if the "sewing circle . . . decided to what they will appropriate the proceeds of their industry" and in Lowndes County in 1840 he reported that the women will use some of their proceeds to paint the church and parsonage while "the remainder they will appropriate according to their own judgment."¹⁰⁰ Individual women also shaped church financial decisions informally through their influence over their husbands who held church office, especially ministers' wives who were often members of these female societies and frequently elected to officer

⁹⁸ Choctaw Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Twenty-first Anniversary*, 17; *ibid.*, *Minutes of the Twenty-second Anniversary of the Choctaw Baptist Association* (Jackson, 1860), 16-17.

⁹⁹ "Minutes of the meetings of the Members and Friends," May 18, 1848-July 17, 1848, Felicity United Methodist Church, New Orleans, Records.

¹⁰⁰ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Seventh Annual Convention*, 15; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile: Langdon & Barker, 1840), 19.

positions.¹⁰¹ Male governing bodies usually offered strong suggestions over where the money went, but many still had to take into account the wishes of the women who actually raised the funds.

While white female church aid societies and fundraising events occurred across the Gulf South, cities like Mobile and New Orleans which had more concentrated free black populations offered unique opportunities for women of color to organize and run fundraisers for their own churches. Like their white female counterparts, these women used newspapers to advertise their events. New Orleans' *Daily Picayune* in March of 1854 and December of 1856 included advertisements for fairs "given by the ladies of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, for the purpose of extinguishing the debt on the edifice" of St. James Church, the free black congregation which separated from the white congregation of St Paul's Methodist Church in 1848.¹⁰² These women organized multiple fairs to pay off the debts accrued from constructing their own separate black church on Roman Street, a cause they certainly saw as worthy of their stewardship. Likewise, in February and May 1855, the *Daily Picayune* advertised two fairs, "held by the colored ladies of New Orleans" that were "for the Benefit of the Fourth Colored Baptist Church." While declaring that the cause "is in every way worthy of patronage" the advertisements also made note of prices, listing a twenty-five cent entrance fee to enjoy the

¹⁰¹ "Origin, Constitution and Records," February 19, 1861, Fayette Quarterly Conference Registers; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Constitution of The Baptist State Convention in Alabama, Together with their Address to the People of Alabama, and a Notice of their Proceedings*, (Mobile, 1823), 6; Eliza Lay to Henry C Lay, February 19, 1848, Lay Papers; Vestry Minutes, July 5, 1847, St. Paul's Episcopal Church Vestry Minutes, 1839 April-1859 December, vol. 11, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana Records.

¹⁰² "Fair," *Daily Picayune*, March 3, 1854; "A Fair," *Daily Picayune*, December 18, 1856; "St. James A.M.E. Church: notes on the history of the Church, undated," box 10, folder 15, Lucile L. Hutton Papers, 1850-1988, Amistad, 20; Church membership at St. James A.M.E. was only available to free persons of color.

entertainments as well as a promise that “reasonable prices will be charged, and in every instance where a greater sum than the price asked is given, charge will be returned to the purchaser.”¹⁰³ Perhaps this was an attempt to guard against negative racial stereotypes regarding their honesty and fairness which white women did not have to face. In Mobile, female members of the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, a black congregation with a white priest, held a fair in 1860 with the help of male members, raising around \$600 for the construction of a new church building.¹⁰⁴ It is striking that these women in both cities were able to organize such public events with the white approval necessary to advertise in newspapers and, as was the case in Mobile, to receive recognition from a white priest who recorded their actions in his report to the Diocese of Alabama.

With these fundraisers, black churchwomen were able to turn labor usually performed for the benefit of whites into labor for the benefit of their own religious communities, a subversive act in a slave society.¹⁰⁵ These women were also able to claim respectability by working within white standards of acceptable female labor—fundraising like white women through the domestic work of sewing, cooking, and hosting. Though there is no evidence that black Protestant women formed official church societies in the Gulf South, their fairs show that they, like their white counterparts, found female religious community through collective stewardship, which remained acceptable even after the backlash against black churches after Nat Turner’s Rebellion.

¹⁰³ "Ladies' Fair" *Daily Picayune*, May 3, 1855; "The Fair," *Daily Picayune*, February 17, 1855.

¹⁰⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-ninth Annual Convention*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ Jacqueline Jones argues that there was a subversive component to black women working for their own communities and a different mentality around work performed by choice, in *Labor of Love*, 4.

There is also evidence that some free women of color physically labored to construct their churches, as was the case at St. James AME in New Orleans. While male members completed most of the skilled labor of carpentry and masonry, women, who represented sixty-three percent of the membership in 1848, performed the necessary labor of transporting building materials around the construction site, reportedly carrying bricks in their arms and aprons.¹⁰⁶ While forced enslaved labor was certainly responsible for much of the physical construction of white and biracial churches in the Gulf South, the labor offered by free women of color at St. James, AME was voluntary. These women made the choice to contribute not only their time and effort in organizing fairs to pay off the debts for church construction but also chose to contribute their physical labor, both of which signal the priority they placed on having an independent sacred space to gather and worship.

The Stewardship of Furnishing and Repairing

For white women, on the other hand, acceptable physical labor occurred more often indoors—most notably in the furnishing of these new churches through the domestic “labor of the needle.”¹⁰⁷ Episcopal female sewing societies in Columbus and Canton, Mississippi made seat cushions for church pews; churchwomen made the carpet for St. John’s Episcopal Church in Montgomery; and Presbyterian Jane Copes made a book cushion for the pulpit Bible used at the new Presbyterian Church in Brookhaven,

¹⁰⁶ John A. Thornton, "The History of St. James African Methodist Church," in *A Century of African Methodism in the Deep South* (New Orleans: St. James AME Church, 1946), 75, 19; Dodson, *Engendering Church*, 66; “A Historic Summary of St. James Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church,” St. James, African Methodist Episcopal Church, accessed February 1, 2018, <http://stjamesameno.com/history.php>.

¹⁰⁷ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Seventh Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1845), 21.

Mississippi.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, white slaveholding women often took credit for the physical labor performed by enslaved women to furnish their churches. In Jefferson County, Mississippi, for instance, Olivia Dunbar brought enslaved women Serena, Lavinia, and Annica to Church Hill Episcopal Church to assist the sewing society in making carpets for the nave and chancel.¹⁰⁹ While enslaved men were responsible for much of the exterior church construction, it was these enslaved women who performed the manual labor of furnishing the interior. Though Lavinia and Annica reportedly received religious instruction from Dunbar's niece at their plantation, there is no evidence they ever attended Sunday services at the church, and yet they performed necessary labor to make this church look respectable before the bishop visited that spring.¹¹⁰ Unlike the women who labored to build St. James AME in New Orleans, their labors were not for their own religious community or by choice, and ultimately white women received credit for supervising the work.

Protestant white women of the Gulf South also received praise for their individual and collective physical labor to raise funds for church furnishing projects. As with fundraising for building construction, Episcopal women led the way and annual diocesan meetings from the 1840s and 1850s are filled with clergy reports praising the “zeal,” “industry,” “efforts,” and “enterprise” of churchwomen who wrote letters requesting donations, put on fundraiser suppers and concerts, and sewed and sold their handiwork at

¹⁰⁸ Vestry Minutes, May 16, 1859, St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Columbus, MS) Records; Fontaine, Journal, December 13, 1848, Edward Fontaine Papers; Clitherall, Diary, vol. 14, December 1, 1855-December 9, 1855, Clitherall Diaries; Jane H. Criswell to Joseph S. Copes, October 22, 1857, Copes Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Eliza Magruder, Diary, April 11, 1846, April 16, 1855.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, January 25, 1846, July 12, 1857.

fairs in order to pay for items like church carpets, furniture, and musical instruments.¹¹¹ Yet there are scattered references to evangelical women working to fund these projects as well, including Methodist and Baptist women purchasing chairs and pulpits in the Alabama Black Belt; Methodist women in Amite and Pattersonville, Louisiana raising funds for carpets, seats, lamps, and musical instruments; and Presbyterian women in Jackson, Mississippi and Baton Rouge, Louisiana purchasing curtains and bells and paying to finish the church basement.¹¹² While usually having to consult with male church members and get authorization, these women were often responsible not only for the labor of raising the money, but also the labor of deciding on the specific purchase, submitting the order, arranging transportation, and ensuring prompt completion and installation in the church.¹¹³ In addition to male praise for their piety-in-action, these women gained important organizational and leadership experience while exercising real influence on the furnishing priorities of the church.

As a key part of the transition from itinerant preaching to settled congregations,

¹¹¹ For examples, see: Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Ninth Annual Convention*, 19; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Twenty-eighth Annual Convention*, 30; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-sixth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama* (Mobile, 1857), 11; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1840), 9-10; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Thirty-first Annual Convention*, 37; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 19, 7.

¹¹² Teague, "An Outline Picture," Teague Papers, 79-81; West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 580; Sarah Lois Wadley, "Diary, August 8, 1859-May 15, 1865: Electronic Edition," January 5, 1861, Documenting the American South, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/wadley/wadley.html>, original in Sarah Lois Wadley Papers, MSS. 01258, SHC; N.A. Cravens, "Home Correspondence," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 26, 1854; James H. Boyd to Joseph S. Copes, May 15, 1848, Alex Downing to Joseph S. Copes, November 29, 1849, Copes Papers; Gurley, Diary, April 10, 1833, Gurley Family Papers.

¹¹³ Alex Downing to Joseph S. Copes, November 29, 1849, Jane H. Criswell to Joseph S. Copes, October 29, 1857, Copes Papers; S.S. Lewis to The Rev. Caleb S. Ives, December 26, 1839, Letters of Samuel Seymour Lewis, Christ Church, Episcopal (County, AL) Records; Roach, Diary, January 29, 1853, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers.

Protestant women also helped furnish temporary spaces for worship before their neighborhoods had official church buildings. In the town of Jackson, Alabama in 1842, one married woman, Mrs. A. C. Taylor, improvised a Methodist worship space by orchestrating the movement of an old private home onto a new lot, funding structural changes to the building to make it suitable, and furnishing it with seats and a pulpit.¹¹⁴ In rural Pattersonville, Louisiana, a group of Methodist women received credit for making necessary improvements to their temporary worship space by installing lamps, carpets, and seats. Their minister reported to the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* that, the ladies “have taken the matter in hand, and you know that failure does not attend female efforts in such enterprises.”¹¹⁵ Episcopal women also mobilized to turn secular spaces into worship spaces including Margaret Taylor, wife of future president Zachary Taylor, who received permission to turn a room in the Baton Rouge military garrison into a chapel where an Episcopal congregation met regularly in 1840 and 1841 before St. James Episcopal Church was built.¹¹⁶ Other Episcopal women in the late 1840 and early 1850s—with less social power than a garrison commander’s wife—acted collectively to raise money to furnish rented rooms for church services in Port Gibson, Canton, and Pontotoc, Mississippi.¹¹⁷ In 1848 Episcopal women of Aberdeen organized a sewing society and used the proceeds to furnish the basement of the Masonic Hall in 1848 with

¹¹⁴ West, *History of Methodism in Alabama*, 580-581.

¹¹⁵ N.A. Cravens, "Home Correspondence," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 26, 1854.

¹¹⁶ Bond, *St. James Episcopal Church*, 7.

¹¹⁷ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-second Annual Convention*, 34-35; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-third Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (New York, 1849), 29, 32; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 15 (New York, 1850), 98.

benches and lamps, which they later could move into a church of their own.¹¹⁸ These women turned predominantly male secular and political spaces into temporary sacred spaces for congregations that were majority female. Their work to create spaces for formal religious practice, however, should also be recognized as religious practice in and of itself, as ritual labor performed to demarcate a space as suitable for worship.¹¹⁹ Even in communities not yet building their own churches, Protestant women in the Gulf South had a reputation for providing necessary labor and funds to furnish worship spaces, endowing them with the material trappings of respectable Protestant churches.

Some of these furnishing purchases in both temporary and permanent church buildings were necessary for any acceptable worship space at the time, like ensuring the inside was plastered and painted, had suitable seating for the congregation, and a pulpit for the preacher with a Bible and any denomination-specific prayer books or hymnals used in the services.¹²⁰ In 1851, The Ladies Service Society of College Hill Presbyterian Church raised money to buy stoves for their church—a necessary labor to ensure the church could stay open through the colder months of the year.¹²¹ In Natchitoches, Louisiana in the 1850s, the same Episcopal women who ran a Sunday school on their

¹¹⁸ Fontaine, Journal, January 30, 1848, Edward Fontaine Papers.

¹¹⁹ David Hall calls for a “rethinking of what constitutes religion” to include its material circumstances including furnishing sacred spaces, in *Lived Religion*, ix-x.

¹²⁰ For examples, see Session Minutes, April 3, 1849, First Presbyterian Church, Lexington Records; Subscription Lists, 1853, January 9, 1854, Magnolia Baptist Church Records; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 48; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Mississippi*, (Natchez, 1841), 11; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Thirtieth Annual Convention*, 72; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention*, 20; Wadley, Diary, January 5, 1861, Wadley Papers.

¹²¹ Carole Lee, "Early Records of College Hill Church Lafayette County, Mississippi with Cemetery Inscriptions," January 3, 1851, in College Hill Presbyterian Church Records, MDAH.

own also had the church painted and furnished, all without the benefit of a resident preacher.¹²² As with church construction, some women's organizations also worked to purchase furnishings for other churches, supporting their denomination throughout the Gulf South. Episcopal women in New Orleans sent Aberdeen, Mississippi's Episcopal church a set of furniture for the altar, while the missionary of St. John's Episcopal Chapel in Madison County, Alabama received a stove from "a kind and zealous lady of the Church in Huntsville."¹²³ These women embraced a religious duty to furnish worship spaces that extended not only beyond their own domestic sphere but also beyond their home churches.

Other furnishing purchases, however, were intended to elevate the worship space, making church buildings not just acceptable but also distinctly sacred spaces, separate from other secular buildings in the community. In 1861, Episcopal author and Sunday school teacher Mary Ann Cruse used the money she raised writing the novel *Betsy Melville* to pay for a stained glass window for the new Church of the Nativity in Huntsville, Alabama, and in 1840, William Crane, rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Woodville, Mississippi credited "the zeal and industry of the ladies composing the sewing society" for raising funds and purchasing a "handsome cut glass chandelier."¹²⁴ Women from denominations that practiced partial immersion baptism or "sprinkling"

¹²² Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 48.

¹²³ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 16, 504; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-fifth Annual Convention*, 19.

¹²⁴ Mary Ann Cruse, *Bessie Melville: Or, Prayer Book Instructions Carried Out Into Life* (1858; repr., New York: General Protestant Episcopal Sunday School Union and Church Book Society, 1867), 6; Frances C. Roberts, *Sesquicentennial History of Church of the Nativity, Episcopal, 1843-1993, Huntsville, Alabama* (Huntsville: The Church of the Nativity, 1992), 33; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 9-10.

also purchased carved stone baptismal fonts that helped elevate this important sacrament to initiate church members.¹²⁵ Margaret Johnston paid for an imported stone font for her Chapel of the Cross which was shipped from Italy to Mississippi in three parts.¹²⁶ Not all decorative purchases were this elaborate. Episcopal women throughout the Gulf South as well as the women of Five Points Baptist Church in Midway, Alabama and the Presbyterian churchwomen of Baton Rouge raised funds to purchase “pulpit hangings” or pulpit “curtains,” often embroidered cloth decoration for a preaching pulpit or reading desk.¹²⁷ Even a more simplistic pulpit hanging, however, helped to distinguish the space of the pulpit where the preacher gave his sermon from the rest of the church building, elevating both the preacher and the act of preaching as the central aspect of the church service.

Reflecting the importance of the Eucharist or communion in the Episcopal and Presbyterian traditions, women from these denominations also worked to furnish their churches with altar tables, embroidered altar cloths, and communion services or set of plates, chalices, and silverware used by the clergymen in serving communion. This was especially evident in the Episcopal Church where both high and low church Episcopalians saw the Eucharist as an important ritual within the liturgy of the worship

¹²⁵ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention*, 65; “Our History,” First Presbyterian Church, Huntsville, Alabama, accessed February 27, 2018, <http://fpchsv.org/our-history>; Cruse, *Bessie Melville*, 352-353.

¹²⁶ “Our History,” The Chapel of the Cross Episcopal Church, accessed December 1, 2018, <http://chapelofthecrossms.org/about-us/our-history/>.

¹²⁷ Gurley, *Diary*, April 10, 1833, Gurley Family Papers; Vestry Minutes, April 10, 1855, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana Records; Minutes, Midway (Five Points) Baptist Church Minutes, 1852-1856, Alabama Church and Synagogue Records Collection, 18; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 9-10.

service.¹²⁸ On at least sixteen occasions from 1839 to 1861 with the majority Episcopal, Protestant women in the Gulf South purchased communion services for their churches, often receiving praise for raising enough money to afford ones made entirely of silver, reflecting highly on the status of both the church and its female patrons as well as the importance they placed on the ritual of communion itself.¹²⁹ While their bodies were physically excluded from the sacred space of the altar or pulpit during worship—being denied the right to preach, baptize, or perform the Eucharist on the basis on their sex—women claimed second-hand public visibility through their furnishing work, purchasing or making items that distinguished important ritual spaces within their churches.

In addition to these decorative elements, mainstream Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal women all invested in musical instruments for their churches as well as paying to build bell towers and designated galleries for choirs and organists. While church bells announced service times to the community and made for a more impressive church façade, musical elements inside the church added to the power and spectacle of both choral and congregational singing during the service and could incite religious excitement or reverence among the listeners. From the late 1830s to 1861, male-authored church records in the Gulf South thanked women for adding twelve organs, seven bell sets, four melodeons, and at least one harmonium to their churches including

¹²⁸ White *Cambridge Movement*, ix, 205; Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 112-113. High church Episcopalians saw the Eucharist as *the* central part of worship, even more important than preaching.

¹²⁹ For examples of “silver” communion sets donated by churchwomen, see: Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Seventh Annual Convention*, 21; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Eleventh Annual Convention*, 19; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Ninth Annual Convention*, 19. For a Presbyterian example, see “Our History,” First Presbyterian Church, Huntsville, Alabama, accessed February 27, 2018, <http://fpchsv.org/our-history>. For women buying altar clothes and tables, see “Report of the Building Committee,” Vestry Minutes, October 7, 1858, Christ Episcopal Church, Holly Springs Records; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Seventh Annual Convention*, 12; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Eleventh Annual Convention*, 18.

in both urban and rural communities.¹³⁰ Like altar tables, communion services, and pulpit hangings, instruments helped to distinguish these newly built churches as sacred spaces meant for ritual practice that were more in line with older, respectable churches from their denominations on the East Coast.¹³¹ Repeatedly, male church leaders looked to the women of the congregation to meet these needs for elevated worship spaces in the Gulf South.

Furnishing projects also served a secular purpose of adding to the social status of both the patrons and the church within the larger community. When women donated items individually, they were often motivated by personal and familial social status or a desire to memorialize deceased family members, as was the case in established churches throughout the eighteenth century on the East Coast.¹³² Mary Ann Cruse's stained glass window for the Church of the Nativity, Huntsville was given to honor her deceased brother, while the matriarch of the very active Episcopal McWillie family of Kirkwood, Mississippi donated two cups for the Communion service at her church "in behalf of a

¹³⁰ For examples, see Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Tenth Annual Convention*, 28; Bond, *St. James Episcopal Church*, 22; Wadley, *Diary*, January 5, 1861, Wadley Papers; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 19, 7; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Annual Convention*, 21; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention*, 18, 20; Alex Downing to Joseph S. Copes, November 29, 1849, Copes Papers; Maria F. Lide to Hannah Coker, September 21, 1842, Lide-Coker Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbus, SC, cited in Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 44.

¹³¹ Williams, *Houses of God*, 64-67, 101-132. For Protestant women's furnishing work in antebellum New England, see Gretchen Buggeln, *Temples of Grace: The Material Transformation of Connecticut's Churches, 1790-1840* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2003), 198-228, especially 204-205.

¹³² See Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 170-173

deceased child.”¹³³ Wealthy Episcopal women were frequently individual donors of prayer books and altar decorations and received public praise from their clergy in diocesan reports.¹³⁴ When women donated and fundraised together, however, they laid claim to a different type of religious and benevolent identity that went beyond increasing the visibility and social status of one’s family. These women embraced a female community of like-minded women and a collective identity as the unofficial stewards of the church. Their shared labors served as a material expression of their faith and, as a rector declared of the ladies of St. Luke’s Cahaba, Alabama, a material expression of their “lively interest in the prosperity and increase of the parish.”¹³⁵ The churches women furnished were not just practical structures to shield the congregation from the natural elements, but also permanent sacred spaces with the material trappings of respectability and reverence that female contributors and their respective denominations prioritized—spaces that would come to define the religious geography of the Protestant Gulf South for decades to come.

Female stewardship of their new sacred spaces did not end once buildings were completed and furnished. If women did not put up the money at the time of construction or installment, they were often called on later to pay off the debts accrued by male church leaders who paid for building expenses on credit. For years after completion, churches relied on a combination of individual female donors, female subscription collectors, and

¹³³ Roberts, *Sesquicentennial History*, 33; "Contributions for Religious Objects," in St. Philip's Episcopal Church (Madison County, MS) Register, 423.

¹³⁴ Vestry Minutes, December 23, 1854, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana Records; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention*, 73; Parish Records, vol. B, January 1862, Grace Episcopal Church, St. Francisville Records.

¹³⁵ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention*, 12.

female society fundraisers to pay off these debts.¹³⁶ On multiple occasions, female societies debated amongst themselves or received pressure from male leadership to put off new furnishing projects and use the money they raised to pay off old debts instead. In 1849, the Presbyterian Ladies Sewing Society in Jackson, Mississippi debated whether to use funds from a supper for a new organ or towards the building debt. As one church member reported, “altho[ugh] there were many voices in favor of an organ,” the sewing society ultimately applied the \$200 to the debt.¹³⁷ When the “Committee of Church Ladies” at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Columbus, Mississippi resolved to use funds from a benefit concert for a new church carpet and pew cushions in 1859, the male vestry, “resolved, that we request the Ladies of the congregation to have a meeting & reconsider their action.” The women met again and reported to the vestry that “the ladies wish concert money to be applied in liquidation of the debts of the church” and each churchwoman would make a cushion for their family’s pew instead of buying them.¹³⁸ Despite obvious pressure, the vestry still recognized that the female society had control over their own budget and would make the final decision on how the money they raised would be spent.

Independent and semi-independent black churches in the urban Gulf South also relied on the women of their congregations to raise funds for building debts. As the advertisement for the fair held in March of 1854 by the women of St. James AME in New

¹³⁶ For examples, see Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 26; Subscription List, January 30, 1829, Washington Circuit Quarterly Conference Records; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Sixth Annual Convention*, 21-22; Vestry Minutes, April 26, 1849, Christ Church, Episcopal (Baldwin County, AL) Records.

¹³⁷ E.M. Avery to Joseph S. Copes, May 9, 1849, Copes Papers.

¹³⁸ Vestry Minutes, March 19, 1859, March 14, 1859, April 8, 1859, May 16, 1859, St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Columbus, MS) Records.

Orleans reported, proceeds were “for the purpose of extinguishing the debt on the edifice.”¹³⁹ They successfully raised \$2,000, a necessary assistance to keep their independent church afloat especially in an already hostile climate for independent black churches.¹⁴⁰ In 1857, the separate black congregation associated with the white Court Street Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama paid back \$383.19 to the ladies of the church which they had loaned to pay for general church upkeep.¹⁴¹ While not a gift, their loan was certainly more favorable than defaulting on payments to a bank. Debts accrued by white missionary churches to the enslaved, on the other hand, offered an opportunity for white churchwomen to perform slaveholding “Christian benevolence,” as was the case in the Episcopal churches of Mobile. When the slave mission Church of the Good Shepherd owed money on a new church edifice, the white Christ Church Sewing Society and the Little Girl’s Sewing Society donated almost \$1,000 and received praise from the white missionary of Good Shepherd, George Stickney, in his diocesan report.¹⁴² Similar to funding plantation chapels, these white women of the urban Gulf South were also able to assert an identity as “Christian slaveholder” with concern for the spiritual lives of their enslaved populations by funding building projects, creating necessary spaces for the diocese’s mission to the enslaved.

Other women helped pay off the debts accrued by other white churches in the region. Women who attended the Baptist State Convention of Mississippi in 1849 made

¹³⁹ “Fair,” *Daily Picayune*, March 3, 1854.

¹⁴⁰ Dodson, *Engendering Church*, 66.

¹⁴¹ “Montgomery Colored Members of the MEC, South Montgomery, 1854-1857,” Folder 1, Box 25, Alabama Church and Synagogue Records Collection.

¹⁴² Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-sixth Annual Convention*, 17.

individual donations to help the church in Biloxi pay off the debt on their church.¹⁴³ In 1846 the Ladies Sewing Society of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Selma held a fair for the express purpose of helping the neighboring Episcopal church in Wetumpka pay off the debt on their building.¹⁴⁴ In the official report to the Diocese of Alabama, the rector in Wetumpka gave credit to the ladies of Selma "for their efforts to sustain the Church amidst her embarrassments."¹⁴⁵ When Third Presbyterian Church in New Orleans found itself in debt for \$5,000 in addition to owing a mortgage of \$11,000 in 1859, the women of the church held two fairs and one concert, collected subscriptions among themselves, and reached out to the "First Church Ladies" of First Presbyterian Church in town. On their own, the Third Church ladies raised close to \$3,500 and then received \$355 from the women of First Presbyterian Church.¹⁴⁶ Whether it was across town or across the state, these women saw themselves as part of a larger religious community that went beyond their individual church needs and were able to financially support their denomination's physical expansion efforts in the region.

Once debts were paid, women continued to look after the physical needs of their sacred spaces, often taking the lead in maintenance projects, especially if it involved tasks transferrable from female domestic duties like cleaning and decorating. St. Paul's Episcopal Church in New Orleans hired a temporary female sexton, a traditionally male

¹⁴³ Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirteenth Anniversary of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (New Orleans, 1849), 13-14.

¹⁴⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 26.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Session Minutes, December 28, 1859, January 10, 1860, April 9, 1860, May 7, 1860, Third Presbyterian Church, New Orleans Records.

position in charge of general upkeep of the church building and grounds. In 1853, the vestry agreed to pay Mrs. Ann Moore \$10 a month to look after the church, but still referred to her labor as “voluntary” and “temporary” before deciding in 1856 that “a colored Boy George be appointed Sexton at a salary of Twenty five dollars per month.”¹⁴⁷ More often, however, women served as unofficial church sextons, preparing the church for regular services and special events. At the Methodist church in Macon, Mississippi in 1853, Maria Dyer Davies recorded on multiple occasions in her diary going to help the other churchwomen sweep the church; clean the windows; and arrange the seats, carpets, and lamps. In the midst of a protracted meeting in 1854, Davies and other churchwomen stayed late after a preaching session to clean up the church before the next day’s meetings. All of their collective labor was voluntary and unpaid.¹⁴⁸ In 1861, Methodist Myra Cox Smith of Greenville, Mississippi wrote in her diary, “For two days past I have exerted every physical power to its utmost putting our little church in order.”¹⁴⁹ Although physically exhausting, Smith found the work spiritually rewarding. While she was working in the church, she wrote, “There came the feeling that it was God’s house and how blessed to be permitted to come there and work. Just then, as though God would reward me for it, a flood of love and joy poured into my soul. My Savior drew very near to me. ‘Glory be to God’ involuntarily escaped from my lips.” Smith interpreted the physical labor she performed to clean the church as religious duty,

¹⁴⁷ Vestry Minutes, December 12, 1853, April 7, 1856, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana Records.

¹⁴⁸ Wightman, Diary, March 7, 1853, July 2, 1853, October 24, 1853, October 14, 1854.

¹⁴⁹ Smith, Diary, December 8, 1861, Somerville and Howorth Family Papers.

declaring “How truly can I say, I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”¹⁵⁰

When Episcopal women throughout the Gulf South “dressed” their churches with evergreens, wreaths, and flowers for the Christmas season, they too interpreted their labor as a religious duty to honor an important season in the church calendar by elevating the worship space and received praise from their clergy. In her book, *The Little Episcopalian*, Mary Ann Cruse had a female Sunday school teacher explain to the main character why women decorated the church at Christmas and connected it to women’s domestic duties to decorate their homes for special occasions: “it is Jesus Christ’s birth-day, and my Sunday school teacher says, that as the church is Jesus Christ’s house, it is very proper to decorate it on his birth-day.”¹⁵¹ According to Episcopalian Emily Douglas, the women of the Church of the Epiphany in New Iberia, Louisiana went so far as to prioritize dressing the church for Christmas over actually attending Christmas services, more evidence of the value churchwomen placed on homosocial religious practice like collective stewardship. In 1858, “as Christmas came near the ladies of the congregation met to decorate the little church but most of them living so far away nine or ten miles, very few were able to celebrate Christ’s birth by their presence at church.”¹⁵² In urban Vicksburg, Emma Balfour directed the churchwomen in these seasonal decorations in 1851, reporting to her sister-in-law that Bishop Green and her rector Stephen Patterson praised their work, both declaring on Christmas that they had “never seen a church so beautifully

¹⁵⁰ Smith, Diary, December 8, 1861, Somerville and Howorth Family Papers.

¹⁵¹ Cruse, *The Little Episcopalian*, 8.

¹⁵² Douglas, Autobiography, Emily Caroline Douglas Papers, 90.

decorated.” Patterson went on to compliment the women on their sense of religious duty, women “who would neglect their own concerns, the concerns of the world to decorate the house of God.”¹⁵³

Episcopal women also performed the ritual act of the “stripping of the church” of Christmas decorations on Ash Wednesday to prepare the worship space for the more solemn liturgical season of Lent and re-decorated the church with flowers at Easter.¹⁵⁴ When the women of St. Andrew’s Church in rural Macon County, Alabama decorated the chancel with Easter flowers, their rector Francis Hanson wrote of the flowers “I trust their beauty and fragrance inspired all our hearts with a deeper feeling of love and gratitude to God for all His mercy and goodness to us.”¹⁵⁵ Episcopal clergy like Hanson and Patterson recognized that the labor women performed in decorating the church was, in fact, religious work, creating a space that would inspire reverence during the worship service, particularly on the holiest days of the church calendar.

As with furnishing the church, however, slaveholding white women also relied heavily on the labor of enslaved women—not just enslaved men—to complete some of the more physically demanding tasks, despite taking the credit for acting on religious duty. In 1846, at Church Hill Episcopal Church in the plantation-rich Jefferson County, Mississippi, Eliza Magruder and her aunt Olivia Dunbar supervised their enslaved female laborers Serena, Livinia, and Nancy who “scoured” the carpets, and in 1850 and 1855, along with other church member’s enslaved laborers, cleaned the church and cleared the

¹⁵³ Emma Balfour to Louisa Harrison, December 31, 1851, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.

¹⁵⁴ Cruse, *The Little Episcopalian*, 198; *ibid.*, *Bessie Melville*, 224.

¹⁵⁵ Hanson, *Diary*, May 2, 1859, 12.

churchyard of tree debris, each time in preparation for new clergy and bishop visits.¹⁵⁶

Certainly many more enslaved laborers were involved in such projects throughout the Gulf South despite being absent from the surviving historical record. Forced female labor and female slaveholder religious duty went hand in hand in the maintenance of churches in a slave society.

For larger repair work and improvements to church buildings, women raised funds to pay men to do the work and to supervise enslaved laborers. In 1859, the ladies of the Baptist Church of Jackson, Mississippi advertised their two-day long fair in the newspaper, where they sold sewing projects and hosted a dinner fundraiser to pay for building repairs. The editors of the *Mississippi Baptist* approved, writing, “the idea is a good one, and we hope the result will be beneficial to all who may participate.”¹⁵⁷ Likewise, Presbyterian women in Lexington, Mississippi raised funds to re-paint their church in 1849, and the Episcopal sewing society of Baton Rouge funded repairs to their church after a tornado hit the town in 1846.¹⁵⁸ As for new projects, antebellum women were responsible for fundraising for Presbyterian Church building expansions in Tuscaloosa and Selma to meet the growing size of their congregations, and a new Episcopal Sunday school building and paved roads and a cistern for Third Presbyterian Church, both in New Orleans.¹⁵⁹ Even in more rural regions of the Gulf South women

¹⁵⁶ Eliza Magruder, Diary, April 11, 1846, May 18, 1850, April 11, 1855, April 16, 1855.

¹⁵⁷ "Ladies' Fair," *Mississippi Baptist*, November 3, 1859.

¹⁵⁸ Session Minutes, April 3, 1849, First Presbyterian Church, Lexington, Records; Bond, *St. James Episcopal Church*, 17.

¹⁵⁹ “Ladies Fair,” *Independent Monitor*, January 23, 1839; Session Minutes, May 1861, First Presbyterian Church, Selma Records, 37-38; Cope, *The Diocese of Louisiana*, 84; Session Minutes, April 9, 1860, Third Presbyterian Church, New Orleans Records.

were often more successful than men in raising funds for such projects. In 1851, when St. Paul's Church near Greensboro, Alabama wanted to erect a new church steeple, they received \$200 from the women's church aid group and only \$26.15 from the rest of the congregation.¹⁶⁰ In the southern Louisiana village of Donaldsonville, the Methodist minister there in 1852 was not surprised when the women of the church "united and caused some neat repairs to be done on the church" because, as he wrote to the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, "the ladies . . . are always first in a good work."¹⁶¹ Women throughout the Gulf South prioritized the maintenance and improvement of their churches, taking pride in their labors to elevate and modernize their worship spaces as well as adapt them to the needs of growing congregations.

Stewardship of Parsonages

An especially popular church improvement project in the 1840s and 1850s was the construction of parsonages or rectories—living spaces provided for the minister and his family. As part of the transition in the Gulf South from missionary outposts to mainstream churches, male church leaders, especially in the Episcopal and Methodist Church, urged their congregations to build parsonages as a way to solidify the church's presence in the region by ensuring the physical presence of its ministers. All three Episcopal bishops in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana made this request in the 1850s.¹⁶² In his 1850 address to the Diocese of Mississippi, Bishop William Green

¹⁶⁰ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twentieth Annual Convention*, 9.

¹⁶¹ "Revival Intelligence, Donaldsonville and P.P. Mission, La, Conf.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 2, 1852.

¹⁶² Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention*, 21; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Nineteenth Annual Convention of the*

declared, “Every parish that desires to give permanency to its interests, and to secure the services of a faithful pastor, should aim, as soon as possible, to procure a rectory or parsonage.”¹⁶³ In the Methodist Church, building parsonages could serve both the interests of settled or “located” clergy in the urban Gulf South as well as the remaining itinerants of rural preaching circuits. Like Episcopal parsonages, urban Methodist parsonages were associated with one church, providing accommodations for their established rector, whereas rural Methodist parsonages were funded by multiple churches on the same circuit and provided more convenient housing in the area for an itinerant preacher. The official report on parsonages in the Louisiana Methodist Conference in 1859 reads “we are now more than ever convinced of the absolute necessity of building Parsonages, in order to ensure support of the Ministry, and to the permanent success of the Itinerancy.”¹⁶⁴ The report went on to explain that without suitable housing on their circuit, itinerants “are compelled to ‘board round,’ being unsettled, poorly provided for, and their families, often unpleasantly situated, are crippled in their operations and impaired in their influence.”¹⁶⁵ While early itinerants were celebrated for the hardships they endured, late antebellum Methodists argued that itinerants were leaving the ministry and the only way for the church to survive was to accommodate their ministers. As an editor of the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* declared of increased parsonage building

Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Alabama (Tuscaloosa, 1850), 15; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Eighteenth Annual Convention*, 25.

¹⁶³ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention*, 21.

¹⁶⁴ Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Fourteenth Session*, 28.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

in the region, “this is a good ‘sign of the times’ as to the personal and social estimation in which Methodists begin to hold their ministers and families.”¹⁶⁶ Ultimately, parsonage building would increase the social status of both the clergy and the church in the region.

Churchwomen, as they had done with church construction, embraced the call to action by donating, collecting subscriptions, and fundraising. The Methodist minister’s wife who moved into the parsonage in Plaquemine, Louisiana in 1855 wrote to the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* praising “the generosity and active energy of Mrs. Gray and Mrs. Reames [and] Mrs. Dodd” who contributed almost \$3,000 for the parsonage and the editors of the paper celebrated the donors writing that they, “hope other stations will imitate their good example.”¹⁶⁷ Julia Howe along with her fellow Episcopal churchwomen of Okolona, Mississippi wrote letters to friends and family across the Gulf South requesting monetary assistance for the “good cause” of building their priest a parsonage and received donations ranging from \$5 to \$100. Rather than leaving it in the hands of the male vestry, the women went out and purchased the house and lot near Grace Church and continued to collect subscriptions for the monthly payments on the mortgage.¹⁶⁸ Other women, like the Presbyterians of Columbus, Mississippi; the Methodists of Demopolis; and Episcopalians of Mobile and Selma, Alabama, collected

¹⁶⁶ "Parsonage-Building," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 14, 1859.

¹⁶⁷ Kate, "Parsonage in Plaquemine, La.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 20, 1855.

¹⁶⁸ Israel Pickens to Mrs. Julia Howe, December 25, 1858, G.S. Gates to C.S. Howe, February 22, 1859, William H. Ross, to Mrs. C.S. Howe, March 20, 1859, J.L. Pickens to Julia Howe, April 17, 1859, in Howe Papers.

subscriptions among their own female societies and put on fairs and dinners.¹⁶⁹

According to Bishop Green in 1860, at St. John's Episcopal Church in Lake Washington, Mississippi, "the interests of the Church at this place have been for some years at a stand, if not declining, for the want of a Pastor" until the "active exertions" of the women of the church who raised money to build a parsonage which Green believed would attract a new rector.¹⁷⁰ Not only were these women donating and raising funds but they were also purposing these projects to their male church boards and initiating the purchases on their own, receiving praise for bringing new life (and clergy) to their churches.

As with building and furnishing churches, some female fundraising societies were able to look beyond their own church's needs and support parsonage building for other congregations in the region. In 1853, R. B Sutton, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, Auburn thanked "the liberality of the ladies of Montgomery" who put up the funds for their vestry room which also served as a rectory.¹⁷¹ Methodist and Episcopal women in the Gulf South also worked to fund parsonages for missionaries to the enslaved. After collecting funds, the Methodist Female Financial Association of Fayette Circuit took the initiative in 1859 by forming their own committee to debate options and using the power of petition to influence the male Fayette Circuit Quarterly Conference. The petition requested that "a committee be appointed to select a site and make arrangements to secure a parsonage for the Missionary on South Jefferson Colored Mission" which the

¹⁶⁹ Lyon, Journal, Lyon Family Papers, 143; A. Spencer to M.A. Keener, May 5, 1849, Keener Family Papers; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention*, 14; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention*, 19.

¹⁷⁰ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-fifth Annual Convention*, 36.

¹⁷¹ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-second Annual Convention*, 24.

male conference agreed to do.¹⁷² In the city of Mobile in 1856, the Ladies' Society of Christ Church raised \$500 for the black Episcopal congregation of Good Shepherd but specified that the money must go towards building a rectory for their white priest.¹⁷³ In both cases, white Protestant women exercised paternalistic Christian benevolence—declaring through their actions that they knew best how black congregations should spend their money and that was through support of white missionaries.

Protestant women of the Gulf South also took the lead in furnishing these parsonages. The Fayette Female Financial Association's original purpose as declared in its constitution was "to provide in some measure for the wants of the Parsonage of the Methodist E. Church (South,) of Fayette Circuit," sponsored by all six churches on the circuit. Not only did members of the female association elect an all-female central board of officers but they also chose a member from each of the six churches to serve as a vice president and at least one member from each church to serve on the financial committee which collected member dues and outside subscriptions. The president of the association then appointed three women as a standing committee which changed quarterly, "whose duty it shall be to receive the new preacher and family—to visit the Parsonage and ascertain the wants thereof, and report the same to the Financial Committee, who shall provide for the Same."¹⁷⁴ In 1858 they repaired the parsonage which Methodist ministers G. F. Thompson and W. B. Johnson reported "had become old and uncomfortable" and

¹⁷² Minutes, January 15, 1859, April 2, 1859, June 4, 1859, Fayette Quarterly Conference Registers.

¹⁷³ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-fifth Annual Convention*, 16.

¹⁷⁴ "Origin, Constitution, and Records," September 27, 1858, Fayette Quarterly Conference Registers.

“soon have become uninhabitable” without their efforts: “May the Lord abundantly reward these good ladies for their labors of love,” they wrote, treating their furnishing efforts as work of religious importance looked on with divine favor.¹⁷⁵ With a potentially new itinerant preacher stationed to that circuit ever year, this female association provided necessary stability to the operation, taking annual inventory of furniture, linens, and household goods; meeting quarterly to discuss furnishing needs; and then buying, donating, or making the items themselves.

Fayette Circuit was not alone in this work; as early as 1849 the Methodist women of Columbus Station in Lowndes County, Mississippi had their own “Parsonage Society” with the express purpose being “to keep the Parsonage supplied with such articles of household and kitchen furniture, crockery, &c, as are necessary for the comfort of the Preacher in charge and his family.”¹⁷⁶ This society also appointed an all-female board of officers who took inventory and raised funds. The Presbyterian women’s society in Jackson, Mississippi raised money for parsonage furniture as well, presenting the pieces as a gift to the wife of the rector in 1852.¹⁷⁷ In a less official capacity, Episcopal churchwomen in the 1840s and 1850s in Tuscaloosa and rural Lowndes County, Alabama as well as more urban Columbus and Jackson, Mississippi worked together to raise funds to paint and furnish parsonages as well as donating furniture and using their time and

¹⁷⁵ G.F. Thompson, W.B. Johnson, "News from our Home Work, Circuit," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, December 1, 1858.

¹⁷⁶ "1849 Constitution of the Parsonage Society," in Randolph-Sherman Papers, MSS. 257, MSU.

¹⁷⁷ E.M. Avery to Joseph S. Copes, November 29, 1852, Copes Papers.

talents to arrange and decorate.¹⁷⁸ As the Reverend N. G. McGaughey reported from Carroll Circuit, Louisiana in 1859, the woman who furnished his parsonage should be an example to all church members: “Be diligent—repent and build your preacher a house—a good one—and furnish it as a *gentleman’s* house should be furnished.”¹⁷⁹ Gone were the days of circuit rider preachers struggling to make ends meet; the late antebellum preacher of the Gulf South would have a respectable place to call home, one that reflected his status in the community, largely thanks to the efforts of the women of the church.

Female committees also cleaned before a new preacher arrived and welcomed them to their new home, extending their domestic hospitality duties to the space of the parsonage. In 1859, when a former preacher left the Macon Circuit parsonage in Alabama a mess, the new minister, W. C. Hearn, reported that “the good sisters, God bless them, anticipated that difficulty” and “were on hand with ‘duster and broom’ to make ready for our reception,” with gifts in hand.¹⁸⁰ W. P. Barton of Yazoo City, Mississippi praised the “ladies of the church” for exercising their domestic duty in preparing his parsonage in addition to the church, writing “None but the hands of kind ladies could arrange things so. Such taste, comfort and neatness,” and “our church is as neat and clean as a ladies

¹⁷⁸ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Fourteenth Annual Convention*, 16; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Ninth Annual Convention*, 19; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-third Annual Convention*, 50; Michael O’Brien, “The Ann Lewis Hardeman journals: ‘a rainy evening when alone,’” in *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-1867* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1993), 300-301.

¹⁷⁹ “News From Our Home Work, Louisiana Conference,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 26, 1859, emphasis in original text.

¹⁸⁰ Rev. W.C. Hearn, “News from Home, Alabama Conference,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 24, 1859.

parlor.”¹⁸¹ Collective female housekeeping served a public religious purpose: it gave respectability to both buildings as well as to the minister who lived and worked there.

Stewardship of Rectors and Stationed Preachers

Protestant women also conferred status on their ministers by offering both formal and informal financial support. Despite previous scholarship that associates female patronage with only the early years of hosting itinerant preachers, the role of female patron continued in the late antebellum Gulf South, even in areas where itinerant preachers settled down and attached themselves to one congregation. In terms of formal patronage, women consistently contributed to preachers' salaries through annual tithing and for some wealthier widows in Episcopal and Presbyterian churches through paying pew rents for their families.¹⁸² Reflecting the priorities of their denomination, Baptist women may have been the least active among Protestants in funding church building projects, but their names frequently appear on subscription lists for preacher salaries. In some cases, as at Clear Creek Baptist Church in Adams County, Mississippi in the late 1840s and Calvary Baptist in Bayou Chicot, Louisiana in the 1850s, women contributed more to their preachers' salaries collectively than their male counterparts.¹⁸³ In 1844 the *Alabama Baptist* endorsed the argument that since “frequently a large portion of the

¹⁸¹ W.P. Barton, "Our Parsonage, Etc.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, January 17, 1857.

¹⁸² For examples, see Ann A. Stuart to Joseph S. Copes, March 23, 1855, Copes Papers; Session Minutes, January 29, 1856, Subscriptions, 1858, Book 2, First Presbyterian Church, Tuscaloosa, Records; Receipt, May 16, 1848, Presbyterian Churches, Mobile, Mobile County, Typescripts, 1848-1894, Alabama Church and Synagogue Records Collection; Vestry Minutes, March 1847, November 1853, Christ Church Cathedral, New Orleans, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana Records; Vestry Minutes, June 3, 1837, Christ Episcopal Church, Tuscaloosa Records; Vestry Minutes, January 1842, April 18, 1846, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Columbus, MS Records.

¹⁸³ "Memorandum of money paid Rev H Goodell for ministerial services 1848," in Clear Creek Baptist Church, Adams County Records, MBHC; Jane P. McManus, ed., *Early Records of Calvary Baptist Church at Bayou Chicot, LA, 1826-1887* (Birmingham: Banner Press, 1987), 27.

salary is raised by the female members, they ought to be allowed to vote” on the choice for a new pastor.¹⁸⁴ Financial support also translated into informal power over hiring decisions, as Edward Fontaine, Episcopal rector in Columbus, Mississippi found when some wealthy and “influential gentlemen and ladies” turned against him and pressured the vestry to find another rector.¹⁸⁵ Female supporters, on the other hand, proved to be an asset. Across all mainstream Protestant denominations in the Gulf South, having female subscribers for preacher salaries was the norm and preachers often found that women were more reliable and liberal in their contributions. Henry Lay, an Episcopal priest traveling through Greensboro, Alabama collecting subscriptions for the bishop’s salary in 1855, reported receiving \$300 from both a male and female church member, but while “Mrs. Pickens” volunteered the money freely, Lay “got \$300 but with difficulty from Mr. Bennet.”¹⁸⁶ Methodists recognized this trend more broadly, endorsing a northern report reprinted in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* that “women are the best subscribers in the world” of both newspapers and preachers; they “seem to make it a point of conscientious duty to pay the preacher and the printer.”¹⁸⁷ Women were the numerical majority in the pews on Sundays, but they were also more likely to see their financial support of preachers as religious duty and tithe accordingly.

Female donors came from across the spectrum, as wealthy patrons funding most

¹⁸⁴ "Shall the Females Vote in Church Meetings?" *Alabama Baptist*, September 7, 1844. For more on church voting rights, see chapter three of this dissertation.

¹⁸⁵ Fontaine, Journal, October 18, 1847, Edward Fontaine Papers.

¹⁸⁶ Henry C Lay to Eliza Lay, December 18, 1855, Lay Papers.

¹⁸⁷ "Women and Newspapers," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, April 17, 1852, reprinted from the *Boston Republican*.

of the salary and as poorer members giving their “widow’s mite” to support their preachers to the best of their ability.¹⁸⁸ In the records of Ebenezer Presbyterian Church in Clinton, Alabama, women of color appear on racially segregated subscription lists including potentially a mix of free and enslaved women. “Nice,” listed as “belonging to A. Alexander,” gave 50 cents in 1840 and “Rachel,” with no owner listed, gave 25 cents, and both were listed as church members. Other women of color, like “Hannah” who gave 25 cents, contributed to the preacher’s salary despite not holding membership in the church. Their subscriptions were also not that far off from the average white female subscriptions, which ranged from fifty cents to ten dollars that year.¹⁸⁹ Women of color like Nice, Rachel, and Hannah expressed their religious priorities through these subscriptions, choosing to spend precious financial resources on the support of a local preacher, despite the limited choice over where they could attend. While many women of color certainly expressed resentment at the “obey your master” rhetoric of much of the white preaching in antebellum biracial services—a common theme in both Federal Writer’s Project narratives of the 1930s and historical scholarship—these women must have found some sort of social or spiritual fulfillment from the preacher at Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, expressing their approval of his preaching and leadership in a material way through their financial support.¹⁹⁰ Perhaps they too felt a sense of religious duty to support their preacher—even a white preacher in a biracial church—that

¹⁸⁸ Clitherall, *Diary*, vol. 13, March 29, 1855, Clitherall Diaries.

¹⁸⁹ Record Book, 1858-1888, Keatchie Presbyterian Church Records, 29-30.

¹⁹⁰ For examples of this resentment in Gulf South Federal Writer’s Project narratives, see Rawick, *The American Slave*, Oklahoma and Mississippi Narratives, vol. 7, 105; *ibid.*, Second Supplemental Series, Texas Narratives, 2614; For historical scholarship, see Rohrer, “Slaveholding Women.”

paralleled that of their white fellow churchgoers.

Slaveholding women led the way in paying the salaries of white missionaries to the enslaved on their plantations, exercising control over the version of Christianity to which their enslaved laborers were exposed.¹⁹¹ While evangelical women were less likely than their Episcopal counterparts to fund the construction of plantation chapels, they did prioritize paying a plantation preacher. One Baptist woman in Mississippi paid a preacher \$600 a year to preach to enslaved laborers on her plantation and her sister reportedly did the same on her own property.¹⁹² In the urban Gulf South of Mobile, white Episcopal women paid the salary of the missionary to the enslaved at the Church of the Good Shepherd, including a donation from the “Little Girl’s Sewing Society” of Christ Church.¹⁹³ Methodist Church leaders in the Alabama Conference used the fact that the salary of the preacher for the “Colored Missions, Demopolis District” was paid entirely by women’s donations to guilt male church members into contributing. The 1855 conference report declared, “We cannot believe that a community so enlightened and so liberal in all other Christian enterprises, will in future suffer it to be said that the slaves of the South, and especially those in our midst, are in part dependent upon the widow’s mite for the bread of life.”¹⁹⁴ Despite the embarrassment, dependence on women’s donations to pay preacher salaries remained.

¹⁹¹ "Transcript of responses by Esther Wright Boyd," Jesse D. Wright Papers, MSS. 99, LLMVC, 8; William A. Stickney Diary, November 1857, December 1857, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.

¹⁹² A.C. Dayton, "I Am Afraid," *Tennessee Baptist*, May 19, 1860.

¹⁹³ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-seventh Annual Convention*, 19.

¹⁹⁴ D.B. Turner, "Colored Missions, Demopolis District, Alabama Conference," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 3, 1855.

As with church construction projects, women also fundraised and collected subscriptions to pay preacher salaries, some individually but others coordinating their efforts through sewing and church aid societies. Episcopal women in New Iberia, for instance, encouraged each other through letters to go collect subscriptions for the salary of their rector and Eliza Marsh reported in 1854 raising \$500 on her own.¹⁹⁵ When the vestry of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Columbus could not collect enough subscriptions to pay their preacher in 1845, they appointed a male committee "to solicit the aid of the Ladies Sewing Society to assist in making up the deficiency."¹⁹⁶ Again, male church leaders expressed embarrassment even as they continued to depend on women's fundraising efforts. In an article in the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, Methodist Mick Healy critiqued a local church who relied on a "ladies' supper" to raise a salary for their minister despite the fact that the male church members "are generally wealthy."¹⁹⁷ At the Presbyterian Church in Jackson, on the other hand, when the preacher Joseph Montgomery wrote the male church elders to inform them that they still owed him \$157.50 on his salary, he actually suggested that the money "might be borrowed temporarily from the ladies sewing society connected with your church," despite what he described as "the humiliating fact that it seems impossible for me at this time to raise a little money from any other source."¹⁹⁸ Even while expressing embarrassment in relying

¹⁹⁵ Robertson, Diary, December 17, 1854, June 7, 1855, May 6, 1856, Eliza Ann Marsh Robertson Papers.

¹⁹⁶ Vestry Minutes, May 25, 1846, St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Columbus, MS) Records.

¹⁹⁷ Mick Healy, "Something New," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, April 5, 1856.

¹⁹⁸ Dr. Joseph F. Montgomery to Joseph S. Copes, July 22, 1843, Copes Papers.

on women for funding, clergymen like Montgomery were well aware of who was most successful at raising money for their salaries.

Also common was the more informal financial patronage of “gift giving,” which seemed to cause less embarrassment for men than relying on women to pay an official salary. Episcopal women in the Gulf South often gave cash to their rectors as Easter and Christmas presents, some individually and some collectively.¹⁹⁹ Although the male vestry in Canton, Mississippi in 1849 made no request for female aid when they failed to pay their rector, Edward Fontaine, \$197 of his salary, Fontaine recorded in his diary receiving personal donations from the ladies of the church which kept him from having to seek other employment, including \$50 from the sewing society.²⁰⁰ Evangelical women also performed this informal patronage and were praised by their ministers for their pious liberality. In her obituary recorded in the records of Keatchie Presbyterian Church located outside of Shreveport, Louisiana, Amanda Harris received credit for her “gift” of at least \$100 every year, which the minister claimed single-handedly “clothed and fed both him and his family” throughout the 1850s.²⁰¹

In addition to money to buy these items, women also gave gifts of food and clothing. It was common in Episcopal and Presbyterian churches for women to raise funds and buy or sew by hand the vestments clergy wore during religious services, once again giving the domestic chore of needlework a public religious purpose. On at least six

¹⁹⁹ For examples, see Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-eighth Annual Convention*, 30; Fontaine, *Journal*, April 21, 1848, Edward Fontaine Papers; Church Materials: William A. Stickney, 1849 to 1886, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.

²⁰⁰ Fontaine, *Journal*, January 1849, July 9, 1849, Edward Fontaine Papers.

²⁰¹ Record Book, 1858-1888, Keatchie Presbyterian Church Records, 29-30.

occasions, Episcopal women in the Gulf South fundraised specifically to buy or make their rectors surplices – the white linen vestment worn over a standard black cassock. In diary entries from 1847, Edward Fontaine, rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Columbus, recorded how the women of the church met at his parsonage over the course of a week to work on his vestments as well as sew clothing items for his children.²⁰² Likewise in 1857, Presbyterian minister Henry Raymond received a present of a black Geneva gown, a standard vestment in the Calvinist tradition, handmade by the sewing society of his church in Marion, Alabama.²⁰³ These gifts often extended to members of the preacher’s family. In 1858, Episcopal women of Jackson, Vicksburg, and the surrounding plantation-rich counties conducted a coordinated fundraising effort to buy not only a horse and buggy for Bishop Green but also a sewing machine for the bishop’s wife.²⁰⁴

Slaveholding women also gave the “gift” of enslaved female labor to preachers’ families. In Huntsville in the 1850s, in addition to gifts of food and money, the Episcopal widow Mary Rice gave Eliza Lay, wife of the rector, the use of several of her enslaved servants for household chores in the 1850s.²⁰⁵ Likewise, Olivia Dunbar, who previously sent her enslaved laborers to help furnish Church Hill Church in Mississippi, also recorded sending enslaved women Lavinia and Priscilla “to help Mrs. Miller” in the

²⁰² Fontaine, Journal, September 12, 1847-September 18, 1847, Edward Fontaine Papers.

²⁰³ Henry Rodney Raymond, Diary, January 2, 1857, Henry Rodney Raymond Papers, MSS. 14, MSU.

²⁰⁴ Emma Balfour to Louisa Harrison, March 12, 1857, Faunsdale Plantation Papers; Roach, Diary, February 17, 1858-March 2, 1858, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers.

²⁰⁵ Roberts, *Sesquicentennial History*, 32.

parsonage.²⁰⁶ These wealthy slaveholding Episcopal women not only provided their preachers the financial benefits of the use of an enslaved labor force, but also bestowed on them the social status and respectability that came with slaveholding, even if only temporary.

Enslaved female labor also came into play when Protestant women hosted clergy who were traveling to denominational conferences in the region. When Mahala Roach hosted preachers in Vicksburg for the Episcopal annual convention, she recorded in her diary putting her enslaved laborer, Aislie, to work getting the rooms ready, washing sheets, and cooking dinner.²⁰⁷ Certainly many non-slaveholding women performed the domestic labor of hosting and cooking for clergy attending these conferences, but on many occasions the lack of credit to enslaved labor is obvious. In 1859, Baptist Mary Wright of Rapides Parish, Louisiana, recorded in her diary “food for Convention to be cooked at house & sent to Cheneyville,” leaving out with the passive voice the fact that as a slaveholder, most of this labor was likely performed by enslaved women.²⁰⁸ When the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana in 1859 officially resolved to give thanks “to the Ladies of Trinity Church, New Orleans, for their liberal and daily supplies of refreshments, furnished this Convention during its session,” they almost certainly relied on enslaved women for much of the physical labor behind the scenes of hauling supplies, cooking, and cleaning.²⁰⁹ Once again, white women received credit for using their

²⁰⁶ Eliza Magruder, Diary, April 11, 1846, May 23, 1850.

²⁰⁷ Roach, Diary, April 25, 1860, April 26, 1860, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers.

²⁰⁸ Mary Wright, Diary, June 28, 1859, Wright-Boyd Papers.

²⁰⁹ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Twenty-first Annual Convention*, 30.

domestic abilities for a public religious purpose when supervising enslaved female labor and once again, modern Protestant institutions in the slaveholding South—like these annual conferences—benefited from an enslaved female workforce, whether they were church members themselves or not.

Throughout the Gulf South, white women acted as financial patrons through all stages of their preachers' careers. Baptist white women, in particular, were especially active in fundraising to support ministerial education in the region, joining and donating to mixed gender societies like the Mississippi Baptist Education Society and also using their female church aid societies to collectively sponsor seminary students and pay for their room and board.²¹⁰ This was especially common for ministerial students at Baptist schools like Howard College in Marion, Alabama; Mount Lebanon University in Louisiana; and Mississippi College.²¹¹ Likewise, Methodist women in Columbus, Mississippi and the Presbyterian Ladies Society of Gainesville, Alabama made annual donations in the 1840s and 1850s to their respective denominational associations, specifying the money be used “for education for the ministry,” essentially funding the next generation of preachers in the region.²¹²

²¹⁰ Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Fourteenth Anniversary of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson, 1850), 41-47.

²¹¹ C.E. Smith to Alabama Baptist State Convention, October 25, 1851, D.L. McCall Papers, Samford; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirty-first Anniversary*, 25; Bethlehem Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Thirty-eighth Annual Meeting of the Bethlehem Baptist Association* (Mobile: 1854), 5; Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Proceedings of the Twenty-fourth Session of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson, 1860), 69-70; Louisiana Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Session*, 8.

²¹² Woman's Missionary Union of Mississippi, *Hearts the Lord Opened: The History of Mississippi Woman's Missionary Union* (Jackson: Woman's Missionary Union of Mississippi, 1954), 17; Minutes, vol. 2, Tuscaloosa of Presbytery Minutes, 229, 289, 384.

Protestant women also funded clergy at the nadir of their careers, creating an informal safety net for sick, indigent, and retired preachers. In the late 1850s the Pine Grove Female Auxiliary Society in Mississippi sent an annual letter and donation to the “Ministerial Relief Association” of their Choctaw Baptist Association which provided necessary financial support for retired preachers as well as for orphans and widows of deceased preachers.²¹³ In 1859, Bishop Green thanked the ladies of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi for their “generous scheme” to add to his income when he was sick and could not travel, writing in his annual address of his “heartfelt sense of this liberal and delicate token of regard on the part of these kind friends and Sisters in Christ . . . May God reward them seven-fold in spiritual things.”²¹⁴ Other women’s organizations worked on a more local level to support their own sick and retired preachers and their families. When Samuel Lewis, rector of Christ Episcopal Church, Mobile, retired due to sickness in 1846, he received a letter signed by sixty-two of the “Ladies of Christ Church,” expressing their grief “at the prospect of a separation from their Beloved Pastor” as well as a purse filled with \$27 collected among their society members.²¹⁵ After his death, the women of Christ Church raised funds to erect a memorial tablet in Lewis’s honor, consulted with the male church warden on a suitable location in the church, and ultimately carried out the project with some funds added later by the vestry.²¹⁶ In 1854

²¹³ Choctaw Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Twenty-First Anniversary*, 17; *ibid.*, *Minutes of the Twenty-Second Anniversary*, 16-17.

²¹⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-third Annual Convention*, 44-45.

²¹⁵ Ladies of Christ Church to Samuel S. Lewis, April 1846, Letters of Samuel Seymoor Lewis, Christ Church, Episcopal (Baldwin County, AL) Records.

²¹⁶ Vestry Minutes, March 15, 1853, June 7, 1859, Christ Church, Episcopal (Baldwin County, AL) Records.

the women of Christ Episcopal Church, Vicksburg did the same, paying for a monument in the church to honor their rector Stephen Patterson who died in the latest yellow fever outbreak.²¹⁷ Even in death, these churchwomen worked to bestow respectability and honor on their preachers as stewards of their memory. While many churches certainly gained stability and respectability through increased male patronage in the 1840s and 1850s, Protestant clergy throughout the Gulf South continued to rely on women both officially and unofficially to be financial supporters of their careers and families, and women found both social and spiritual fulfillment in this religious duty to serve their churches.

Wartime Reflections on Antebellum Stewardship

In November 1862, Amanda Armstrong, re-elected president of the Female Financial Association of Fayette Circuit in Mississippi, gave a speech for the fourth anniversary of the association and made the case in mixed company for public female stewardship in the church. Addressing the common assumption that “ladies are not capable of doing anything aside from their Domestic duties,” Armstrong responded: “That Ladies have a proper sphere to move in, I candidly admit; but I do not think it it [sic] follows as a matter of course, that they should bury the talents which God has given them to improve.”²¹⁸ Protestant women throughout the antebellum Gulf South used gender norms about the domestic sphere in order to expand that sphere into the public space of their churches, carving out room for female collective action and an identity beyond the family in the process. White women turned domestic duties of sewing,

²¹⁷ Roach, Diary, April 10, 1854, Roach and Eggleston Family Papers.

²¹⁸ "Origin, Constitution and Records," November 6, 1862, Fayette Quarterly Conference Registers.

cooking, furnishing, and hosting into stewardship for their clergy and church buildings, and—in a slaveholding society—employed enslaved female labor to do all of the above as an extension of their own religious duty. In the urban Gulf South, some women of color were able to choose to be stewards of their own churches, adopting the same fundraising methods based in domestic duties and also finding female religious community organized around a higher calling.

While church aid societies like Fayette's paralleled the sewing societies of the war effort, they also predated them. Southern female associations did not begin with the Civil War, but instead with an antebellum religious calling to expand the physical presence of their churches and ministers and furnish them with all the trappings of mainstream respectability, a calling particularly suitable for the former missionary outposts of the Gulf South. As Armstrong concluded in 1862, "it is not for a high-sounding name, that we are Associated together. Neither is it for worldly pleasure or gain; but to walk together a[s] Christians – doing all the good we can."²¹⁹ This "good" performed by antebellum women and their female stewardship societies was to create the modern Protestant landscape of the Gulf South.

²¹⁹ "Origin, Constitution and Records," November 6, 1862, Fayette Quarterly Conference Registers.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Last at the Cross and First at the Tomb” Female Benevolence and Missionary Activism

My sex, characterized for long and patient suffering, boundless benevolence and lasting affection, who were last at the cross and first at the sepulchre; whose nature is to succor the distressed, encourage the timid, and comfort the mourner; to discountenance vice and encourage virtue—meet you on the day of your anniversary to instruct by our counsel, cheer by our presence, and encourage by our example, you gentlemen who have declared an exterminating war against that tyrant, and cruel monster, King Alcohol –

—Mary E. Tarrant, *The Crystal Fount*

In Jonesboro, Alabama on July 4, 1849, Mary Tarrant presented a banner and gave this public address to the local Sons of Temperance division, a copy of which was published in the Alabama temperance newspaper, *Crystal Fount*. Acting as the “representative of the Ladies of Jonesboro and vicinity,” Tarrant felt compelled to include in her speech a justification for female public activism in benevolent and moral reform causes like the temperance movement.¹ She specifically connected women’s work in Alabama to the Biblical women who cared for Jesus at his death and the accepted notion of women’s “natural” instincts to help those in need. Tarrant was not unique in making this connection; church leaders throughout the region used versions of “last at the cross and first at the tomb” to describe women’s instinct for charity.² In 1851, Thomas

¹ Mary E. Tarrant, "Correspondence," *Crystal Fount* (Tuscaloosa, AL), October 3, 1849.

² See "Correspondence," *Independent Monitor*, January, 4, 1849; "Bible Presentation," *Crystal Fount*, August 15, 1851; A. Judson Crane, *Address Delivered at the Annual Commencement of the Mississippi Female College* (Memphis, 1854), 21.

Savage of Pass Christian, Mississippi, praised the female benevolent society of his church, writing “it was so in the days of our Saviour—woman was last at the cross and first at the tomb—first and last in all good works.”³ Throughout the antebellum Gulf South, women combined their moral duty as Christians and as women to expand the sphere of their benevolence work beyond their families to aid the widowed, orphaned, sick, destitute, and unconverted at home and abroad. In the process, they expanded the scope of the benevolent and missionary work conducted by their churches. As donors and unpaid laborers, women built new spaces for religious activism—the region’s benevolent societies, orphanages, book depositories, and missions—institutions of modern Christian benevolence in the Gulf South.

Scholarship on the “benevolent empire” movement of the early nineteenth century, which grew out of the Second Great Awakening and combined evangelization with social reform, still associates the movement with the North and northern women.⁴ All of the major Christian benevolent organizations of the era, including the American Tract Society, American Bible Society, American Home Missionary Society, and the Sons of Temperance, were based in northern coastal cities. Scholars have argued that fear of the spread of the abolitionist movement and feminism through northern influence kept these organizations from succeeding in the late antebellum South and the only

³ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 16, 505.

⁴ See Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries*; Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 11-97; Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Connie A Shemo, eds., *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2010); Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 157-163.

benevolence work conducted by women was in the mission to the enslaved.⁵ Others blame rural isolation, focusing on the men who served as traveling agents or colporteurs in the region and a few female benevolent organizations confined to southern cities.⁶ Even with scattered examples throughout the South, scholars have assumed that the vast majority of southern women did not look beyond caring for their own families and churches.⁷

Women in the antebellum Gulf South, however, were essential to the spread of Protestant benevolence movements throughout the region, not just in cities. These women constructed a specifically southern version of the benevolent empire—one based on local organizations and southern auxiliaries that distanced themselves from northern influence and were more closely tied to individual churches. Their activism did not challenge the

⁵ See Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 28-20; Fraser, *Gender, Race and Family*, 3; Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 177; Matthews, *Religion in the Old South*, 116; Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of the Public Woman: Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States, 1630-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Joanne V. Hawks, and Sheila L. Skemp, *Sex, Race, and the Role of Women in the South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983), 94-95, 100; Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 130-185.

⁶ For rural isolation arguments, see Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden*, xii, 18-20; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 70. For urban-specific female benevolence in the South, see: Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 101-104; Barbara Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders: Assisting the Poor in Charleston, 1670-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Lebsack, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 196-199; Boswell, "The Meaning of Participation," 28, 44; Murray, "Charity Within the Bounds," 54-70; Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 11; Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 239-240; Lockley, "The Rise and Fall of Female Benevolence," 197-209; Tyler, *New Orleans Women and the Poydras Home*; Bachand, "Gendered Mobility," 52-55. For scholarship that focuses on male benevolence, see John Quist, "Slaveholding Operatives of the Benevolent Empire: Bible, Tract, and Sunday School Societies in Antebellum Tuscaloosa County, Alabama," *Journal of Southern History* 62, no. 3 (August 1996): 481-526; Quist, *Restless Visionaries*; Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprize*.

⁷ For scholarship that gives scattered examples of female benevolence work in the antebellum South, see Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 110; Kierner, *Beyond the Plantation Household*, 137-138, 194; Scott, *Natural Allies*, 12, 19; Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 57; Bode, "A Common Sphere," 782-783; Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 52. Elizabeth Varon gives some early examples in Virginia but argues that female benevolence societies declined by the 1830s and women turned to supporting the Whig Party, in *We Mean to Be Counted*, 3, 24.

existing social order or advocate for women's suffrage or the abolition of slavery, but their conservatism should not be confused with apathy. Like northern women, they harnessed the language of female Christian duty and public motherhood to support male organizations and form their own societies around causes that appealed specifically to women—helping other women and children and advocating for their Christian education.⁸ With local, church-based benevolence, white southerners were less concerned about a threat to slavery. Although excluded from white “ladies” benevolent societies and denied the status of “lady,” free and enslaved women of color found ways to donate and participate in causes they prioritized, most notably by forming their own urban mutual aid societies and supporting missionary efforts in Africa.⁹ While not directly challenging the social order, Gulf South women carved out spaces for Christian public activism that extended beyond their local church and family, created organizations with like-minded women, and shaped their denominations' benevolence and missionary efforts in the region and abroad.

Pastoral Care for the Sick, Dying, and Destitute

The most widespread form of female benevolence in the Gulf South outside of the family was care for members of one's community in times of need. The common practice of “visiting” took on religious significance in times of sickness or death, especially with

⁸ Lori Ginzberg coined the term “benevolent femininity” to describe a prescriptive ideal of charity as part of women's religious and domestic duties in the North, in *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 1-10. Suzanne Lebsack argues that female benevolent associations were often organized specifically to help other women, in *Free Women of Petersburg*, 195-236.

⁹ See Elizabeth Varon's discussion of the term “lady” as an indicator of whiteness and wealth in antebellum southern society that excluded women of color, in *We Mean to Be Counted*, 5, 7.

seasonal outbreaks like yellow fever.¹⁰ Women noted in their journals nights spent at the bedside of a neighbor offering both material and spiritual comfort, often in the company of other female visitors.¹¹ In their own obituaries, these female visitors received praise for being good Christians, like Elvira Nichols, who according to the *Mississippi Baptist*, “relieving the sick and afflicted, she was ever ready to do her duty.”¹²

Nor was this role confined to white women. While often left out of diary entries, white slaveholding women certainly relied on enslaved women to perform much of the physical labor of caring for sick and dying white neighbors, as they did daily for members of the slaveholder’s family and others enslaved on the property.¹³ Mahala Roach’s diary contains references to her caring for sick and dying enslaved laborers as a benevolent female slaveholder, most likely overseeing the physical labor of enslaved women, but Roach also recorded multiple nights when women of color came to her house in Vicksburg to “sit up with” Ailsie, an enslaved woman on her deathbed.¹⁴ In the city of Vicksburg, a mourning practice that would have been confined to other enslaved women on a plantation was open to free and enslaved neighbors and followed a similar pattern of “visiting” by white women.

¹⁰ For more on women’s respectable public mobility through the social practice of “visiting,” see Bachand, “Gendered Mobility,” 64.

¹¹ Wightman, *Diary*, April 14, 1852; Hays *Diary*, April 23, 1857, November 10, 1857, Hays-Ray-Webb Papers; Roach, *Diary*, May 29, 1855, Roach and Eggleston Papers.

¹² “Obituary,” *Mississippi Baptist*, September 30, 1858. See also “Obituaries,” *South Western Baptist*, December 22, 1859; William Winans, “Funeral Sermon for Harriet Gibson,” January 16, 1838, William Winans Papers.

¹³ James Warren, “To Claim One’s Own: Death and the Body in the Daily Politics of Antebellum Slavery,” in *Death and the American South*, ed. Craig Thomson Friend and Lorri Glover (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 117-118; Fett, *Working Cures*, 117.

¹⁴ Roach, *Diary*, May 21-29, 1860, Roach and Eggleston Papers.

When another friend lost her young son, Mahala Roach played a critical part in the funeral preparations. In addition to making frequent visits to help her friend in mourning, she also wrote two obituaries for different newspapers, brought flowers to the Baptist church, and helped other churchwomen “in dressing the Pulpit in white” for the funeral sermon.¹⁵ Other white Protestant women recorded sewing burial shrouds and caps, writing “funeral tickets” for those invited to attend the service, and caring for the families of the deceased.¹⁶ Enslaved women often performed the physical labor of washing and dressing corpses, black and white, an act that historian James Warren has described as both a “sacred and intimate role”—symbolically preparing the deceased for rebirth in the afterlife.¹⁷ These women offered pastoral care within the framework of traditional domestic responsibilities but also performed necessary labor that made public funeral services possible.

For enslaved women, this labor could even include performing funeral rites for enslaved persons when preachers were unable or unwilling to do so. Alice Sewell, formerly enslaved on a plantation outside of Montgomery, Alabama, recalled that even though they attended a white church, when enslaved laborers died they “never did say nothing ‘bout a slave dying and going to heaven. When we die, de bury us next day and you is just like any of de other cattle dying on the place.” It was an older enslaved woman who, according to Sewell, directed the religious rites and burial for the deceased, creating

¹⁵ Ibid., March 6-11, 1858.

¹⁶ Eliza Magruder, Diary, September 21, 1850; Wightman, Diary, November 18, 1852; “Obituary,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 19, 1854; J.M. Hartford to Joseph S. Copes, March 14, 1842, Copes Papers.

¹⁷ Warren, “To Claim One’s Own,” 117.

sacred space on the plantation in the process: “[she] said de funeral sayings by herself. She knew it by heart.”¹⁸ Vested with the temporary power of a preacher, this enslaved woman restored the humanity of the deceased and challenged white control over black bodies after death by ensuring that the body of the deceased received a proper, Christian burial.¹⁹ She also brought spiritual comfort to the living community of mourners through Christian funeral rites, which most likely emphasized the reunion of friends and family with the deceased in the afterlife. It is unclear how common this practice was, but certainly many enslaved women had to improvise ways to honor their deceased, especially when slaveholders neglected to do so, and perhaps others found more comfort in performing these rites on their own terms instead of those of a white preacher.

After caring for family and friends in need, the next step in expanding the scope of one’s Christian benevolence was to care for the less fortunate through donations or acts of service. Given the expectations of female humility, it was far more common for women to receive public praise for this work after their death. Gulf South women’s obituaries are filled with acclaim for acts of charity to the poor, like Methodist Juliet Yonique of Columbus, Mississippi, who was described by her minister as “one of the most active and useful members in this charge; no task seemed too arduous where she could do good. Possessed of ample means, she has been to the poor, the sick and

¹⁸ Rawick, *The American Slave*, Missouri Narratives, Volume 11B, 303.

¹⁹ For more on conflicting claims to enslaved black bodies after death see, Warren, “To Claim One’s Own,” 110-130; Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

friendless, an angel of mercy.”²⁰ Descriptions of female benevolence to the needy as a “vocation,” “ministry,” “divine mission,” and even “godlike work” all signal a parallel pastoral role to the work of ordained male ministers.²¹ Protestant newspaper editors in the region encouraged women to emulate Dorcas, the Biblical woman famous for giving clothes to the poor, and teach their daughters to give their time and money to the poor as part of their Christian education.²² Other women, like Episcopalian Eliza Clitherall in Montgomery, Alabama, regretted their inability to do more for the poor as a failing of Christian duty: “God is merciful & dispenses his blessings to me—I partake of his bounties largely—but I have nothing to give to his creatures who are poor and needy,” she wrote in her journal.²³ Benevolence to the less fortunate was not only a critical part of defining ones social status as middle and upper class but also necessary for one’s identity as a Christian woman.

For the wives of ministers and in the Baptist tradition the wives of deacons, benevolence to the poor was closely tied to service to their church. Ministers’ wives accompanied their husbands on pastoral visits and deacons’ wives, sometimes referred to in church records as “deaconesses” were expected to help their husbands collect and

²⁰ “Obituary,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, March 11, 1854. For more examples, see “Obituaries,” *South Western Baptist*, March 1, 1860, May 10, 1860; “Obituaries,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 19, 1858, August 7, 1858;

²¹ Blackwood, “Duties and Pleasures of Woman,” *Mississippi Baptist*, July 15, 1858; “Obituary,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 28, 1852; C.K. Marshall, “Letter from Jackson, MS,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November, 12, 1853; “Obituary,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, March 11, 1854.

²² “Ladies' Department, What She Did,” *Mississippi Baptist*, May 10, 1860; “The Church Service,” *Church Herald*, April. 9, 1852; Blackwood, “Duties and Pleasures of Woman,” *Mississippi Baptist*, July 15, 1858.

²³ Clitherall, *Diary*, vol. 16, June 8, 1858, Clitherall Diaries.

distribute church alms for the poor.²⁴ Churchwomen without officially recognized roles could also use their connections with clergy to facilitate Christian benevolence to those in need. In Columbus, Mississippi in the 1840s, Episcopalian Mary Smith visited the sick and dying in prisons and would inform her priest, Edward Fontaine, when prisoners were in need of a minister to perform their last rites.²⁵ In 1853, when Mobile was suffering from a yellow fever epidemic, a female member of the Presbyterian Church in Selma used the network of Presbyterian preachers in her area to send a donation “for the relief of sufferers.”²⁶ Individual Protestant women used their church communities as a way to reach those in need.

Female Charitable Societies

Middle- and upper-class women not only looked to their ministers for support in their charity work, but also sought out groups of like-minded women motivated by a Christian duty to care for less fortunate women and children. The earliest female charitable societies in the Gulf South which included Protestant women followed northern models of benevolence: they were non-sectarian Christian and based in major cities to deal with urban problems associated with immigration and concentrated population.²⁷ The New Orleans Female Orphan Society, established in 1817, was even

²⁴ Roberts, *Sesquicentennial History*, 31; Gurley, Diary, December 10, 1833, Gurley Family Papers; Minutes, Baptist Church of Christ at Hephzibah, LA Books, vol. 2, 14; Pisgah Baptist Church Minutes, May 8, 1852, box 8, folder 15, Alabama Church and Synagogue Records; A.G.B., "Obituaries," *South Western Baptist*, March 17, 1859; Minutes, April 20, 1861, First Baptist Church, Huntsville Records.

²⁵ Fontaine, Journal, September 29, 1847, Edward Fontaine Papers.

²⁶ W.T. Hamilton to Rev. A.A. Porter, September 30, 1853, Correspondence, A. A. Porter papers, CPTS.

²⁷ In New Orleans, female education and care of orphans at the Catholic Ursuline convent predated Protestant female charitable societies; see Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*. For northern Protestant parallels,

founded by a group of northern-born Protestant women, mostly Presbyterians and wives of businessmen who had moved to New Orleans and maintained social and economic ties to the East Coast. Nine women, led by Presbyterian Phoebe Hunter of Philadelphia, founded the organization in response to a yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans that hit poor and immigrant neighborhoods the hardest, leaving many children without parents and families without breadwinners. Within a year, what began as women fostering orphan girls in their own homes became an incorporated society run entirely by female officers and subscribers that managed the Poydras Female Asylum, an orphanage for girls named after the society's early benefactor, Julien Poydras. The Poydras Female Asylum, which remained in operation through the Civil War, took in true orphans who had lost both of their parents as well as half orphans and children of impoverished living parents who could not provide for them, some temporarily and some until adulthood.²⁸ Likewise in Mississippi in 1816, a group of close to one hundred Protestant female subscribers founded the Natchez Female Charitable Society, electing female officers and incorporating in 1819. The women organized in order to fund the Christian education of poor children in the city and the financial relief of widows, but in response to a yellow fever outbreak in 1820, they turned their attention to helping orphans and erected an orphanage in 1821.²⁹

see Scott, *Natural Allies*, 12-19, 195; Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*; Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*; Mathews, *Rise of the Public Woman*.

²⁸ Tyler, *New Orleans Women and the Poydras Home*, 25-29.

²⁹ Joseph Stratton, "A History of the Natchez Orphan Asylum," in Natchez Orphan Asylum, *Annual Report* (1855), 9-14; "An Act to Incorporate the Female Charitable Society of Natchez," State Government Records Series 2370; Sparks, "The Good Sisters," 49.

As in the North, taking care of orphaned children and furnishing and maintaining a home for them proved to be a socially acceptable avenue for women's public activism and a natural transition from domestic responsibilities. In board meeting minutes in New Orleans, female officers often referred to the children in the Poydras Asylum as "the family."³⁰ In his 1855 address at the anniversary meeting of the Natchez Orphan Asylum, Presbyterian minister Joseph Stratton argued that women, especially mothers, were particularly qualified for this type of work and celebrated that the society has always been entirely run by women: "The best gauranty that the public can have, that the charge of such an institution will be properly administered, is found in the fact just mentioned, that the supervisors of the orphan family are females, most of them mothers, who come to the work entrusted to them with the experience and the tenderness of feeling gained from the intercourse with families of their own."³¹ In these charitable societies private motherhood signaled an aptitude for public motherhood.

Central to women's justification for organizing orphanage societies was also a claim to religious duty. In making a home for orphans and children of destitute families at the Poydras Asylum, society secretary Mary Stewart described her fellow members as "faithful stewarts" [stewards] and "Almoners" to whom God had entrusted "so many of the lambs of His flock."³² Annual reports for the female orphan societies in New Orleans and Natchez emphasized that their institutions provided for both the temporal and spiritual needs of orphans with regular religious instruction, often directed by female

³⁰ Board Minute Books, vol. 3 and 4, October 27, 28, 1834, November 3-20, 1834, January 17, 1848, Poydras Home Records; Tyler, *New Orleans Women and the Poydras Home*, 194.

³¹ Stratton, "A History of the Natchez Orphan Asylum," 25.

³² Annual Report, January 16, 1857, Board Minute Book, vol. 6, Poydras Home Records.

teachers.³³ At the same time, by saving poor and orphaned children these societies also hoped to “restrain the progress of vice and immorality” in urban areas associated with moral decay, as was stated in the act to incorporate the Female Charitable Society of Natchez in 1819.³⁴ Over the following decades Protestant ministers continued to credit these societies with saving their cities from depravity. In his 1838 address to the Natchez society, Presbyterian S. G. Winchester declared, “Your labors, moreover, not only respect the orphans themselves, but also the welfare and peace of the community of which they are hereafter to become members.”³⁵ Male church leaders looked to the middle- and upper-class female leaders of these benevolent societies to reform cities like Natchez and New Orleans associated with moral decay by saving the future generations of the lower class.

The board of the Poydras Female Asylum also offered financial support and job opportunities to widows and destitute women throughout the antebellum period, another acceptable avenue for public female benevolence.³⁶ Quoting a “Mrs. Kirkland,” the Episcopal *Church Herald* in Vicksburg noted, “woman is the natural and God appointed aid of woman in her needs; the woman that feels not this, has yet to learn her mission

³³ Natchez Orphan Asylum, *Annual Report* (1838), 14; *ibid.*, *Annual Report* (1847), 15-16; *ibid.*, *Annual Report* (1852), 3; Board Minute Books, vols. 5-7, January 16, 1854, January 16, 1855, January 16, 1856, January 16, 1858, Poydras Home Records; Poydras Female Asylum, *Fortieth Annual and First Printed Report of the Poydras Female Asylum* (New Orleans: Clark & Brisbin, 1857), 13.

³⁴ “An Act to Incorporate,” February 12, 1819, State Government Records Series 2370.

³⁵ Natchez Orphan Asylum, *Annual Report* (Natchez, 1838), 14; see also, *ibid.*, *Annual Report* (1855), 8.

³⁶ In 1861, the Board still supported fifteen widows, see Poydras Female Asylum, *Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the Poydras Female Asylum for the Relief of Widows and Orphans* (New Orleans, 1861), 6.

aright. Among the most precious of woman's rights is the right to good to her own sex."³⁷

Women founded the first female benevolent society in Mobile, Alabama in 1829 specifically to aid impoverished widows. Society members collected donations to purchase food, clothing, and medical supplies for women living on their own, and by 1835 they funded and maintained a group of houses known as "Widows' Row" for those who also needed a place to live.³⁸ Again women's traditional housekeeping responsibilities translated into collective public charity within the space of a benevolent society. While these early societies did not have ties to a specific church, they opened meetings with prayer, invited Protestant ministers to preach, and claimed religious motivation for their work.³⁹

By the late 1830s, Protestant women had founded female charitable or Dorcas societies in Gulf South cotton towns of Tuscaloosa and Greensboro, Alabama and Woodville, Columbus, and Vicksburg, Mississippi.⁴⁰ Unlike their earlier urban counterparts, however, all of these societies were associated with a specific Methodist, Presbyterian, or Episcopal Church, often using space within the church for meetings and drawing membership from the female church rolls. Episcopal women, on average the

³⁷ "Good Words by Mrs. Kirkland," *Church Herald*, April 28, 1854.

³⁸ "Guide to the Mobile Female Benevolent Society Records," The Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama, Mobile, Alabama, accessed December 1, 2018, <https://www.southalabama.edu/libraries/mccallarchives/mfbs.pdf>.

³⁹ For examples, see Natchez Orphan Asylum, *Annual Report* (1855), 9; Board Minute Book, vol. 6, June 4, 1857, vol. 6, Poydras Home Records; Record Book, vol. 1, February 1, 1860, Tuscaloosa Female Benevolent Society Records; Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 88; Quist, "Slaveholding Operatives," 522.

⁴⁰ Gayle, *Journal of Sarah Haynsworth Gayle*, 264; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Seventh Annual Convention*, 16; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 3, 201-202; William Winans to Mrs. M.B. McGehee, October 18, 1838, Winans Papers; Mrs. E. A. Wright to Anne Burnham, October 29, 1836, Burnham Letters; Eliza Williams to John Gurley, May 14, 1839, Gurley Family Papers.

wealthiest of Protestant women in the region, were especially active throughout Louisiana in the 1850s, organizing their own benevolent societies at St. James' Church, Baton Rouge; St. James' Church, Alexandria, and even Emmanuel Church in rural Plaquemine Parish.⁴¹ Clergy encouraged the formation of these female benevolence societies as part of establishing a church presence in the region and they became an indicator of a church's health and influence on the larger community. Elijah Guion, rector of St. James, Baton Rouge, included their female benevolent association in his annual report to the diocese in 1855 as an example of how "the temporal and spiritual interests of the Parish, have, under the Divine blessing, assumed a more healthy and promising aspect, for which, we thank God and take courage."⁴² It was common for female church aid sewing societies, once they had funded the construction of their churches, to then turn their fundraisers towards charitable causes. Dividing the proceeds from sewing projects, fairs, and door-to-door collections between church projects and charity, they expanded their Christian stewardship to those in need outside of the church, especially women and children.⁴³ Female benevolent societies and hybrid charity and church aid societies were a key part of the transition from frontier missions to established churches that wanted to invest in reforming their communities, especially in a region where public funds to provide such services were rare.

⁴¹ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Seventeenth Annual Convention*, 45-46; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Nineteenth Annual Convention*, 24; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1854), 47.

⁴² Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Seventeenth Annual Convention*, 46.

⁴³ For examples, see Mrs. E. A. Wright To Anne Burnham, October 29, 1836, Burnham Letters; Vestry Minutes, March 22, 1855, Christ Church, Episcopal (Baldwin County, AL) Records; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirteenth Annual Convention*, 5.

Women in the rural Gulf South were also able to extend their charity work outside of their own neighborhoods by helping cities with concentrated populations of impoverished women and children. Female subscribers and even officers of the Natchez Orphan Asylum lived in Natchez's surrounding plantation districts.⁴⁴ In the early 1850s, when Susan Ker served on the board of managers, she traveled from Good Hope Plantation in Concordia, Louisiana across the Mississippi River from Natchez to attend meetings and visit the asylum.⁴⁵ Other Louisiana women organized to help cities like New Orleans during yellow fever epidemics.⁴⁶ Female church sewing societies in Baton Rouge raised money and sent white nurses to New Orleans in 1853, praised by their local newspaper for being "angels of mercy," who "came forward in advance of other aid."⁴⁷ In 1854 the Ladies Benevolent Society of Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Plaquemine sent \$300 to care for children in New Orleans who had been orphaned by the 1853 epidemic. Their rector wrote that these women were motivated to help the city's "destitute orphans" by a "feeling of devout thankfulness to Divine Providence for the almost uninterrupted health of the Parish" in rural Plaquemine.⁴⁸ These women were aware of charity needs outside of their own communities and with claims to Christian duty, participated in a larger network of female benevolence in the region.

⁴⁴ Natchez Orphan Asylum, *Annual Report* (1855), 14; *ibid.*, *Annual Report* (1854), 3.

⁴⁵ In August, Ker traveled from Linden or Glenhood Plantation outside of Natchez to the Natchez Asylum, see Mary Susan Ker, *Diary*, August 7, 1850, August 13, 1850, July 30, 1855, August 13, 1855, Ker (John and Family) Papers.

⁴⁶ For an example of a Catholic female benevolent society working to aid poor families during yellow fever epidemics in New Orleans, see Les Dames de la Providence, in Bachand, "Gendered Mobility," 53.

⁴⁷ "Sewing Societies," *The Weekly Comet* (Baton Rouge, LA), June 17, 1855.

⁴⁸ Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Sixteenth Annual Convention*, 47.

In the 1840s and 1850s, the number of female benevolence societies run by women in the urban Gulf South multiplied. These late antebellum organizations were also more likely to be tied to a specific church or denomination. Episcopal and Presbyterian women were particularly active, forming benevolent sewing societies in New Orleans at the Episcopal Church of the Annunciation, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and Prytania Street Presbyterian Church; in Vicksburg at First Presbyterian Church; and in Mobile at Christ Church, Episcopal.⁴⁹ Even the Tuscaloosa Female Benevolent Society organized in 1853, unique in its nondenominational character, had a Presbyterian majority and often held their officer meetings at the Presbyterian Church.⁵⁰ Episcopal women throughout New Orleans ran the Protestant Episcopal Children's Home, electing two female officers from each of the five Episcopal churches in the city serve as the board of managers.⁵¹ The Reverend A. D. McCoy, rector of St. Peter's Church, established the orphanage in 1859, but within a few months realized that his church could not financially support it and the Episcopal women of the city took over. McCoy's wife served as president of their board.⁵² In addition to raising over \$2,600 at a fair in 1860, they used their church connections to collect donations from their own congregations in the city as well as from

⁴⁹ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 11, 379; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Fourth Convention*, 33; Mary Folger Memorandum Book; December 15, 1858, December 22, 1858, January 5, 1859, Mary and Eunice Macy Folger Collection, MSS. 795, LARC; Eliza Williams to John Gurley, May 14, 1839, Gurley Family Papers; Vestry Minutes, March 22, 1855, Christ Church, Episcopal (Baldwin County, AL) Records.

⁵⁰ Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 88; Pamela Hopkins to Maria Hopkins Walker, March 1844, Rice Family Papers.

⁵¹ Protestant Episcopal Children's Home, *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Children's Home of the Protestant Episcopal Church of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1861), 17.

⁵² Protestant Episcopal Children's Home, *First Annual Report*, 5.

Episcopal congregations throughout the Diocese of Louisiana.⁵³ Making a religious appeal for support in 1860, secretary Mary Randall wrote of the female officers, “they feel assured that the knowledge of the wants of an Institution in which every Episcopalian in the city and diocese is interested, is only necessary to induce them to give, each according to his means, and that they will not withhold from the Lord that which cost them something. He hath said, give and it shall be give unto you . . .”⁵⁴ A crucial part of Protestant women’s benevolence work in the Gulf South was calling on men to fulfill their own Christian duty to financially support women’s charities.⁵⁵ The Children’s Home, which struggled under male control, found financial stability through the fundraising leadership and day-to-day management of Episcopal women.

Other orphanages remained nondenominational Protestant but, like Protestant female academies, distanced themselves from Catholic influence in the decades leading up to the Civil War. The Female Orphan Society of New Orleans had a long history of Protestant-Catholic cooperation in managing the Poydras Asylum, beginning in 1824 when it took over care for Catholic orphans from the Ursuline convent by order of city officials.⁵⁶ The society elected both Protestant and Catholic board members and employed the Catholic Sisters of Charity from a convent in Maryland to run the Poydras Asylum alongside several Protestant female teachers and employees. In the 1830s,

⁵³ Minute Book, vol. 3, January 17, 1860, Protestant Episcopal Children's Home, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana Papers, Series 558-C, Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana Records, LARC.

⁵⁴ Protestant Episcopal Children’s Home, *First Annual Report*, 7.

⁵⁵ See also, Natchez Orphan Asylum, *Annual Report* (1849), 5.

⁵⁶ Board Minute Books, vol. 2, October 27, 1824, Poydras Home Records; Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 235-239.

however, religious conflict grew between Protestant and Catholic employees and between the board and the Sisters of Charity. Board members accused the sisters of not respecting the ultimate authority of the board over hiring decisions and employee accommodations. The Sisters of Charity resigned in 1836 and opened their own Catholic orphanage in New Orleans, but conflict continued at Poydras Asylum when a Catholic priest was accused of inspiring the Catholic girls to boycott religious instruction because Protestant teachers used a different version of the New Testament than the Catholic Church.⁵⁷ The board ultimately severed Catholic priests' influence over orphans in their institution when they relocated in 1856 to their newly built facility outside of town. Not only was the new Poydras Home too far away for residents to attend Sunday services in the city, but the board also voted to only select "clergymen of the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Methodist Churches" to serve as visiting chaplains, rotating annually between these denominations.⁵⁸ The board also fired Catholic employees who refused to encourage orphans to attend the Protestant religious services held at the new orphanage or who refused to attend themselves, and in 1861 voted to stop hiring Catholic employees altogether.⁵⁹ From 1824 to 1861, the Poydras Home went from an organization run by Catholic nuns to a completely Protestant staff running secular and religious instruction, even though the majority of the orphans still came from Catholic families.

⁵⁷ Board Minute Book, vol. 3, September 1, 1836-November 14, 1836, Poydras Home Records; Tyler, *New Orleans Women and the Poydras Home*, 66-86. For more on Catholic orphanages and homes for widows in antebellum New Orleans, see Boudreaux, "A History of Philanthropy in New Orleans," 158-161, 176-178; Tyler, *New Orleans Women and the Poydras Home*, 80-82.

⁵⁸ Board Minute Books, vol. 7, April 17, 1862, Poydras Home Records.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, July 3, 1856, vol. 7, February 7, 1861.

Women in New Orleans and other lower Gulf South cities also formed distinctly Protestant institutions in opposition to Catholic influence. After yellow fever epidemics in 1837 and 1839 in Mobile, women founded the “Protestant Orphan Asylum Society” specifically for Protestant families as the city already had a Catholic orphanage.⁶⁰ In the 1850s in New Orleans women founded the “Protestant Orphans’ Home” for the children of Protestant families.⁶¹ The “Society for the Relief of Destitute Females and Their Helpless Children” began as a charitable sewing society in First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, but after an epidemic in 1847, they sought assistance from other Protestant women in the city to care for sick and poor women.⁶² In 1851 the society opened St. Anna’s Asylum, a home for Protestant widows and their children, and raised money for a new building finished in 1854.⁶³ In 1855 in Baton Rouge, a local newspaper praised the multiple church sewing societies which supported a Protestant orphanage there whose work was “ever blessed” by God, while criticizing the orphanages run by Catholic Sisters of Charity: “that order, with all the work of mercy it performs, is made by man, one of his powerful agents, to force upon the world, a religion that cannot exist, where there is any freedom of conscience and republican feeling.”⁶⁴ Reflecting a national rise in anti-Catholicism, Protestant women, particularly in cities known for having a large Catholic

⁶⁰ Thomason, Michael. *Mobile: The New History of Alabama's First City* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 84.

⁶¹ "The Orphan's Home," *Daily Picayune*, May 9, 1855.

⁶² Boudreaux, "A History of Philanthropy in New Orleans," 171, 436.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁶⁴ "Sewing Societies," *The Weekly Comet*, June 17, 1855.

presence, increasingly physically separated their spaces of Christian benevolence from spaces managed by Catholic women.⁶⁵

Race and Class Politics of Benevolent Societies

As with church aid societies, Protestant female benevolent societies were modeled after contemporary male organizations with regular meetings, elected officers, and membership dues. Larger organizations like the Female Orphan Society in New Orleans and the Female Benevolent Society in Tuscaloosa wrote constitutions and formed committees to collect subscriptions, visit potential charity recipients, make purchases, and run fundraisers.⁶⁶ In 1855, *The Weekly Comet* praised Baton Rouge's Protestant female benevolence societies for their democratic meeting format: "all meet upon an equality; first at one, and then at another private residence; and in fear that some may feel mortified at not being able to entertain the company as well as others, all refreshments are forbidden."⁶⁷ Nevertheless, elite slaveholding women with free time for charity still tended to dominate leadership positions. These women turned their homes into public meeting spaces to facilitate collective Christian benevolence and, even without refreshments, their parlors were on display as material markers of social status.

At the region's orphanage societies, managing boards were mostly married elites who hired unmarried middle- and lower-class women as teachers, matrons, and laundresses. Elite women ran decision-making bodies and lower-class women managed

⁶⁵ See also Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 233.

⁶⁶ "Constitution of the Female Orphan Society," Minute Books, January 21, 1817, Poydras Home Records; Record Book, vol. 1, Tuscaloosa Female Benevolent Society Records. For more examples, see Mary Folger, Memorandum Book, January 5, 1859, Folger Collection; "Charter of the Children's Home of the Protestant Episcopal Church in New Orleans," Protestant Episcopal Children's Home Records; Natchez Orphan Asylum, *Annual Report* (1855), 9-14.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

day-to-day operations. Board members could hold office for years, even decades, with symbolic reelections at annual meetings. It was common for daughters and nieces to essentially inherit these offices when their older relatives were ready to retire. Presbyterian Joseph Stratton praised the Natchez Female Charitable Society in his 1855 address for being “handed down from mother to daughter through three generations of the females of Natchez. There are members in the present board of Managers, whose grandmothers, served in the first board ever elected.”⁶⁸ Leading families maintained control of the female charitable societies and at the same time trained their daughters and granddaughters for public lives of service.

Elite women who dominated benevolent society boards also reinforced class hierarchy with the language of religious duty by making moral judgments about who to help and who to hire. Officers of the Tuscaloosa Benevolent Society served on visiting committees which would interview potential clients in their homes and “enquire into the character and condition of the persons assisted,” almost always the matriarch of a family in need.⁶⁹ As Marise Bachand has argued, in antebellum southern cities like Charleston and New Orleans, “often animated by religious fervor, benevolence brought ladies into unrespectable spaces they would not have visited otherwise.”⁷⁰ Women justified crossing class barriers into the physical spaces occupied by lower-class women—the poorer parts of town— as the means to moral reform. Visitors then presented their reports at board meetings and officers voted on whether the mother or widow was worthy of assistance.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 25. See also: Board Minute Books, vol. 4, April 20, 1849, Poydras Home Records; Tyler, *New Orleans Women and the Poydras Home*, 25.

⁶⁹ Record Book, February 2, 1857, Tuscaloosa Female Benevolent Society Records.

⁷⁰ Bachand, “Gendered Mobility,” 54.

St. Anna's Asylum made moral, class-based judgments when they separated housing 'for respectable aged females . . . accustomed to the comforts of life' who paid a fee for use of a private parlor and dining room; physically able poorer residents, on the other hand, were praised for being industrious, taking in washing and sewing to pay their way.⁷¹ In board meeting minutes, the managers of the Poydras Asylum justified firing teachers and staff when employees violated middle-class standards of morality. As the secretary of the board explained in 1840, "the children of course must look to the ladies placed over them for morals, and the managers expect those Ladies will at all times be very guarded in their expressions and examples."⁷² In 1848, the managers defended firing a washerwoman and two seamstresses for complaining about the cook's food because they were "setting an example of ingratitude to the children."⁷³ These morality standards also applied to enslaved women of color purchased by the Female Charitable Society to work at the Poydras Asylum, but with harsher consequences. When violated, enslaved women like "Rachel the laundress" were instead threatened with "being removed and sold at Auction to the highest bidder."⁷⁴ Female officers of benevolence societies, slaveholders themselves, used standards of Christian morality to reinforce the class and racial order rather than challenging it.

While female benevolence organizations in the North were becoming increasingly secular and political after 1830, their Gulf South counterparts maintained ties to churches

⁷¹ *Daily Picayune*, June 11, 1854; Boudreaux, "A History of Philanthropy in New Orleans," 437, 180.

⁷² Board Minute Books, vol. 3, May 11, 1840, Poydras Home Records.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, March 16, 1848.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, May 20, 1840.

to legitimize their projects with the language of Christian duty and avoid accusations of feminist or abolitionist influence.⁷⁵ Rather than challenge slaveholder control over their enslaved work force, women's charity organizations in the South limited their assistance to white families. In Charleston, abolitionist Sarah Grimke pointed out the hypocrisy of a slaveholding "charitable woman" who gave Christian alms to the white poor across town while also regularly beating her enslaved seamstress, "without, so far as appeared, exciting any feelings of compassion."⁷⁶ The vast majority of white women in the Gulf South saw this racial distinction in benevolence as necessary to maintain the institution of slavery. Several of the larger orphanages bought and sold enslaved laborers to work in their institutions or inherited them as part of estates.⁷⁷ From 1858 to 1861, the Tuscaloosa Female Benevolent Society gifted poor white women with afternoons of enslaved labor, paying owners of enslaved women who were hired out to perform domestic duties like washing and cleaning for white clients of the benevolent society.⁷⁸ Some of these women were named in the society records, like "Hagar (servant)," named after the Old Testament servant of Sarah, who was hired out "for waiting upon" white widows in town who appealed to the female benevolent society for financial assistance.⁷⁹ Other enslaved

⁷⁵ For increasingly secular benevolence in the antebellum North, see Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, 132-134; Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, 90.

⁷⁶ "Testimony of Sarah Grimke," in Theodore D. Weld, *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York, 1839), 22, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/weld/weld.html>. See also, Bellows *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, 45.

⁷⁷ Board Minute Book, vol. 2 and vol. 3, May 20, 1824, April 12, 1828, February 9, 1832, June 11, 1832, April 3, 1835, Poydras Home Records; "Charter," Protestant Episcopal Children's Home Records.

⁷⁸ Record Book, vol. 1, September 20, 1858, December 21, 1858, August 3, 1859, January 14, 1860, March 10, 1860, April 12, 1860, Tuscaloosa Female Benevolent Society Records.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, August 3, 1859, November 4, 1859.

laborers appear in the records only as “domestic,” reduced to the type of labor they performed for white women.⁸⁰ Female charity in a slave society reinforced racial distinctions over class by elevating poor white women with temporary slaveholder status. The white women of the benevolent society took the credit for helping white mothers and widows in need, but enslaved women performed the actual labor of Christian benevolence.

Some Protestant women of color in the urban Gulf South were able to participate of their own free will in mutual aid societies, which directed charity within their own communities. In 1855 in New Orleans, the *Daily Picayune* reported that “the Colored Ladies of New Orleans” were holding a fair for the benefit of the male and female “Lutheran Benevolent Association” which functioned as a mutual aid society for over six hundred black members. Members had access to funds for the “the relief of the sick and disabled, of the widow and the orphan, and the burial of the dead.”⁸¹ The church association created an independent community of support, a safety net for members and their families that was not dependent on the whims of white charity from slaveholders or employers. As with church aid societies, black women led the way in fundraising efforts for the mutual aid society. In 1857, the women also helped organize an anniversary dinner for the members of benevolent society, held most likely outdoors, “on the premises of James W. Behan,” an influential white supporter of the society. The *Daily Picayune* praised this white benefactor and used the event as evidence of the benevolence of their slave society: “perhaps some of our kind friends of the negropholist press of the

⁸⁰ Record Book, vol. 1, March 10, 1860, April 12, 1860, April 20, 1860, Tuscaloosa Female Benevolent Society Records.

⁸¹ “New Orleans Fair,” *Daily Picayune*, March 27, 1855.

North may find in this brief report fresh material for reflection and comment, in relation to the character and working of 'the peculiar institution.'⁸² At the same time, this benevolent society provided an opportunity for free women of color to engage in Christian benevolence—making decisions about how to spend their time and money for the benefit of their own community and operating safely in public with the help of a white benefactor. The society did not challenge the racial order of a slave society but it did offer women of color a space for public activism which white women did not fill, and provided male and female members with some sense of security for the future.⁸³

White women with social connections also tended to have more success with raising money. The female board of managers of the Protestant Orphan's Home in New Orleans consistently raised over \$3,000 annually for the orphanage at their spring fair which included multiple nights of dinners and performances by well-known musicians.⁸⁴ Members of elite New Orleans' families, female officers used their connections to newspaper editors and city officials to publicize their fair and to secure donations of ice, gas, and omnibuses from local companies.⁸⁵ Female officers of incorporated societies like the Female Orphan Society of the Poydras Home, the Protestant Orphans Home in New Orleans, and the Natchez Female Charitable Society also bought, rented, and sold real estate, exercising financial power as representatives of a corporation denied to them

⁸² "Lutheran Benevolent Society of New Orleans," *Daily Picayune*, July 16, 1857.

⁸³ For Catholic mutual aid societies for women of color in New Orleans, see: Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*, 239-240; Boudreaux, "A History of Philanthropy in New Orleans," 183-184; For Protestant mutual aid societies for women of color in antebellum Virginia, see Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 7.

⁸⁴ "Orphans' Fair," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 19, 1855; "A Card," *Daily Picayune*, April 24, 1857; "The Orphans' Home," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 1, 1858; Boudreaux, "A History of Philanthropy in New Orleans," 232-233.

⁸⁵ "Acknowledgement," *Daily Picayune*, April 12, 1858.

as individual married women.⁸⁶ These women then used family connections to lawyers and bankers to arrange favorable contracts for property sales and to manage their society's investments and inheritances, gaining valuable experience networking and managing a corporation in the process. Social status and the professional contacts that came with it helped female officers navigate through male-dominated secular spaces of business, real estate, and law, while still acting within an acceptable space for female religious activism—a benevolent society.

Some of the larger female benevolent organizations had parallel male boards or “trustees” who offered advice and financial oversight, but even in these cases, female officers found ways to maintain their autonomy in financial decisions. The Episcopal Children's Home in New Orleans, for instance, had an all female board of managers from members of each of the five Episcopal Churches in the city as well as a “board of council” of male members from the same five churches. The board of council appointed the male treasurer and the board of managers appointed the female “sub-treasurer”—often a husband and wife team—but the female officers had veto power over the selection of the treasurer. Also written into their constitution was the provision that “no purchase or sale of real estate shall be made without the consent of the Board of Managers” and the female officials had final say on all hiring and firing decisions inside the Children's Home, including decisions to pay for hired-out enslaved laborers.⁸⁷ The female board of managers for the Poydras Asylum did not have a shadow male government, but did retain

⁸⁶ Board Minute Books, vol. 3, March 26, 1839, October 16, 1848, Poydras Home Records; Boudreaux, “A History of Philanthropy in New Orleans,” 165; “An Act to Incorporate the Female Charitable Society of Natchez,” State Government Records Series 2370.

⁸⁷ Protestant Episcopal Children's Home, *First Annual Report*, 4. See also, Boudreaux, “A History of Philanthropy in New Orleans, 1835-1862,” 164, 219.

a male lawyer and accountant to advise them. In 1839, when the female board disagreed with the advice of their lawyer over the sale of a property and the lawyer threatened to resign, the officers resolved that they had “only exercised what they consider a sacred right to approve or dissent, after due reflection, upon all matters submitted them, in which the interests of the Society are involved.”⁸⁸ When the male board of directors of a boy’s orphan asylum in town tried to pressure them to exclude another benevolent institution from a shared inheritance, the female board of the Poydras Asylum refused, resolving at a meeting that it was “inconsistent with the spirit of charity by which they profess to be governed, to become instrumental in any degree in depriving one charitable institution of that which was undoubtedly intended it should possess.”⁸⁹ On multiple occasions the board claimed corporate autonomy from male oversight as a moral or sacred right necessary to do the work of caring for destitute women and children.

Scholars have argued that autonomy declined in female organizations in Charleston, Savannah, and Petersburg, Virginia in the 1850s as men and government officials took over social welfare operations, but in the Gulf South, men continued to defer to women and their Christian organizations to direct benevolence work.⁹⁰ Large-scale orphanages like the Poydras Asylum and the Natchez Orphan Asylum received funding from city and state governments and volunteer male organizations like the local

⁸⁸ Board Minute Books, vol. 3, April 4, 1839, Poydras Home Records.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, July 15, 1836.

⁹⁰ Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, 44; Lockley, “The Rise and Fall of Female Benevolence,” 197-209; Lebsack, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 229-230.

Freemasons, Sons of Malta, and Odd Fellows donated to female benevolent societies.⁹¹ They recognized women's prerogative over charity to women and children in their towns. Organizations like the Tuscaloosa Benevolent Society were not declining in 1850s but instead were physically expanding the space of their operations. By 1861 they found it necessary to divide the city into districts and appoint visiting committees and subscription collectors for each district to manage their growing numbers of clients and subscribers.⁹² In the rural Gulf South, church sewing societies and informal groups of churchwomen continued as some of the only organized attempts to provide a safety net for the poor. Charity remained firmly in women's public sphere, justified by women's Christian responsibility to families in need.

Women and the Temperance Movement

Gulf South women's activism in the antebellum temperance movement grew out of the same Christian duty to save families in need— specifically women and children who suffered from the vices of intemperate husbands and fathers. Beginning in the 1830s and becoming more widespread by the 1840s, evangelical ministers in the region preached against the sale and consumption of alcohol (especially liquor) as a root cause of poverty, immorality, and violence in families.⁹³ They encouraged their congregations to take temperance pledges and monitor one another, forming the earliest temperance

⁹¹ Treasurer's Books, vols. 33-39, Poydras Home Records, LARC; Natchez Orphan Asylum, *Annual Report* (1847), 6-7; *ibid.*, *Annual Report* (1854), 3.

⁹² Record Book, vol. 1, December 4, 1861, Tuscaloosa Female Benevolent Society Records.

⁹³ For examples, see "Temperance Festival" *Independent Monitor*, December 28, 1848; Jesse Stratton to Absalom Peters, November 1, 1832, AHMS; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-Third Anniversary*, 9; Tower, Diary, January 15, 1846, February 24, 1846; W.H.N. Magruder, Lecture Notes and Writings, 1843-1849, folder 2, W.H.N. Magruder Papers, MSS. 17, Centenary. For an Episcopal bishop preaching support for temperance, see Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-first Annual Convention*, 19.

societies in the region including auxiliaries to the Sons of Temperance.⁹⁴ Scholarship on the southern antebellum temperance movement tends to focus on these male evangelical leaders and women appear only able to exert a moral influence at home.⁹⁵ Protestant women in the Gulf South, however, were more similar to their northern counterparts than previously assumed. They too found in the temperance cause a way to harness the language of Christian duty to justify organizing with other women and even speaking in public, but did so without crossing into dangerous territory of abolitionism or women's suffrage.

As with benevolent societies, all-female temperance societies in the Gulf South began in urban areas as the means to reform the social ills of cities. In May 1844, women in New Orleans founded the Lady Franklin Total Abstinence Society, officially predating the organization of the male Franklin Total Abstinence Society by six months. The Lady Franklin Society was a combination temperance and charity society. Members not only pledged to remain temperate themselves but also worked to reform impoverished "inebriates" in the local workhouses. In its first three months, the society persuaded sixteen women and ten men at the workhouse to pledge sobriety and provided them with

⁹⁴ "Temperance," *Flag of the Union*, August 22, 1835; "Temperance," *Alabama Baptist*, December 9, 1843; S.E.J., "From a Gentleman in Alabama," *Journal of the American Temperance Union* 9, no. 11 (November 1845): 163; "Objections to Joining the Sons of Temperance," *South Western Baptist*, August 21, 1850; H.T. Lewis, H.M. Youngblood, W. Ford, "Mississippi Conference Reports, Temperance," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, December 27, 1856; Christian, *History of Baptists in Louisiana*, 74.

⁹⁵ Ian R. Tyrrell, "Drink and Temperance in the Antebellum South: An Overview and Interpretation," *The Journal of Southern History* 48, no. 4 (November 1982), 492; Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 154-155; Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 36; Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, 115; John Quist notes a few examples of women making temperance banners in Tuscaloosa County, but mostly focuses on their private role influencing male family members, in *Restless Visionaries*, 165, 195-199. Elizabeth Varon gives only one example of a woman speaking publicly on temperance, but interprets her role as symbolic and the rise of the Sons of Temperance as a moment of decline for female activism in the movement, in *We Mean to Be Counted*, 6, 35-38.

clothing, housing, and employment. As “directress” Elizabeth Daly declared in the society’s quarterly report, “Thus these unfortunate men and women were placed in a condition to become again respectable and useful members of society.”⁹⁶ Within a year, the society expanded their reform operations to include visits to the parish prison, “delivering addresses to the prisoners, and endeavoring by every incentive to persuade these unfortunate persons to begin a new course in life, the first step of which is to become temperate.”⁹⁷ Evangelizers of the temperance movement, the Lady Franklins expanded their sphere of activism by taking their message to unrespectable spaces that needed it most.

By 1847, New Orleans also had a local chapter of the Daughters of Temperance, an auxiliary to the Sons of Temperance but with their own female officers, meetings, and agenda.⁹⁸ Like the Lady Franklin Society, the Daughters of Temperance doubled as a charity organization, seeing temperance as the first step in saving the poor of the city. In their praise of the society, local newspapers used the language of women’s religious duty and public motherhood, describing the Daughters as “guardian angels” who, “by kind and soothing admonitions, and still more by example, can recall the drunkard from his heedless path.”⁹⁹ The editors of the *Daily Picayune* even claimed that these women “have

⁹⁶ Andrew Daly “Temperance in New Orleans,” *Journal of the American Temperance Union* 9, no. 11, 166.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ “Grand Union—Daughters of Temperance,” *Daily Picayune*, April 29, 1851.

⁹⁹ *Daily Crescent*, May 1, 1849, cited in Boudreaux, “A History of Philanthropy in New Orleans,” 95; “Grand Union—Daughters of Temperance,” *Daily Picayune*, April 29, 1851.

often succeeded when all other means have failed.”¹⁰⁰ The Daughters of Temperance also took up a cause of specific concern to women: helping the wives of intemperate men who were struggling to care for their families because of their husbands’ drinking habits. They opened a sewing repository in the city, taking in sewing jobs which they “let out to wives of improvident husbands” as a means of employment.¹⁰¹ They also called on their brother organization, the Sons of Temperance, to support their repository as customers—to “hand in their favors, and be active in procuring those of their friends.”¹⁰² In Tuscaloosa, the Female Benevolent Society filled this role on a smaller scale, justifying financial assistance to a woman in 1858 because she had a “drunken husband.”¹⁰³ These organizations made a special effort to care for women who were victims of male alcohol abuse.

By 1851, the Daughters of Temperance had become a Grand Union with multiple societies or “unions” in New Orleans as well as throughout southern Louisiana. Women founded Daughters of Temperance unions in Gretna, Lafayette, Baton Rouge, Plaquemine, and Pattersonville, each with their own officers and meetings. Officers traveled to New Orleans to attend Grand Union meetings as representatives from each union.¹⁰⁴ No longer just a means to save New Orleans, the Daughters of Temperance organized a coordinated effort to save both urban and rural Louisiana from the evils of

¹⁰⁰ "Grand Union—Daughters of Temperance," *Daily Picayune*, April 29, 1851.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Record Book, vol. 1, February 8, 1858, Tuscaloosa Female Benevolent Society Records.

¹⁰⁴ "Grand Union—Daughters of Temperance," *Daily Picayune*, April 29, 1851.

alcohol consumption. Rather than being isolated to the needs of their own community, female officers heard reports about the progress of other women's efforts across the state and passed that information on to their members back home. Members of the Daughters of Temperance saw themselves as part of a statewide female organization united in the cause of Christian reform.

Following a similar trend in the North, however, by the late 1840s most women's temperance organizations in the Gulf South turned their reform efforts inward.¹⁰⁵ They focused on gaining new members and encouraging each other to lead temperate lives and run temperate households. Organizations like the "Matrons and Maidens of Temperance" founded in 1852 in Selma, Alabama were also less autonomous than the Daughters, playing a subordinate role to the local Sons of Temperance.¹⁰⁶ The Sons recruited their members and even wrote their constitution, which stated that the Daughters of Temperance proved too "inconvenient for ladies to have frequent meetings in private and to submit to the routine of ceremony to sustain such an organization."¹⁰⁷ Inspired by Selma, the Sons of Temperance in rural Maplesville, Alabama invited women to join their own Matrons and Maidens of Temperance and expressed hope that this model would be "generally diffused throughout the length and breadth of our state."¹⁰⁸ Even though male officers directed their shared meetings, the women of these organizations

¹⁰⁵ For a northern comparison, see Ruth M. Alexander "'We Are Engaged as a Band of Sisters': Class and Domesticity in the Washingtonian Temperance Movement, 1840-1850," *Journal of American History* 75, No. 3 (December 1988): 763-785.

¹⁰⁶ "Honor to the Ladies of Selma," *Crystal Fount*, January 30, 1852.

¹⁰⁷ "The Constitution of the Matrons and Maidens of Temperance," *Crystal Fount*, April 2, 1852.

¹⁰⁸ "A Voice from Maplesville," *Crystal Fount*, April 9, 1852.

still met publicly and had some means to control their own affairs. Maiden and Matrons had the right to vote on changes to their constitution and formed their own committees to make sure female members stuck to their temperance pledges, similar to investigative committees for morality trials in evangelical churches.¹⁰⁹

While these organizations had no specific denominational association, male church leaders praised them for fulfilling women's religious duty, describing members as "man's guardian angel" following a "holy mission" of pledging temperance and encouraging their families to do the same.¹¹⁰ The "Daughters of Samaria," on the other hand, an auxiliary of the Independent Order of the Good Samaritans, had a direct connection the Methodist Church as a Methodist preacher founded each order. Beginning in Louisiana in 1855, the Daughters of Samaria had combined meetings with their male counterparts. The Grand Lodge of the Good Samaritans in Franklin, Louisiana, however, required that any new lodge in the state have "at least twelve petitioners, six males and six females to secure a charter," writing the necessity of including women into their constitution.¹¹¹ As N. A. Cravens, minister and founder of the society in Franklin wrote to the *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, "let us go to work at once in good earnest to redeem our state, by the order that calls out fully female influence and cooperation."¹¹² Male temperance organizations continued to recognize the need for organized women's involvement in the movement, not just private influence at home.

¹⁰⁹ "The Constitution of the Matrons and Maidens of Temperance," *Crystal Fount*, April 2, 1852.

¹¹⁰ "A Voice from Maplesville," *Crystal Fount*, April 9, 1852; "Great Meeting in New Orleans," *Journal of the American Temperance Union* 9, No. 6 (June 1845): 92; "Objections to Joining the Sons of Temperance," *South Western Baptist*, August 21, 1850.

¹¹¹ N.A. Craven, "Temperance Information," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 2, 1855.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Even more common than official women's temperance organizations were the individual women, including Episcopalians, who signed temperance pledges and attended the public meetings of male organizations.¹¹³ Some allowed women to join, but informal groups of women also organized separately to support them.¹¹⁴ In 1851, one thousand people participated in a Fourth of July Sons of Temperance parade in Bellefonte, Alabama from the Temperance Hall to the Methodist Church, led by a brass band and the Bellefonte Section of Cadets and, as the *Crystal Fount* reported, they were "joined by the Ladies in the rear, to grace the imposing spectacle," adding respectability and moral approval to the march by their participation.¹¹⁵ The most common means of collective female support included marching in parades, singing hymns, providing food and non-alcoholic refreshments for temperance celebrations, and sewing banners and regalia for male organizations, giving domestic chores a public benevolent purpose.¹¹⁶ In 1849, a group of Methodist women from Shreveport presented a banner to the local Sons of Temperance division in the middle of the annual conference for the Methodist Church in

¹¹³ Wightman, Diary, June 16, 1853; Mary Folger Memorandum Book, April 6, 1859, Folger Collection. For Episcopal women, see Fontaine, Journal, July 4, 1848, Edward Fontaine Papers; Eliza Magruder, Diary, August 9, 1849; Robertson, Diary, January 16, 1860, Eliza Ann Marsh Robertson Papers.

¹¹⁴ For women joining co-ed organizations run by men, see "Address before the Warren Circuit Temperance Society" folder 2, W. H. N. Magruder papers; Pamela Hopkins to Arthur F. Hopkins, June 23, 1841, Rice Family Papers; "The New Temperance Society," *The Southron*, May 10, 1843, transcript in Temperance Subject File, MDAH; "Revival Intelligence, Demopolis District, Ala. Conf.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 16, 1852.

¹¹⁵ L.P. & F. Solomon Hogin, "Bro. Warren," *Crystal Fount*, July 4, 1851.

¹¹⁶ "Sons of Temperance," *Alabama Baptist*, July 7, 1848; Winans, Journal, June 8, 1849, Winans Papers; "Benton, Ala.," *Crystal Fount*, June 13, 1851; "Warrior Encampment, Order of Temperance," *Crystal Fount*, July 4, 1851; "Tuskegee, July 18, 1851," *Crystal Fount*, July 25, 1851; Emma Holcombe to Mary Anna Keener, July 11, 1848, Keener Family papers.

Louisiana.¹¹⁷ Often, however, the group of women who made the banner selected one female representative to present it during a temperance event and the men invited her to give an address in front of an audience of men and women. While much of their participation was symbolic and in the background of male events, banner presentations provided women with a unique opportunity to speak publicly in support of temperance in front of a mixed audience.

Both male temperance leaders and female representatives justified women's public speech with an acknowledgement of female humility followed by claims to the religious and moral duty that propelled them to speak. In 1849, when Harriette Wallace presented a banner and addressed the Warrior Division of the Sons of Temperance on behalf of the "ladies of Tuscaloosa," she claimed that while "it is man's prerogative to conceive and execute all great schemes for the improvement of the human race; surely woman is not transcending her privilege, when she stands forth to encourage him onward in his struggles." She went on to connect the temperance movement to the medieval crusades, both holy causes: "Their's [sic] the glory of winning the Holy Sepulchre from the polluted hands of infidels, be yours the noble aim of delivering the immortal souls of men from the degrading thralldom of intemperance."¹¹⁸ Ten years later in Benton, Mississippi, Laura Holmes used her address on behalf of the female members of the male-run Independent Order of Good Templars to celebrate the religious success of their temperance work. With humility she declared that she "preferred to be a silent witness" but felt "called" to acknowledge publicly their "glorious redemption from that demon

¹¹⁷ Woodsman, "Shreveport Correspondence," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 20, 1852.

¹¹⁸ Correspondence," *Independent Monitor*, Jan 4, 1849.

rule” of alcohol, even crediting the order with the rise in membership at her Methodist Church. Holmes went on to praise women specifically: “she [woman] has been consulted, and behold how her cause has triumphed . . . woman is the guardian angel of your Order. Keep her in the councils, and the day is not far when every inebriate will, by her influence, be drawn in to her circle, where her kindness and vigilance will ever preserve them.” Without women’s help, Holmes declared, the temperance movement would be “an ignoble failure.”¹¹⁹ Throughout the Gulf South in the 1840s and 1850s, women made similar addresses highlighting the Christian duty of temperance reform and at least six of these addresses were reprinted in local newspapers in order to reach an even larger audience.¹²⁰

Adding to the religious significance, almost all of these female temperance addresses occurred in local Protestant churches. Churches were often the only buildings in town that provided enough seating, but the choice of location also allowed women to co-opt a space for public speech usually reserved for male preachers. In addition to claiming religious motivations for speaking in the church, Mary Vaughn of Tuscaloosa quoted and interpreted Bible passages in her address and declared that the temperance movement was “the ushering in of the millennial morn,” language which bordered on preaching.¹²¹ Other groups of women presented Bibles at these public events, also accompanied by female speeches. In 1851, Margaret Payne, a representative of the

¹¹⁹ "Fourth of July at Benton—Speech of a young lady," *Mississippi Baptist*, August 18, 1859.

¹²⁰ "Sons of Temperance," *Alabama Baptist*, July 7, 1848; "Correspondence," *Independent Monitor*, January, 4, 1849; "Miss Mary Vaughan's Address," *Crystal Fount*, August 2, 1851; "Bible Presentation," *Crystal Fount*, August 15, 1851; Mary E. Tarrant, "Correspondence," *Crystal Fount*, October 3, 1849; "Fourth of July at Benton—Speech of a young lady," *Mississippi Baptist*, August 18, 1859.

¹²¹ "Miss Mary Vaughan's Address," *Crystal Fount*, August 2, 1851.

“ladies of a portion of Autauga County” in Alabama, requested of the local Sons of Temperance, “that a portion of this holy book be read at the opening of each sermon of your Division, and prayer be offered to the Great Patriarch above to crown your efforts with success.” In response to her address the Sons promised to use this Bible when new members made their temperance pledges. As Vaughn’s address occurred on the Fourth of July, she also presented the division with a “star spangled banner” made by the county women. Her speech drew a connection between their Christian motivations and the female patriots of the Revolutionary Era, including “Lady [Martha] Washington,” who according to Vaughn also “loved her Bible” and was inspired by her piety to aid the war effort.¹²² Denied the ability to preach on Sundays, temperance events in churches opened up the sacred space of the pulpit to women who made religion the crux of their temperance message.

By the 1850s, temperance organizations in both the North and the South adopted legislative means of reform to restrict the sale of liquor, which previous scholars have associated with a decline in women’s activism since women were denied the right to vote or hold political office.¹²³ Gulf South women nevertheless found ways to both support political campaigns and continue the moral battle in their churches. For the latter, women helped enforce temperance as witnesses of drinking infractions in church morality trials.¹²⁴ In 1854, when the rector of a Presbyterian church in Grosse Tete, Louisiana was

¹²² "Bible Presentation," *Crystal Fount*, August 15, 1851.

¹²³ Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 3, 33-39; Mary Ryan, *Women in Public*, 135; John Quist sees the 1850s in Tuscaloosa County as a time of increased women’s participation in temperance but still limited to a “persuasive role” without direct action, in *Restless Visionaries*, 198-199.

¹²⁴ For examples, see Minutes, November 1855, Presbytery of New Orleans Records, 39; Session Minutes, August 3, 1850, Carolina Presbyterian Church Session Records, MDAH.

accused of drunkenness, a church member, “Mrs. Dickinson,” went so far as to find a replacement minister and pay his salary until the rest of the church agreed to fire the offender. She claimed to have acted according to the “dictates of her conscience.”¹²⁵ On the political side of the movement, women in Mississippi and Alabama signed petitions to their legislatures that called for a ban on the sale of liquor in their counties.¹²⁶ A group of women from Pontotoc, Mississippi and its vicinity wrote their own petition and gathered female signatures, writing in the petition as justification for their activism that liquor’s “evil effects fall most heavily upon their sex.”¹²⁷ The right to petition their government was one of the only ways disenfranchised women could publicly and collectively advocate for political change, and these women, motivated by Christian duty to help womankind, used that right to advocate for temperance laws.

In rural northern Louisiana, evangelical women organized to influence elections in favor of temperance candidates and resolutions in person. In 1854, the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* praised the Methodist and Baptist women who were members of the temperance “Lodge of the Knights of Jericho” and had worked to convince the men of Shiloh to vote for temperance party candidates in the local elections: “We suspect the ladies had a hand in it . . . And truly the mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, women all, have an interest in these elections that well entitles them to say ‘our election.’ The victory

¹²⁵ John Slack to Hall Slack, July 11, 1854, Correspondence, Slack Family Papers, MSS. 3598, SHC.

¹²⁶ Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 198-199; “Petitions to the Legislature at the c. sessions of 1850-1859,” box 2370, State Government Records Series 2370, MDAH.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

is theirs. Let them engage elsewhere, as at Shiloh, to win it.”¹²⁸ Women remained crucial to the movement in Shiloh and male leaders in the church and in the temperance lodge acknowledged this. In 1852 in Hamilton, Louisiana, women were not able to change the town vote on requiring establishments to get a license before selling liquor, but they did collectively express their disapproval in a public setting: a group of women attended the town council meeting which was held at the Methodist Church and collectively stomped their feet to indicate their displeasure at a “no license” vote.¹²⁹ The Methodist women of Jackson, Mississippi, on the other hand, obtained the pen the governor used to sign a temperance bill and presented it in a silver box to the Reverend C. K. Marshall in gratitude for the work he had done in encouraging politicians to vote for it.¹³⁰ Lacking a political voice themselves, these evangelical women continued to work together and find other ways to express their opinions on temperance legislation to politicians. By using the space of a church for a demonstration or working through local ministers, women continued to claim religious duty for their activism in symbolic ways, even as the fight for temperance moved into the political sphere.

With the temperance movement of the 1850s, Gulf South evangelical women crossed into the political sphere, but, unlike their northern counterparts, their activism did not challenge the racial or gender hierarchy of their society.¹³¹ In New Orleans,

¹²⁸ "Home Correspondence," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 25, 1854.

¹²⁹ Trippett, "Hastroff Circuit, LA. Conf.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, August 7, 1852.

¹³⁰ *The Mississippian*, June 25, 1854, cited by J.B. Cain, *Methodism in the Mississippi Conference, 1846-1870* (Jackson, MS: The Hawkins Foundation, Mississippi Conference Historical Society, 1939), 122.

¹³¹ For a similar argument about white women in Virginia getting involved in politics through female benevolence, see Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 1-40. For differences with northern women, see Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 199; Scott, *Natural Allies*, 45.

Vicksburg, and Montgomery, free women of color were encouraged to sign temperance pledges and join biracial temperance unions where white women could monitor their behavior.¹³² As slaveholder John Hawkins declared in 1845, enslaved men and women should be encouraged to join temperance societies as a means of social control: “the happy effects produced by getting our colored population to join Temperance societies are very visible,” he wrote, “the master has more confidence and the slaves more indulgence, in consequence of the sobriety of the latter.”¹³³ Southern leaders of the movement were also quick to point out the differences between southern and northern women’s temperance activism. As Harvey Cribbs declared after Mary Vaughn’s address in 1851, “whenever you [southern women] step forward with smiling faces and throbbing bosoms to give aid and encouragement to the advancement of any cause, the whole world feels assured that the cause, whatever it be, is the cause of good morals and of social virtue,” not an “arena for political strife and contention.”¹³⁴ While southern women gave numerous temperance addresses in churches throughout the Gulf South, when Rachel Barker, a northern Quaker, tried to move from moral reform to antislavery in her address in a Methodist Church in New Orleans, church leaders agreed to never invite her to speak in the city again.¹³⁵ Even though the temperance movement was never as successful in the Gulf South as supporters hoped, Protestant women, especially evangelicals, worked to

¹³² "John Hawkins," *Journal of the American Temperance Union* 9, no. 6 (June 1845): 91; "Mississippi—Vicksburg," *Journal of the American Temperance Union* 14, no. 10, (October, 1850): 158; J.W. Brown, "Colored Mission, Montgomery, Ala.," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, November 17, 1855.

¹³³ "John Hawkins," *Journal of the American Temperance Union* 9, no. 6, 91.

¹³⁴ "Miss Mary Vaughan's Address," *Crystal Fount*, August 2, 1851.

¹³⁵ Tower, *Diary*, January 25, 1846, January 31, 1846, February 30, 1846.

make intemperance synonymous with immorality in their churches and female social circles.¹³⁶ As Beth Barton Schweiger has argued, “the antebellum crusade had failed in its attempt to formally regulate liquor but had succeeded wildly in making it disreputable.”¹³⁷ While Schweiger credited evangelical ministers in Virginia, in the Gulf South Protestant women’s activism was crucial to changing public opinion.

Women and Domestic Missions

Other national benevolent causes adopted by Protestant women in the Gulf South were more closely tied to evangelization. This included efforts to spread Christianity throughout the nation by bringing Bibles, religious tracts, and missionaries to areas in need of religious influence. In the 1810s and 1820s, northern Protestants founded national organizations like the American Bible Society, American Tract Society, and American Home Mission Society to accomplish these goals.¹³⁸ They saw the Gulf South as a domestic missionary field in need of their colporteurs and preachers to convert a rural frontier as well as cities like New Orleans with a reputation for irreligion. Gulf South Protestant women were early financial supporters of these multi-denominational northern efforts to bring religious texts and missionaries to the region.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues that drinking remained a “function of masculinity” in the antebellum South, despite temperance literature on the “viciousness of the alcoholic husband,” but also claimed that “upper-class women who partook of anything stronger than a sweet wine lost respectability,” in *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 278-279.

¹³⁷ Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 184.

¹³⁸ Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 23-24.

¹³⁹ *Baton Rouge Gazette*, May 19, 1827; Zebulon Butler to Rev. A Peter, August 28, 1828, Zebulon Butler Letters, MDAH; J.N. Carothers to Absalom Peters, April 24, 1833, Incoming Correspondence, box 1, Alabama, AHMS; Quist, “Slaveholding Operatives,” 521-522; Bible Society Minutes, 1820-1830, vol. F, C.C. Clay Papers, Duke, 69; Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 41.

Over the next few decades, however, evangelization efforts tended to break along denominational lines. Gulf South Presbyterians continued to support the American Home Missionary Society, a mostly Congregationalist and Presbyterian organization based in New York City, while Methodist, Baptist, and Episcopal statewide governing bodies formed auxiliary missionary societies to expand their denomination's efforts in their own states. Individual women appear in their records as donors and subscribing members and some churchwomen organized female societies which gave collective donations.¹⁴⁰

Mainstream Baptist and Methodist women were the first to organize their own missionary societies beginning in the 1820s.¹⁴¹ By 1824 there were at least thirteen "ladies societies" attached to Baptist congregations in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana that collected money and made boxes of clothing for domestic missionaries which they sent to their respective state conventions.¹⁴² Following social standards of female modesty, officers of the female societies did not usually attend the state convention meetings, sending their donations with ministers instead. Harriet Harrison, secretary of the Ladies Society of Jonesborough, Alabama, was able to address her Baptist state convention by way of a letter accompanying their donation, which was read

¹⁴⁰ "Members of the Mississippi Conference Auxiliary Society," Winans Account Book, 1824, Winans Papers; Women's Missionary Union of Mississippi, *Hearts the Lord Opened: The History of Mississippi Woman's Missionary Union* (Jackson: Women's Missionary Union of Mississippi, 1954), 17; Benjamin M. Drake, treasurer's account book for Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, November 1837, Drake (Benjamin M.) and Family Papers, MDAH; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Baptist State Convention in Alabama at its Nineteenth Anniversary* (Marion, 1843), 18; Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 2:287.

¹⁴¹ Primitive Baptists rejected missionary and benevolent societies because they did not have Biblical precedent. See also Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 89.

¹⁴² Alabama Baptist State Convention, "Constitution of The Baptist State Convention," 6-9; "Minutes of the Second Session", November 1824, Mississippi Baptist State Convention Records, 3-4; Quist, *Restless Visionaries*, 31; "Plan of the Mississippi Baptist Education Society," *Latter Day Luminary* (November, 1822): 345.

and recorded in the convention minutes. In the letter Harrison spoke on behalf of her ladies society and defended mainstream Baptists' use of missions in the face of Primitive Baptist criticism: "being fully convinced of the importance of missionary operations for the spread of Divine truth . . . we wish to bear some humble part in so glorious a work."¹⁴³ She went on to compare her organization to Biblical models of Christian womanhood, including the poor widow who donated her mite; Phoebe, who Paul trusted to deliver his letters to the Romans; and Priscilla and Chloe, who were "helpers."¹⁴⁴ Like these women, Harrison argued, "so we also reach forth a helping hand, and assist in carrying into effect your laudable design."¹⁴⁵ She deftly combined female humility with Biblical justifications for women's activism in the domestic missionary cause. While wealthier Presbyterian and Episcopal women dominated in female charitable societies which focused on physical needs and moral reform, Baptist and Methodist women led the way in creating missionary societies in the region. Reflecting their church's priority of evangelization, they used the term "benevolent society" to mean fundraising for missionary auxiliaries.¹⁴⁶

These Baptist female societies in Alabama also served as "reading associations," and each society appointed a female "solicitor" who sold subscriptions to members for the *Latter Day Luminary*, a Philadelphia-based newspaper published by the Baptist

¹⁴³ Alabama Baptist State Convention, "Constitution of The Baptist State Convention," 6-9.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Mississippi, Baptist State Convention *Proceedings of the Sixth Anniversary of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (Natchez, 1842), 22; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Baptist State Convention in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1838), 13.

missions board.¹⁴⁷ As female education increased in the region, so too did the expectation that Gulf South women would be avid readers of their church's missionary efforts. Literate women were also inspired to spread Biblical literacy and religious education throughout the region, leading to their support for Bible and tract distribution societies. Baptist women in the Gulf South were especially active in efforts to supply every household in the nation with a Bible, reflecting a denominational emphasis on *sola scriptura*. They were early supporters of the American Bible Society through state auxiliaries, and after 1836, through auxiliaries of the American and Foreign Bible Society—a national Baptist organization that broke with the ABS because they wanted to supply Bibles that used the word “immerse” instead of “baptize,” in accordance with Baptist theology.¹⁴⁸ Free and enslaved women of color donated to the AFBS as well, including members of the African Baptist Church in New Orleans; enslaved laborers in Mississippi; and “Priscilla, colored woman” who donated \$2 to the Tuscaloosa Baptist Bible Society in 1836.¹⁴⁹ Despite rising fears of enslaved laborers learning to read after Nat Turner's rebellion, black southerners were able to contribute to northern efforts to circulate Bibles in the region because they were working through white southern auxiliaries.

¹⁴⁷ "Domestic," *Latter Day Luminary* (January 1824): 19.

¹⁴⁸ William H. Wyckoff, *The American Bible society and the Baptists, Or, The Question Discussed, Shall the Whole Word of God Be Given to the Heathen?* (New York, 1841), 89, 6; American and Foreign Bible Society, *Eighth Annual Report* (New York, 1845), 46; *ibid.*, *Eleventh Annual Report* (New York, 1848), 10, 25.

¹⁴⁹ American and Foreign Bible Society, *Tenth Annual Report* (New York, 1847), 83; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Fourteenth Anniversary of the Baptist State Convention in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1837), 15.

Female support for different publishers often depended on denomination. In the 1820s and 1830s, Methodist women in Mississippi were subscribing members to the “Amite and Florida Bible Society,” a local auxiliary to the American Bible Society, while Presbyterian women supported the Presbyterian Board of Publications and donated to make their ministers life members of the American Sunday School Union, which also published Presbyterian religious tracts for adults.¹⁵⁰ In 1829 in Woodville, Mississippi the women of St. Paul’s Church formed the “Female Episcopal Tract Society” to fund and distribute tracts from the Episcopal publishing company in New York City.¹⁵¹ Rector James Fox reported to his diocese that the society “promises to be useful in the promotion of Piety and in the diffusion of religious knowledge,” specifically knowledge of Episcopal beliefs and practices.¹⁵² Another Episcopalian in rural Mississippi wrote to her bishop in Natchez to request “tracts and books of such a character as will throw light upon the distinctive principles of the Church,” including Episcopal prayer books.¹⁵³ Individually and collectively, women expanded their denomination’s influence in the Gulf South through the types of religious books and tracts they helped disseminate.

By the 1840s and 1850s, at the same time as sectional tensions were building in most mainstream Protestant denominations, Gulf South auxiliaries for missionary, Bible, and tract societies were becoming increasingly independent from their northern-based

¹⁵⁰ Amite and Florida Auxiliary Bible Society Minutes, 1815-1835, MDAH, 138-139, 154, 159; Stratton, Diary, December 10, 1851, Stratton Papers; American Sunday School Union, *Eighth Annual Report* (Philadelphia, 1832), 58; *ibid.*, *Tenth Annual Report* (1834), 52, 56; *ibid.*, *The Twenty-First Annual Report* (1843), 55.

¹⁵¹ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of Third Annual Convention*, 28.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-fourth Annual Convention*, 17.

parent societies. Northern tract societies faced the brunt of accusations for spreading abolitionist influence. In 1849, editors of *The Planter's Banner* in Franklin, Louisiana included northern churchwomen's organizations in a warning that northern "tract societies, sewing societies, cent societies, abolitionist presses are sending out a perfect storm of tracts, pamphlets, newspapers, addresses, sermons, circulars, and abolition almanacks, creating false impressions and prejudice against the south."¹⁵⁴ Gulf South Protestants, however, found they could still associate as auxiliaries to national organizations as long as they increased supervision over the materials they ordered and distributed.¹⁵⁵

Women helped by becoming dues-paying members of local societies that founded religious book and tract depositories in the region so that they would not have to rely on northern agents to choose and distribute publications.¹⁵⁶ While men served as society officials and ran the meetings, male leaders continued to rely on their female members to raise money for them. In 1852, "the Bible Society of Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes" in Louisiana appointed "a committee of ladies to assist them in promoting the objects of

¹⁵⁴ "Mr. Fisher's Lecture on 'The North and South,'" *Planters' Banner* (Franklin, LA), April 12, 1849.

¹⁵⁵ For this argument for men in Alabama, see Quist, "Slaveholding Operatives," 496.

¹⁵⁶ Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Proceedings of the Fifth Anniversary of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson, 1841), 32; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Eighteenth Anniversary of the Baptist State Convention in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1841), 15; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, "Proceedings and Constitution of the Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church for Diffusing Christian Knowledge in the Diocese of Mississippi," in *Journal of Twenty-sixth Annual Convention*; "Southwestern Bible Society," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, January 31, 1852; Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Thirteenth Session*, 51.

the society,” including recruiting new members and collecting donations.¹⁵⁷ In 1859, Episcopalian Margaret Johnson gave \$200 to found the “Church Book Depository” in Jackson, and in 1851 a group of Presbyterian women raised enough money to open a depository in Canton, Mississippi.¹⁵⁸ The Reverend B. H. Williams praised the “good work” of these ladies and used them as an example to encourage men in New Orleans to build a Presbyterian depository of their own.¹⁵⁹

Women found more opportunities for leadership within the homosocial space of female Bible and tract societies. Like church aid and benevolent societies, the Ladies Bible Society of Plaquemine, founded in 1852 by a group of Presbyterian and Methodist women who shared a church, wrote a constitution, collected dues, and elected female officers.¹⁶⁰ Male church leaders praised them for taking public action to fulfill their “duty to circulate the Bible.”¹⁶¹ In 1860 in Houma, Louisiana, St. Mathew’s Episcopal Church supported a “Ladies’ Bible, Prayer Book, and Tract Society.”¹⁶² From 1849 until the outbreak of the Civil War, the Gainesville Ladies Bible Society collected subscriptions and made an annual donation to the Alabama Baptist Bible Society, which they sent to

¹⁵⁷ "Bible Society in Lafourche and Terrebonne, La," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 28, 1852.

¹⁵⁸ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention*, 94.

¹⁵⁹ Reverend B.H. Williams to Joseph S. Copes, November 28, 1851, Copes Papers.

¹⁶⁰ A.E. Goodwin, "The Ladies' Bible Society of Plaquemine," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, March 27, 1852.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Convention*, (New Orleans, 1860), 41.

the state convention through a male delegate from their church.¹⁶³ These female societies served as fundraising auxiliaries which southern male organizations relied on to continue their work in the region.

As with female benevolent societies, women in the urban Gulf South had the most success in maintaining multi-denominational organizations. White Protestant women in New Orleans founded the Ladies' Bible Society in 1844 and the Ladies' Tract Society in 1849.¹⁶⁴ Both combined evangelization with charity to try and solve urban problems of poverty and immigration. The Ladies' Bible Society began by focusing on providing Bibles for hotels and prisons in the city and consistently raised over \$200 a year. Rather than giving money to the American Bible Society to do the work, they actually requested and received funding from ABS so that they could continue managing operations on their own.¹⁶⁵ They also funded male colporteurs of the New Orleans Bible Society and stocked their city depository with Bibles, including French, Spanish, German, Italian, and Portuguese translations to target Catholic immigrants.¹⁶⁶ The female executive committee reported in 1853:

We have among our population representatives of all European countries . . . most of these have never listened to the story of Redemption, or if they have heard of Bethlehem and Calvary, the reality has been so blended with fable, that their minds have failed to discern the truth. Shall we not, then, be more diligent in our endeavors to furnish them with that volume, which will tell them of 'the Lamb of God, which taketh

¹⁶³ *Minutes of the Thirty-fourth Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention* (Tuskegee, 1857), 27, 29.

¹⁶⁴ American Bible Society, *Annual Reports of the American Bible Society*, vol. 2 (New York, 1860), 247; "The Ladies' Tract Society," *Daily Picayune*, February 17, 1856.

¹⁶⁵ American Bible Society, *Annual Reports*, vol. 2, 247.

¹⁶⁶ "Distribution of the Bible in New Orleans," *Daily Picayune*, September 18, 1844.

away the sin of the world?¹⁶⁷

The Protestant Ladies' Bible Society saw converting both "irreligious" and Catholic immigrants of New Orleans as motivation for their work.¹⁶⁸

The Ladies Tract Society held fairs and collected donations to buy religious tracts in multiple languages as well, which they gave to local churches and missionaries to distribute to needy families.¹⁶⁹ In 1856, missionaries claimed these tracts drew nearly two hundred people into Protestant churches that had never gone before as well as six hundred new students for Sabbath schools.¹⁷⁰ With humility, the female secretary of the society expressed the board's regret that they could not do more while also claiming that it was "impossible to estimate the blessed results of such a work, even for a single year, many of which shall appear only in the light of eternity." Claiming credit for new church members, she wrote, "It is enough to encourage the Society to labor on, and to incite them to more strenuous effort."¹⁷¹ Members of these Bible and tract societies felt that their work to distribute reading materials would not only increase religious influence in a city associated with immorality, but also save souls.

¹⁶⁷ "Report of the Ladies Bible Society, of the First and Third Municipalities," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 12, 1853.

¹⁶⁸ For Protestant anxieties over Catholic immigration and "immorality" in the antebellum urban South, see Dennis C. Rousey, "Aliens in the WASP Nest: Ethnocultural Diversity in the Antebellum Urban South," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (June 1992): 152-164; Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, xiv.

¹⁶⁹ Moss, Diary, March 28, 1854; Session Minutes, May 30, 1853, May 26, 1854, June 31, 1857, First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans Records; "The Ladies' Tract Society," *Daily Picayune*, February 17, 1856.

¹⁷⁰ "The Ladies' Tract Society," *Daily Picayune*, February 17, 1856.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Both organizations continued to thrive in the 1850s, a time when other scholars have found a decline in women's benevolence organizations in the South.¹⁷² By 1853, the Ladies Bible Society found it necessary to divide the city into districts and create committees of women to oversee operations in each district. One member from each committee collected donations from residents in their area.¹⁷³ They were still reporting Bible distributions in the city in 1861 on the eve of the Civil War.¹⁷⁴ Likewise, the Ladies Tract Society in their annual report published by the *Daily Picayune* in 1856 claimed, "nearly each successive year has added to its receipts and its circulation."¹⁷⁵ As with the Natchez Charitable Society, the New Orleans Ladies Tract Society also drew support from rural women. This included elected officers who had time and money to travel to meetings in the city, like Frances Polk, the wife of the Episcopal bishop of Louisiana, who lived on a sugar plantation near Thibodeaux and served as a "director" in the 1850s.¹⁷⁶ Protestant women throughout southern Louisiana continued to act independently of male organizations and invest in converting Catholic and irreligious New Orleanians through the circulation of religious tracts and Bibles.

Even when most female societies relied on male colporteurs to physically distribute reading materials, women could serve as unofficial distributors. In 1853,

¹⁷² For scholarship that finds a late antebellum decline in southern female tract and Bible societies, see Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 3; Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, 44; Lockley, "The Rise and Fall of Female Benevolence," 197-209.

¹⁷³ "Report of the Ladies Bible Society," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 12, 1853.

¹⁷⁴ American Bible Society, *Annual Reports of the American Bible Society*, vol. 3 (New York, 1861), 691.

¹⁷⁵ "The Ladies' Tract Society," *Daily Picayune*, February 17, 1856.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

several members of the Ladies Bible Society in New Orleans decided to distribute Bibles and Testaments from the depository on their own.¹⁷⁷ By 1860, Protestant women had organized their own Bible societies in Woodville, Mississippi and Shreveport, Louisiana, which were technically female auxiliaries to the “Southwestern Bible Society” but their female officers supplied their towns with Bibles, including French translations, without help from male agents.¹⁷⁸ In rural Adams County, Mississippi, Episcopalian Mary Roberts circulated religious books and tracts throughout her neighborhood until she was too sick to travel. In 1854 while on her deathbed, she reportedly asked one of her daughters to complete the final tract deliveries for her.¹⁷⁹ Women living in towns with depositories, on the other hand, took requests and sent publications to female friends and family members who lived in the rural Gulf South, informally spreading their denomination’s influence throughout the region.¹⁸⁰

Protestant women also began subscribing to local denominational newspapers instead of northern newspapers and a few worked to recruit new subscribers. In 1860, the *Louisiana Baptist* praised “an active young lady in Rapides” who signed up ten new subscribers in her neighborhood, including both men and women. The editors hoped she would serve as an inspiration to other women in the region.¹⁸¹ When southern Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches broke with their national denominations, women

¹⁷⁷ "Report of the Ladies Bible Society," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 12, 1853.

¹⁷⁸ American Bible Society, *Annual Reports*, vol. 3, 594.

¹⁷⁹ "Obituary," *Church Herald*, April 21, 1854.

¹⁸⁰ For examples, see Emma Balfour to Louisa Harrison, May 11, 1853, Faunsdale Plantation Papers; Committee on Tracts, Second Annual Conference, January 1848, Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Conference Committee Records.

¹⁸¹ "One Dollar Plan," *Louisiana Baptist*, May 24, 1860.

began donating to southern publication societies like the Southern Baptist publishing company based in Nashville, which also took over supplying their depositories.¹⁸² White evangelical women financially supported the transition to southern auxiliaries, publications, and newspapers.

In terms of supporting missionaries to the region, in the 1830s and early 1840s Gulf South women made individual donations and organized separate female missionary societies in their churches that fundraised for the national organizations of their denominations. This included the American Home Missionary Society, American Baptist Home Mission Society, the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Episcopal Board of Domestic Missions.¹⁸³ When evangelical denominations split from their national conventions over slavery in the 1840s and 1850s, however, they formed separate southern mission boards, like the Southern Baptist Board of Domestic Missions based in Marion, Alabama, and looked to Gulf South women for financial support.¹⁸⁴ In 1850, the Alabama Baptist State Convention officially approved women serving on mixed-gender visiting committees in their congregations to solicit donations for the southern domestic mission board.¹⁸⁵ Even though southern Episcopalians

¹⁸² Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirteenth Anniversary of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (New Orleans, 1849), 21; *ibid.*, *Minutes of the Sixteenth Anniversary of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (New Orleans, 1852), 37.

¹⁸³ American Baptist Home Mission Society, *Twelfth Report* (New York, 1844), 22; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Fifteenth Anniversary*, 13; The Methodist Episcopal Church. *Nineteenth Annual Report*, 52; Ann M. E. Heath to Christopher R Robert, January 1857, February 10, 1859, AHMS.

¹⁸⁴ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 90; Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Proceedings of the Twenty-third Session of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi*, (Jackson, 1859), 17.

¹⁸⁵ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-seventh Anniversary*, 17.

remained a part of the national Episcopal Church, women increasingly donated to their state's diocesan missionary society rather than directly to the national missionary board based in New York.¹⁸⁶ By 1855, over half of the donors to the "Society for the Diffusion of Christian Knowledge in the Diocese of Mississippi" were women, and by 1857 the diocesan society had amended their constitution to require that each church's auxiliary to the society "appoint four persons, two of whom shall be ladies, to solicit donations and to procure members for the society."¹⁸⁷ Women not only donated their own money but also worked alongside men and held official positions as fundraisers.

While not allowed to hold official positions, free and enslaved women of color do appear on donor rolls as financial supporters of their denomination's domestic missions, especially in Baptist and Methodist churches. Often their donations were comparable to white women in the region. Hopewell Baptist Church of Copiah County, Mississippi listed "Patty a blackwoman, 50c[en]ts" as part of the church's donation to home missions in 1844, the same amount of money donated by two white women that year.¹⁸⁸ In the summer of 1848, the *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* reported two donations from Alabama women, \$2.50 from "Fanny Wordsworth, colored sister," and \$2 from "a lady," the latter designation assuming whiteness.¹⁸⁹ In 1834, slaveholder Elizabeth Wilkinson of the Methodist Fayette Circuit in Mississippi donated fifty cents for the Methodist

¹⁸⁶ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-eighth Annual Convention*, 10-11; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-fifth Annual Convention*, 9.

¹⁸⁷ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Twenty-ninth Annual Convention*, 108-111; *ibid.*, *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention*, 96.

¹⁸⁸ Church Meeting Minutes, September 1844, Hopewell Baptist Church, Copiah County Records, MBHC.

¹⁸⁹ Board of Foreign and Domestic Missions of the Southern Baptist Convention, *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* 1, no. 2 (July 1846): 48.

publication fund, while laborers enslaved by her, “Tabby, Tom, Joe, Rose, Emma, Rhoda, Peter, Letty, Susan, William, and Casey,” each “subscribed” to the Mississippi Methodist missionary society by paying fifty cents.¹⁹⁰ Their donations came with implied membership to a biracial, mixed-gender missionary society.

More often, however, women of color were listed as “coloured woman,” giving no indication of name or freedom status.¹⁹¹ Or, their donations were assumed as part of collective donations from a black congregation, which in urban black churches could reach over \$100 annually.¹⁹² White church leaders generally encouraged these donations. In 1850, the committee on domestic missions at the Alabama Baptist State Convention “recommended that none are too poor to pay ten cents annual for this object, each member, male and female, white and colored be solicited to contribute ten cents, or more, annually, to this object.”¹⁹³ In 1847 a minister from Clifton, Alabama wrote to the *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* to encourage other ministers in the region to seek donations from black members, not only for the money but also as a way to pacify a black labor force. He wrote, “it seems to give them a feeling of self-respect and importance, and many of them contribute with eagerness and evident gratification—delighting to be the means of sending that gospel which has so ameliorated their own

¹⁹⁰ Minutes, 1834, Fayette Circuit Quarterly Conference Records, 69.

¹⁹¹ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Thirty-fourth Anniversary*, 28; American Baptist Home Mission Society, *The Ninth Report* (1841), 60; Treasurer's book, for Auxiliary to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, April 26, 1851, Drake (Benjamin M.) and Family Papers.

¹⁹² American Colonization Society, “Colored Congregation in Mobile,” *African Repository* 37, no. 1 (January 1860): 29; Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Convention*, 56.

¹⁹³ Alabama Baptist State Convention *Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh Anniversary*, 17.

condition, to shed its benign influence over others.”¹⁹⁴ According to the same journal, an enslaved woman in Alabama donated over \$15 to Baptist missions over the course of twelve months, choosing to spend “the little earnings allowed by her mistress” on the missionary cause.¹⁹⁵ While presented to slaveholders as a nonthreatening outlet for black laborers to spend their time and money, supporting domestic missions also inherently encouraged free and enslaved people of color to see themselves as part of a larger community of Christians that extended beyond their own church or plantation.

Most white and black Protestant women donated through their churches to “domestic missions” or “southern missions,” choosing to let southern male mission boards or state conference leaders decide where to spend the money.¹⁹⁶ In 1850, Presbyterian Jane Criswell of Warsaw, Alabama added to her will that an enslaved woman who worked for her “must be sold at my death and the money is for ‘home missions’ in this country for it is much needed.”¹⁹⁷ For slaveholding women like Criswell, participating in the economy of enslaved labor provided a way to support religious causes that benefited whites. Jane did not have to give up this labor while living, but could pledge the future value of an enslaved laborer to the cause of her choosing. While her husband Thomas gave enslaved laborers the option of going to Liberia after his

¹⁹⁴ *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* 2 (1848), 95.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ "Domestic Missions," *South Western Baptist*, June 16, 1852; Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Seventeenth Anniversary of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (Columbus, 1853); Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 25 (New York, 1860), 310; Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Twenty-eighth Annual Convention*, 10-11; "Donations Acknowledged," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, March 26, 1853; "Deaths," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 4, 1856.

¹⁹⁷ Jane H. Criswell to Joseph S. Copes, December 23, 1850, Copes Papers.

death, this enslaved woman purchased by Jane did not have this choice; her potential freedom was sacrificed to provide missionaries for white settlers in the Gulf South.¹⁹⁸

Other white women included notes with their donations to specify how their money was to be used. Baptist Jane Hays requested that her donation to the southern board in Marion, Alabama “be used in Tuscaloosa county” where she lived.¹⁹⁹ In 1837, an Episcopal “daughter of the church” from rural Russell County, Alabama donated the “proceeds of a dairy beyond the wants of the plantation for three months, for missions in Alabama” which amounted to \$40.²⁰⁰ These women were not content to let men decide how their money was to be spent; their financial support was conditional on having some influence on missionary priorities.

Other women worked specifically to pay for missionaries for the region’s cities who would offer religious guidance to the urban poor and immigrant populations, both segments of the city considered in danger of embracing irreligion, immorality, or, as many Protestants feared, Catholicism. In 1845, the Ladies Missionary Sewing Society of Christ Church, Episcopal in Mobile held an “Easter week” fair to pay for a “city missionary” who would preach to “the poor, sick, and distressed” of the city.²⁰¹ In New Orleans in 1840, the treasurer of the Female Missionary Society of First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans transferred over \$400 for the “furtherance of its City Missionary Operations” while the “Ladies Society, Auxiliary to the City Mission Society” associated

¹⁹⁸ Jane H. Criswell to Joseph S. Copes, December 23, 1850, Copes Papers.

¹⁹⁹ C.G. Strugis, "Domestic Missions," *South Western Baptist*, April 9, 1851.

²⁰⁰ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 5, 293.

²⁰¹ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Fourteenth Annual Convention*, 23.

with the Church of the Annunciation in New Orleans raised over \$1,000 for a separate Episcopal city missionary in 1849.²⁰² The women of the Episcopal sewing society picked out and hired the missionary themselves. The Presbyterian Ladies Bethel Society of New Orleans organized to pay the salary of a chaplain for a seaman's bethel, a Protestant chapel intended specifically for sailors that was common in nineteenth-century port cities.²⁰³ The Ladies Bethel Society played a public motherhood role by looking after the spiritual needs of sailors temporarily lodging in the city—an unsettled working-class population considered particularly at risk of moral degradation if left to the influence of New Orleans' boarding homes, brothels, and drinking establishments.

Churchwomen also funded missions to immigrants in New Orleans, especially the “mission to Roman Catholics” and the “German Mission,” both targeting immigrants.²⁰⁴ As with charity societies, women living outside of these cities also donated to support urban missions. In 1855, the *Daily Picayune* reported that Methodist women from Carrollton, Greenville, and New Orleans worked together to put on an elaborate May Day “entertainment” that included a “living pyramid” of May Queens to fund construction for a missionary church for German immigrants in Carrollton.²⁰⁵ Baptist women in

²⁰² Session Minutes, March 18, 1840, First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans Records; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Eleventh Annual Convention*, 20.

²⁰³ Minutes, 1860, Presbytery of New Orleans Records, 207. For white women in antebellum Charleston funding homes for sailors and organizing to look after their moral wellbeing, see Bachand, “Gendered Mobility,” 54; Murray, “Charity Within the Bounds,” 61. For more on seamen's bethels as middle class religious reform, see Richard J. Callahan, Jr., “The Religious Spaces of American Whaling,” in *Religion, Space, and the Atlantic World*, ed. John Corrigan (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 143-144.

²⁰⁴ “Mission to Roman Catholics,” *South Western Baptist*, September 22, 1852; “Collections for German Mission Baptist Church, New Orleans,” *Mississippi Baptist*, January 28, 1858.

²⁰⁵ “Carrollton Missionary Church,” *Daily Picayune*, May 3, 1855.

Mississippi and Methodist women in Thibodeaux and Waterproof, Louisiana supported their respective denominations' "German Missions" in New Orleans as well, after hearing about them in newspapers reports and sermons.²⁰⁶ Another Methodist woman from Lafayette, Louisiana wrote in to the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* in 1851 to urge women in the region to donate to a "City Missionary fund" which "would do much towards promoting the moral prosperity of New Orleans."²⁰⁷ The proposed missionary would preach, distribute religious tracts, and teach Bible classes at prisons and hospitals. This female writer appealed specifically to Methodist women by reminding her audience that there were female prisoners and patients in New Orleans as well: "let them picture themselves some of their own sex, wretched and degraded, a prey to remorse and despair, and they too will perhaps awaken to a sense of their duty and assist in providing means to illuminate dark and ignorant minds."²⁰⁸ Charity and evangelization of women overlapped in city missions and it was women's Christian duty to care for other vulnerable women.

Gulf South church leaders also looked to white women to organize their own fundraising missionary societies within their churches, as leaders of the Union Baptist Association in Mississippi wrote in 1842, "for the purpose of obtaining contributions to

²⁰⁶ "LA Duncan Treas., German Mission," *Mississippi Baptist*, October 14, 1858; "Collections for German Mission Baptist Church, New Orleans," *Mississippi Baptist*, January 28, 1858; "Religious Intelligence," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, September 15, 1855; Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Eleventh Session*, 18-20.

²⁰⁷ "City Missions," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 4, 1851.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

be applied to the preaching of the Gospel in destitute places in the limits of this body.”²⁰⁹ In 1858 the Episcopal Ladies’ Working Society of Osyka funded five priests to serve as missionaries in the Diocese of Mississippi; paid for two priests to attend missionary training in Nashotah, Wisconsin; and contributed “\$142.60 worth of prayer books, tracts, and religious publications” for missionaries to distribute.²¹⁰ Women and their missionary societies also expanded their scope to support missions in other parts of the country. The Columbus Ladies Society associated with the Baptist Church in Columbus, Mississippi attended the first meeting of the male-run Southern Baptist Home Mission Society in 1839 and funded half the cost of sending a missionary to Texas when male officers were short on funds.²¹¹ Methodist women in Alabama donated to their denomination’s “California Mission” which sent missionaries to mining towns after the 1849 Gold Rush.²¹² In 1858, the Presbyterian Ladies Benevolent Sewing Circle in New Orleans made boxes of clothing for a mission station in Kentucky.²¹³ Far from being isolated to their own church and community needs, these women read missionary newspapers, wrote letters, and attended missionary sermons and meetings, working to stay informed and contribute to missionary work going on around the country, and ultimately, the world.

²⁰⁹ Union Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Twenty-Second Annual Meeting of the Union Baptist Association* (Raymond, MS: 1842), 3. For similar examples, see: Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-fifth Convention*, appendix M; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Ninth Annual Convention*, 3; C.D. Oliver, "Domestic Missions. Auburn Ala. Missionary Collections, M.E. Church," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, July 26, 1851; Presbytery of Tuscaloosa Minutes, vol. 2, 229.

²¹⁰ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention*, 97.

²¹¹ Women’s Missionary Union of Mississippi, *Hearts the Lord Opened*, 17.

²¹² *Minutes of the Alabama Conference of the M.E. Church, South* (1852), 18.

²¹³ Mary Folger Memorandum Book, December 15, 1858; May 5, 1859, Folger Collection.

Women and Foreign Missions

Even before Mississippi Baptists organized their first state convention in 1824, there was the Mississippi Baptist Ladies Charitable Mission Society which gave female members the opportunity to support both domestic and foreign missions. In its 1822 constitution, the society justified the global scope of their activism by claiming they had a responsibility as women to bring the benefits of Christianity to all women: “The Gospel . . . has laid our sex under a peculiar tribute of praise and gratitude, as having raised us from the vassalage of savage barbarity, and from the horrid customs and rites of Pagan idolatry. We wish those 'good tidings' to be preached to all the daughters of affliction. The field of Missions is the world, and there is a loud call at present day for an increase of labourers.” Welcoming “any female who wishes to do good” to join the society, they instituted a progressive dues system with members paying “in money, or in articles of clothing, or even in superfluous ornaments to any amount within the compass of her circumstances, as the suitable expression of her degree of charity.” Women with more money to spare could become life members for \$10 and then have a say in whether their money went to pay for a future missionary’s education or for supporting current missionaries in the field. All of the money supported the missionary efforts of the Baptist General Convention whose New York-based newspaper praised these Mississippi women, hoping “that others who have not yet put their hands to the good work, will ‘Go and do likewise.’”²¹⁴

As with domestic missions, the earliest organized efforts by Gulf South women to aid foreign missions were as auxiliaries to national denominational missionary societies

²¹⁴ All quotations in this paragraph are from *Latter Day Luminary* (November 1822), 345.

based in northern cities. Mainstream Baptist and Methodist women also dominated these early foreign efforts, reflecting their denominations' emphasis on God's "Great Commission" to Christians to evangelize the world.²¹⁵ In addition to the Mississippi Female Charitable Mission Society, Baptist women in Shiloh, Alabama formed the "Female Burmah Bible Society" as an auxiliary to the New York-based American and Foreign Bible Society. Reflecting their denomination's priority on converts reading the Bible, these women sent money to AFBS to fund Bible translation and publication for missionaries to distribute in Burma.²¹⁶ Other early Baptist organizations, like the Marion Female Benevolent Society in Alabama and Brandon Female Missionary Society in Mississippi, began to prioritize foreign missions in the 1830s, splitting their donations between foreign and domestic mission boards in the North but directing larger sums of money for foreign efforts.²¹⁷

Baptist and Methodist women in the Gulf South were early supporters of the mission to Native Americans, first as a home mission in their states and then as a foreign mission in "Indian Territory" after their forced removal in the 1830s.²¹⁸ Northern-born Anne Burnham, who worked as a missionary teacher among the Choctaw near Havana,

²¹⁵ The most well known "Great Commission" Bible verse is Matt. 28:16-20.

²¹⁶ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twelfth Anniversary of the Baptist State Convention in Alabama* (Greensborough, 1835), 16; *ibid.*, *Minutes of the Thirteenth Anniversary of the Baptist State Convention in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, 1836), 14.

²¹⁷ Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting*, 18; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Fifteenth Anniversary of the Baptist State Convention*, 13.

²¹⁸ "Minutes of the Second Session," Appendix, Mississippi Baptist Missionary Society, 1822, Mississippi Baptist Convention Records, MBHC; Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Proceedings of the Ninth Anniversary of the Convention*, 26.

Alabama, moved to Fort Towson, Oklahoma in 1833 to continue her work.²¹⁹ Most white women born in the South supported missions in Native American territories from a distance. When Methodist missionary Alexander Talley moved from Mississippi to Oklahoma to work with the Choctaw in 1831, he reported to the *Christian Advocate* in New York that he had “sister Curtis and her female friends of Natchez” to thank for “furnishing me with \$46.37 ½ to be expended in procuring necessaries for the Choctaws on their arrival.”²²⁰ The Female Missionary Society of Mobile, associated with the Franklin Street Methodist Church, took a different approach; in the 1830s, one of their members adopted a Choctaw boy, Dixon Lewis, who was living in former Choctaw lands on the Tombigbee River, and the female missionary society funded his education to become a missionary in Choctaw Territory in the West.²²¹ Gulf South Protestant women’s interest in funding Christian education grew out of their roles as Sunday school teachers for white and black children at home, and remained central to their justification for collective activism for foreign missions throughout the antebellum period.

Early foreign missionary activism in the Gulf South also included Protestant women who organized to support the American Colonization Society in the 1830s. Founded in 1816 to fund the immigration of free blacks from the United States to West Africa, the American Colonization Society drew early support from both pro- and anti-slavery advocates in the North and South. While current scholarship recognizes the diversity of supporters who found an uneasy alliance in the colonization movement, there

²¹⁹ Burnham, Letters, 1833-1838.

²²⁰ "New Home of the Choctaws " *Christian Advocate* (New York), July 29, 1831.

²²¹ West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama*, 585-587.

is no acknowledgement of the collective action of southern female supporters beyond the Upper South, and even in the Upper South the focus has been on early nineteenth-century antislavery women.²²² For the Deep South scholars focus on the evangelical male ministers who were unpopular holdouts of the colonization movement after Nat Turner's rebellion and reference a few individual women who left enslaved laborers to the ACS in their wills.²²³

In fact, it was proslavery Methodist women in the Gulf South who worked together to fund their ministers' memberships to the American Colonization Society in the 1830s and early 1840s. According to William Winans' 1838 accounts, the "Ladies of Wilkinson Circuit," "Ladies of Feliciana Circuit," "Ladies of Washington Station," and the "Ladies of Holmes Circuit" each collectively raised the \$30 for their own ministers to become life members of the ACS.²²⁴ That same year the Methodist Ladies Benevolent Society of Woodville raised the money to make William Winans himself a life member of the ACS. Winans had the letter written to him by their secretary, Mary McGehee, published in the northern ACS paper, *The African Repository*. In her letter, McGehee specifically emphasized women's duty as "parents and Christians" to support

²²² Beverley C. Tomek and Mathew J. Hetrick, eds., *New Directions in the Study of African American Recolonization* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2017); Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005). For scholarship on antislavery women's collective activism in the ACS before 1840 in Virginia and Maryland, see: Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) 83-103; Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 59-70; Bruce Dorsey, "A Gendered History of African Colonization in the Antebellum United States," *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 1 (Autumn 2000), 80.

²²³ For examples, see Norwood Allen Kerr, "The Mississippi Colonization Society (1831-1860)," *Journal of Mississippi History* (February 1981): 9, 20-22; Alan Huffman, *Mississippi in Africa: The Sage of the Slaves of Prospect Hill Plantation and their Legacy in Liberia Today* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004), 59-65. Quist only mentions two women in Tuscaloosa who were members of the male-run Alabama Colonization Society, in *Restless Visionaries*, 322.

²²⁴ William Winans to Joseph Gales, January 10, 1839, Winans Papers.

colonization, not in order to end slavery but as the means to evangelize to Africans. She personified the continent of Africa as a fellow mother in need of Christian female support: “God grant that the American Colonization Society may be the day-star of a brighter era to benighted Africa and her suffering sons!”²²⁵ Despite being active supporters of colonization, McGehee and her husband, who was one of largest slaveholders in Wilkinson County, never freed any of their enslaved laborers for emigration to Africa, nor did they encourage other supporters to do so.²²⁶ Instead, Mary McGehee promised money and missionaries. “As mothers,” McGehee declared on behalf of the benevolent society, “we are ready to devote our sons to this missionary field.”²²⁷ Winans agreed, writing in response that the cause of colonization “commends itself, with peculiar emphasis, to female benevolence” because of women’s accepted role as supporters of missionary causes in other parts of the world. Winans hoped that their example would “induce other Ladies, in this highly-favored portion of our happy country, to turn their benevolent regard to this important enterprise!”²²⁸ By 1842, the Methodist women’s sewing society in Huntsville, Alabama and the women of the Presbyterian Church in Woodville followed their example and made their own pastors life members of

²²⁵ “Correspondence,” *The African Repository* 15, no. 4 (March 1839): 66-68.

²²⁶ Tom Blake, “Wilkinson County, Mississippi: Largest Slaveholders from 1860 U.S. Census Slave Schedules and Surname Matches for African Americans on 1870 Census,” April 2001, <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~ajac/genealogy/mswilkinson.htm>.

²²⁷ “Correspondence,” *The African Repository* 15, no. 4 (March 1839): 66-68.

²²⁸ William Winans to Mrs. M.B. McGehee, October 18, 1838, Winans Papers. For a similar focus on education in women’s colonization’s organizations in Virginia, see Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 59.

the ACS.²²⁹ Collectively supporting the ACS in the Deep South served a missionary purpose and did not require Protestant women to free their own enslaved laborers.

In 1839, Protestant women in New Orleans and Natchez each held meetings at Presbyterian Churches in their cities to organize their own female auxiliaries to the American Colonization Society, drawing members from the surrounding countryside. Both organizations specifically cited the dual cause of spreading “education and Christianity” as their reason for supporting the ACS.²³⁰ A male observer of the society in Natchez even connected women’s financial support for the “instruction and improvement of the African Colonies, and of the native tribes in their vicinity” to the “increasing concern for the religious instruction of the slave population” in the South.²³¹ Proslavery women in the Gulf South distanced their involvement with colonization from the potentially dangerous idea of freeing the enslaved, emphasizing instead sending a select few freed African American missionaries who could bring Christian education to Africa. They defended both the African colonization movement and slaveholding as parallel missionary work—the means of spreading Christian instruction at home and abroad.

As sectional tensions over slavery heightened in the late 1840s and 1850s, southern female supporters of colonization, like their male counterparts, distanced themselves from the national American Colonization Society by donating to state auxiliaries. These auxiliaries claimed to focus on removing existing free black

²²⁹ "Contributions" *African Repository* 17, no. 8 (April 1841): 112; *ibid.* 18, no. 3 (February 1842): 47.

²³⁰ "Letters from the Corresponding Secretary of the Society," *African Repository* 15, no. 12 (July 1839): 196; *ibid.*, no. 14 (August 1839): 230.

²³¹ "Letters from the Corresponding Secretary," *African Repository* 15, no. 14 (August 1839): 230.

populations from the region rather than freeing the enslaved.²³² The majority of white Protestant women in the Gulf South, however, abandoned the colonization movement altogether and turned their financial support to their denominations' missionary efforts in Africa instead. In 1845, when southern Baptists split from their national convention, they also formed their own Board of Foreign Missions based in Richmond, Virginia. Their board argued that southerners should lead the way in supporting missions to Africa specifically *because* they were slaveholders familiar with Africans and their American descendants as enslaved laborers. As J. L. Reynolds, chairman of the Committee on African Missions, reported at the board's meeting in 1847, "Our intercourse with them [Africans] and their descendants at home, has afforded us the opportunity of observing their characteristic traits, and thus enable us the better to appreciate their wants, and to select the instrumentalities which will be likely to secure their allegiance to Jesus Christ."²³³ Southern women, who supported religious instruction of the enslaved at their homes and churches, could extend that paternalistic slaveholder benevolence to support religious instruction in Africa.

Baptist women in the Gulf South responded to the call by sending their donations to the foreign mission board with directions that they be used specifically "for African Missions," as the Baptist Ladies Benevolent Society of Collirene, Alabama did in 1850.²³⁴ One donor, Mary Stackhouse of Jackson, Mississippi, emphasized Baptist

²³² "Circular to the friends of African Colonization in the State of Louisiana," *African Repository* (January 1849): 3; "Constitution of the Alabama State Colonization Society," *African Repository* 25, no. 1 (January 1852): 141; Kerr, "The Mississippi Colonization Society," 1-30.

²³³ *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* 2, no. 1 (June, 1847): 12.

²³⁴ Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-seventh Anniversary*, 26. See also, Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Fourteenth Anniversary*, 29; *ibid.*, *Minutes of the*

education by specifying that her donation in 1855 be used “for Bibles for Central Africa.”²³⁵ Episcopal women in the Gulf South, many of whom were wealthy slaveholders, were also especially active in their denomination’s missions in Africa, individually sponsoring “the education of a child in Africa” and re-naming them after family members or priests.²³⁶ In 1858, the sewing circle of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in New Orleans donated \$150 to the Episcopal mission “for teacher in Africa” and in 1853 the Tuscaloosa Episcopal sewing circle donated \$20 to help fund a “female diocesan school, [in] Africa.”²³⁷ All of these donations through adult female missionary societies were in addition to the donations female academy and Sunday school teachers and students gave through separate school missionary societies.²³⁸ By focusing on education for children, they made support of African missions an acceptable extension of a slaveholding woman’s Christian duty.

At the same time, J. L. Reynolds of the Southern Baptist mission board argued that white slaveholding Christians need not actually go to Africa, where, “the insalubrity of the climate presents a formidable barrier to the occupancy of the field by the Anglo-Saxon race.” Instead, thanks to the mission to the enslaved, slaveholders could send African Americans “selected from the south” as missionaries to “bless their benighted

Twenty-second Session of the Mississippi Baptist Association (Jackson, 1858), 13; “Communications,” *South Western Baptist*, September 25, 1854.

²³⁵ Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Nineteenth Anniversary of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson, 1855), 34.

²³⁶ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 7 (New York, 1842), 8; *ibid.* 10 (New York, 1845), 284; *ibid.* 13:160, 192; *ibid.* 20:276; *ibid.* 22:64.

²³⁷ *ibid.* 23:208; *ibid.* 18:208.

²³⁸ See chapter one and chapter two of this dissertation.

countrymen with the light of Christian truth” while still taking the credit for “Christian philanthropy.”²³⁹ They could also take credit for encouraging free and enslaved African Americans to donate to African missions through their churches. In 1854, Baptist leaders of the Coosa River Association in Alabama encouraged preachers to take up collections for African missions “from Africa’s own sons and daughters here in your midst . . . no people give more cheerfully than our colored members when allowed.”²⁴⁰ The Southern Baptist mission board encouraged slaveholders to read letters from African mission stations to enslaved populations to inspire donations but also in an attempt to inspire gratitude for their lives in a Christian country: “we doubt not, that as their light shines on the benighted abroad, it will burn with a purer and brighter flame at home.”²⁴¹ While intending to reinforce slavery as positive good through African missions, they also encouraged collective black action and a fundraising role for black women at a time of general backlash against black activism in churches.

All four mainstream Protestant denominations in the Gulf South encouraged these donations and free and enslaved women appear on donor rolls for southern missionary societies specifically requesting that their donations be used “for African missions.”²⁴²

²³⁹ *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* 2, no. 1 (June 1847): 12. Lisa Lindsay discusses white Protestants who supported African Americans as missionaries to Africa because “they could withstand tropic diseases” better than whites, in *Atlantic Bonds: A Nineteenth Century Odyssey from America to Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 121; see also pages 103-121.

²⁴⁰ “Communications, Money Received by J.D. Williams at the Coosa River Association,” *South Western Baptist*, September 25, 1854.

²⁴¹ *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* 3, no. 1 (June 1848): 4-5.

²⁴² Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Nineteenth Annual Convention*, 55; Presbytery of South Alabama Minutes, vol. 6, 77-78; Mississippi Baptist State Convention, *Proceedings of the Sixth Anniversary*, 22; *ibid.*, *Proceedings of the Seventh Anniversary of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi* (Raymond, 1843), 21.

Donations came from semi-independent urban black congregations dominated by free persons, including the Franklin Street Methodist Church in Mobile, which had its own “Colored Union Missionary Society,” but denominations also reported donations from rural enslaved congregations.²⁴³ The Presbytery of South Alabama reported in 1848 “two of our churches missionary societies are organized among the servants and they give their money and prayers, with generous sympathy, to spread the gospel among the destitute in Africa.”²⁴⁴ Methodists reported collecting annual donations for African missions from their own mission stations for the enslaved, and Episcopalians collected from congregations that met in their white members’ plantation chapels.²⁴⁵ In the 1850s, the separate enslaved congregation at the Episcopal Chapel of the Cross in rural Madison County, Mississippi increased their donation to African missions each year, giving \$3 in 1855, \$16 in 1856, and \$30 by 1857—an amount comparable to white donations for the cause.²⁴⁶ In 1849, the Southern Baptist foreign mission board reported that that the largest contribution to African missions that year came from a black congregation and “nearly twenty dollars from a slave woman” in Alabama.²⁴⁷ With the little money they earned hiring out their labor, Protestant women of color prioritized the mission to Africa

²⁴³ Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Minutes*, (1853), 14; “Donations,” *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* 5 no. 9 (February 1851), 208; Church Minutes, September 1859, First Baptist Church Eufaula Records, Samford.

²⁴⁴ Presbytery of South Alabama Minutes, vol. 6, 275.

²⁴⁵ Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Fourteenth Session*, 11; E.J. Hamill, “Missionary Treasurer’s Report—Alabama Conference,” *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, December 26, 1859; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Tenth Annual Convention*, 28; Fontaine, *Journal*, November 20, 1848, Edward Fontaine Papers; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 22, 246.

²⁴⁶ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 20, 372; *ibid.* 21:186; *ibid.* 22:359.

²⁴⁷ *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* 4 (1849): 59.

as individual donors and as members of black congregations, and received encouragement from white church leaders for embracing a paternalistic duty to save their African “countrymen” from paganism.

In the 1840s and 1850s, not only was the mission to Africa growing in popularity among Gulf South women, but white women were also increasing their support to other foreign mission fields which their southern mission boards and local church leaders prioritized. These women stayed informed—subscribing to missionary journals which printed foreign correspondence from mission stations and attending annual missionary sermons at their churches—basing where they instructed their donations to go on what they read and heard. Eliza Clitherall of Tuscaloosa was particularly moved to donate to the Episcopal mission in the Holy Land in 1860 after reading about the “poor Disciples of Christ” affected by the “Syrian Massacre.”²⁴⁸ Baptist women in Alabama collected money for a Baptist chapel at their mission in Canton, China after missionary John Lewis Shuck’s request for this made it into the *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal*.²⁴⁹ Male church leaders relied on women to volunteer as donation collectors in their churches and “adopt” missionaries with their own money.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Clitherall, *Diary*, vol. 15, October 10, 1860, Clitherall Diaries. Clitherall was referring to the 1860 civil war between Maronite Christians and the Druzes (an Islamic sect) which culminated in a massacre of thousands of Maronites in Damascus and the destruction of hundreds of Maronite villages and churches. Clitherall may have read a reprint of “The Civil War in Syria,” *The New York Times*, July 21, 1860 or “The Syrian Massacres,” *The New York Times*, July 28, 1860.

²⁴⁹ *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* 1, no. 10 (February 1847): 208.

²⁵⁰ “Female Influence,” *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* 1, (May, 1847): 279; *ibid.* 4, no. 4 (September 1849): 118; Cahaba Baptist Association, *Minutes of the Fortieth Anniversary*, 22; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth Anniversary*, 37; Casey, comp., *Amite County*, 2:197-198; Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirty-second Annual Convention*, 97.

Contrary to declension scholarship, Gulf South women increasingly worked alongside other women to raise and submit missionary donations in the decades leading up to the Civil War.²⁵¹ There were at least twenty-eight official female societies attached to individual Protestant congregations that donated to their denomination's missions from 1840 to 1861, many donating annually. Some doubled as female prayer meetings or church aid societies.²⁵² These women met regularly, collected membership dues, raised money with fairs and sewing projects, and filled boxes of clothing for missionaries—often splitting their donations between foreign and domestic fields.²⁵³ Additionally, there were at least twenty-seven unofficial groups that donated collectively as “the ladies of the church” during this same time period. Women collectively supported their church's foreign mission causes in cities like New Orleans, Natchez, and Mobile; in towns like Selma, Columbus, and Shreveport; and even in rural churches and preaching stations like Suggsville in Clark County, Alabama and Ouachita and Trenton Circuits in northern Louisiana.²⁵⁴ Rather than remaining isolated to their own church community, women throughout the Gulf South worked together to expand the space of their activism to

²⁵¹ For scholarship on the decline in women's collective missionary activism in the late antebellum South, see: Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 3, 24, 30; Lebsack, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 222; Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders*, 44.

²⁵² Nicholson, "News from our Home Work," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 20, 1858; Mrs. E. A. Wright to Anne Burnham, October 29, 1836, Burnham Letters.

²⁵³ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Sixth Annual Convention*, 9; Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Second Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1840), 45; Clitherall, *Diary*, vol. 15, January 17, 1857, Clitherall Diaries; Session Minutes, July 1858, May 1861, First Presbyterian Church, Selma, Records.

²⁵⁴ Footnotes 250, 251; Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Minutes*, (1853), 13; "Louisiana Conference," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, March 7, 1860; Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Twelfth Session*, 13; *ibid.*, *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Thirteenth Session*, 16-19.

include support for Protestant missions across the globe.

As with the mission to Africa, many of these women's organizations worked specifically to fund the Christian education of unconverted women and children at mission stations in Native American territories and China. In 1849, the *Alabama Baptist* published an ad for a female teacher for "Armstrong Academy, Choctaw Nation."²⁵⁵ After hearing a sermon from an agent of the Baptist Indian Mission Association, "the Ladies of Centre Ridge Baptist Church" in Carlowville, Alabama donated \$100 to "adopt" Mary Davis, the missionary who volunteered to teach at Armstrong, receiving praise from the newspaper for their financial support: "who will imitate the noble example of the ladies of Centre Ridge Baptist Church?"²⁵⁶ Baptist women in the region were inspired to fund more female teachers in Native American missions. In the early 1850s, the "ladies of Talladega Baptist Church" donated \$100 to "sustain" Eliza McCoy working with the Potawatomie mission and the women of Siloam Baptist Church in Marion, Alabama "adopted" Sarah Osgood, a missionary for the Wea people who taught at Harvey Institute, both in Kansas.²⁵⁷ In exchange for regular financial support, Osgood wrote the women of Siloam Church to give them updates about the mission and her school. Osgood emphasized the importance of keeping Native American children at the school so that they would not be "exposed to the vices of their people," an assimilation policy that continued in government-sponsored Native American boarding schools in the

²⁵⁵ "Female Teacher Wanted," *Alabama Baptist Advocate*, July 1, 1849.

²⁵⁶ "The Ladies of the Centre Ridge Church," *Alabama Baptist*, March 6, 1850.

²⁵⁷ G.B. Davis, "Report," *South Western Baptist*, September 11, 1850; "Female Benevolence," *South Western Baptist*, April 17, 1850; "Letter from Miss Sarah A Osgood," *South Western Baptist*, April 23, 1851.

late nineteenth and early twentieth century.²⁵⁸ Osgood stressed that education was necessary to bring about conversions, writing to the women, “we must not expect many conversions until the now rising generation shall have become well taught in the doctrines of the Gospel.”²⁵⁹ Her female sponsors in Alabama then submitted these letters to the *Alabama Baptist*, giving the message of Christian education a larger audience of female readers in the Gulf South. Female readers responded by sending individual donations to support the schools of the “Southern Baptist Board of Indian Missions.”²⁶⁰

Racialized stereotypes about Africa’s climate kept white women from going there as missionary teachers, but church leaders saw white female missionary teachers as essential to converting women and children in China. While preaching in Vicksburg to raise money for the Baptist mission to China, John Shuck argued that due to gender norms in China, “the only way in which access can be gained” to Chinese women was “through the instrumentality of female missionaries.”²⁶¹ In 1846, Shuck married Eliza Sexton, a teacher at Judson Female Academy in Alabama, and within a year they were working as missionaries in Shanghai. While John preached, Eliza visited the women of Shanghai in their homes to offer religious counsel and worked with other missionary

²⁵⁸ "Letter from Miss Sarah A Osgood," *South Western Baptist*, April 23, 1851; Julie Davis, "American Indian Boarding School Experiences: Recent Students from Native Perspectives," *Magazine of History* 15, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 20-22.

²⁵⁹ "Letter from Miss Sarah A Osgood," *South Western Baptist*, April 23, 1851.

²⁶⁰ G.B. Davis, "Report," *South Western Baptist*, September 11, 1850; "Indian Missions," *South Western Baptist*, August 21, 1856; "Report," *South Western Baptist*, April 28, 1859; "Indian Missions," *South Western Baptist*, June 7, 1860.

²⁶¹ "Brother Shuck in Mississippi," *Alabama Baptist*, December 11, 1846.

wives to fundraise for a schoolhouse.²⁶² Not only did they raise money in Shanghai by organizing their own sewing society, but Eliza also received financial support for her school from the Judson Female Academy missionary society and “many sisters among the Southern churches.”²⁶³ Her husband celebrated the fact that they raised enough money for the school, “without a dollar from the Board,” thanks to women’s fundraising efforts in China and back home in the Gulf South.²⁶⁴

In 1851, Martha Foster became the second female Baptist resident in Alabama (after Eliza Shuck) and first person born in Alabama of any gender to become a Baptist missionary in China. Foster, a teacher, had to marry the missionary Tarleton Crawford before the board would let her go, but she was adamant that she had her own calling to missionary work separate from being a wife. While waiting to board the ship to Shanghai, Martha wrote, “I know it is commonly thought that a woman need have no such convictions of duty; if she be an obedient, affectionate wife, that is sufficient. And so it would be, if a woman’s conscience be list in that of her husband—if he be her god—if she owe no higher duties to God.” With female humility even in the privacy of her diary, Martha continued, “Such convictions forced themselves upon me, much against my own will, and I therefore conclude that God sometimes gives direction to a woman’s mind, independent of her husband.”²⁶⁵ Martha’s independent work in China was a reflection of

²⁶² *The Southern Baptist Missionary Journal* 3, no. 5 (October 1848): 125-126; *ibid.* 4, no. 7 (December 1849): 176; *ibid.* 5, no. 3 (August 1850): 55; *ibid.* 5, no. 6 (November 1850): 134.

²⁶³ *Ibid.* 4, no. 7 (December 1849): 176, 179. For more on Eliza Shuck, see chapter one of this dissertation.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 5, no. 5 (October 1850): 99; *ibid.* 5, no. 6 (November 1850): 136.

²⁶⁵ Crawford, Diary, November 4, 1851, Crawford Diaries.

her belief in her separate calling. She led female prayer meetings, spent evenings talking to individual women about Jesus, and founded a female school.²⁶⁶ Alabama Baptists read about her work through her letters, which were published in Gulf South newspapers, and continued to support her financially.²⁶⁷ Cahaba Baptist Association wrote that Martha Crawford, “ought to arouse the spirit of self-sacrifice in all of us,” and in 1852, her home congregation of Grants Creek Baptist church donated \$80 “to educate a Chinese girl in Mrs. Crawford’s school.”²⁶⁸

Methodist and Episcopal Churches also sent women who taught at academies and Sunday schools in the Gulf South to become missionary teachers in China. Again, Gulf South women became their financial supporters. In 1852, Mary McLelland, a Methodist teacher at Pearl River Academy in Mississippi, married James Lambuth and they became the first foreign missionaries from the new Foreign Mission Board of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Methodist minister John G. Jones reported that they both claimed to be “‘inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost,’ to offer themselves as missionaries to China.”²⁶⁹ In 1858, the Methodist women of Monticello near Pearl River paid to make Mary Lambuth and her child life members of the Methodist Missionary Society, and her home congregation of Pearl River Church raised \$100 so that Mary could rent a

²⁶⁶ Crawford, Diary, April 21, 1852-February 6, 1853, Crawford Diaries.

²⁶⁷ "Martha Foster Crawford, Letter," *South Western Baptist*, January 1, 1853; "Letter of Mrs. Martha F. Crawford," *South Western Baptist*, June 29, 1854; "Martha Foster Crawford," *South Western Baptist*, September 21, 1854.

²⁶⁸ *Minutes of the Thirty-Fourth Anniversary of the Cahaba Baptist Association* (Tuscaloosa: 1851), 11; Alabama Baptist State Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-Ninth Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention*, (Montgomery, 1853), 30.

²⁶⁹ Jones, *Complete History of Methodism*, 4:215.

schoolhouse in China.²⁷⁰ Individual Methodist women in Mississippi and Louisiana sent donations to sponsor Chinese students at her school.²⁷¹ In 1860, when Mary brought her children home to the United States because “the moral influence of paganism is too corrupting” and then returned to China without them to continue her missionary work, the *New Orleans Christian Advocate* used her self-sacrificing example to encourage their female readers in the Gulf South to donate to the cause: “what will that portion of them who are mothers think . . . Do some complain at giving a little money to this cause, when others are doing and suffering so much in it?”²⁷² Mary Lambuth sacrificed the domestic duty of taking care of her own children for the public work of bringing unconverted children into the church.

In 1844, the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama sent Emma Jones, an unmarried Sunday school teacher from Christ Church, Mobile, to Shanghai. She volunteered to run an Episcopal boys school there and also spearheaded a new missionary school for girls. As recorded in the Episcopal magazine, *The Spirit of Missions*, Jones wrote home, “my heart yearned to collect the female children of China, and instruct them in that blessed Gospel which has elevated their sex where it has been promulged [sic].”²⁷³ Missionary societies associated with Christ Church’s female Sunday school class, female sewing society, and general congregation donated specifically to support her school, and when

²⁷⁰ Nicholson, "News from our Home Work," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, October 20, 1858; Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Minutes of the Forty-third Session*, 26.

²⁷¹ Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, *Minutes of the Forty-third Session*, 26; *ibid.*, *Minutes of the Forty-fifth Session of the Mississippi Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Vicksburg, 1860), 18; John Lambuth, "Contributions for China" *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, May 9, 1860.

²⁷² "Arrival of Mrs. Lambuth," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 29, 1860.

²⁷³ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 21, 376-377.

Jones made a visit home in 1857, she attended their sewing society meeting as a guest speaker on the Shanghai mission.²⁷⁴ Episcopal women in New Orleans, Charleston, and Philadelphia also used their donations to sponsor students at her school.²⁷⁵ Baptist missionary Eliza Shuck added praise writing to the *Alabama Baptist*, “This Institution is giving much encouragement. Miss Jones, from Mobile, Ala., has mainly the charge of it, and is admirably adapted to fill her place. Her heart is in the work, and God has given her tokens of success.”²⁷⁶

Emma Jones was also exemplary because she was unmarried, and her work put her in the middle of denominational debates about how women should participate in the cause. The Missionary Bishop of China, William Boone, wrote that Jones was “a happy illustration of what true-hearted, single Christian women can do for the benefit of a heathen people”—women who would not be distracted by the domestic responsibilities of missionary wives and mothers.²⁷⁷ While all church leaders did not agree, Jones’ work as an unmarried female missionary teacher proved to be a precursor to a postbellum norm across Protestant denominations.²⁷⁸ Other antebellum female missionaries from the Gulf South like Lambuth, Shuck, and Crawford, who claimed a religious duty to serve as

²⁷⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, *Journal of the Thirteenth Annual Convention*, 17; Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 10, 196; *ibid.* 16:404; Clitherall, *Diary*, vol. 15, January 17, 1857, Clitherall Diaries.

²⁷⁵ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 15, 53-56, 160, 438.

²⁷⁶ "Mrs. Shuck's Letter" *Alabama Baptist*, November 20, 1850.

²⁷⁷ Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church, *The Spirit of Missions* 12, 256-257.

²⁷⁸ For scholarship on postbellum single female missionaries, see: Dana L. Robert, *American Women and Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 115-129; Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries*, 6; Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up*, 157-163.

teachers not just as wives, as well as the women back home who donated to build their schools and sponsor their students, helped to pave the way.

Looking Outward

In *The Free Women of Petersburg*, Suzanne Lebsock argued that in the 1840s and 1850s, the women of Petersburg, Virginia's churches made a "decisive turn in the direction of the local, the specific, and the concrete, as they committed the greater part of their fundraising skills to the construction of new buildings for their own congregations."²⁷⁹ Despite earlier activism in missions and benevolence, Christian women in Lebsock's Petersburg turned their focus inward on the eve of the Civil War, restricting the space they claimed for activism to their own church. During the same period in the Gulf South, however, Protestant women were expanding the scope of their religious activism, taking on a Christian duty to help their cities, states, nation, and the world. In cities like New Orleans, Natchez, and Mobile, white women built spaces like orphanages and book depositories and used their homes and churches for multi-denominational benevolent society meetings in order to address urban social problems. Free women of color in New Orleans used their church to fundraise for their own mutual aid society. In both the rural and urban Gulf South, white women organized female societies tied to their local churches that supported their denomination's missionary work at home and abroad, and free and enslaved women of color prioritized supporting missionaries at home and in West Africa. Rather than withdrawing from public benevolence and mission work when fears of abolitionism and women's suffrage movements grew, women played a crucial role in southern versions of these movements

²⁷⁹ Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, 222.

that maintained the region's racial and gender hierarchy. By focusing on Christian education and the needs of women and children, Protestant women in the Gulf South justified their duty to look outward—to claim spaces for activism on the other side of town and the other side of the world—and pushed their churches to do so as well.

CONCLUSION

Claiming a Public “Sphere of Usefulness”

Prescriptive writing from the late antebellum Gulf South offers two contrasting versions of the ideal southern Protestant woman. On the one hand is the domestic exemplar of the Cult of True Womanhood found in Judson Crane’s commencement address at the Baptist Mississippi Female College in 1854. Crane’s ideal woman attended school and church but “the matronly dignity and worth and influence she displays and exercises around the hearthstones of her own Anglo-Saxon home” were “the grand object and finale of her existence.”¹ The only space of woman’s religious influence and activism was the private space of the home: “It is in the domestic circle,” Crane argued, where “she exerts a greater power than anything;” “she moulds the minds and character of her sons, who, when grown to manhood . . . [remember] above all, the teachings of the mother, and the pious lessons received around the hearth of the homestead.”² Crane denounced the northern women who “propose that she [southern woman] shall quit the sphere in which she now moves so gracefully and usefully” as mother, wife, and daughter, and left his female audience with this advice from Lord Littleton: “Seek to be

¹ A. Judson Crane, *Address Delivered at the Annual Commencement*, 15.

² *Ibid.*, 15, 14.

good, aim not to be great; A woman's noblest station is retreat; Her fairest victories fly from public sight; Domestic worth—that shows too strong a light.”³

On the other hand is the idealized Protestant woman, Bessie Melville, the title character in the prescriptive novel written by Episcopalian Mary Ann Cruse of Huntsville, Alabama in 1858. Melville attended a southern Episcopal female academy where she not only went to church, Sunday school, and church choir practice, but she also gave religious counsel to her classmates. She convinced one classmate, Emma, to join the church and served as her confirmation sponsor; led prayer meetings in the dormitory; and formed a missionary society which raised money for missions in Native American territories.⁴ After graduation, she adopted “a teacher's life, for to this sphere of usefulness Bessie has consecrated herself,” teaching at an Episcopal day school as well as at her church's Sunday school and founding missionary societies for her students in both.⁵ Ultimately Melville married a missionary and moved to a mission station in the Pacific Northwest where she founded a school for Native American girls and built a new chapel and schoolhouse, funded by donations she collected from her former classmates and students back home. Emma, the classmate Bessie brought into the church all those years ago, stayed in touch and sent Bessie a baptismal font made out of carved Italian marble for her mission church.⁶ As a missionary wife and teacher, Bessie found “pure satisfaction and pleasure which a conscientious discharge of duty and a voluntary

³ Crane, *Address Delivered at the Annual Commencement*, 17, 20.

⁴ Cruse, *Bessie Melville*, 64-232; 258-260.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 286, 270-271.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 327-340, 352-353.

sacrifice of self for the good of other, must ever bring” and continued to rely on a network of female friends in the church for spiritual and financial support.⁷ As evangelizer, prayer leader, teacher, fundraiser, and missionary, Bessie Melville was, according to Cruse, an exemplar of female “usefulness in this world” rather than just usefulness in the domestic sphere.⁸ Ultimately, “she did not regret her choice; deliberately and voluntarily she had consecrated herself to this service.”⁹ According to this Gulf South author, a woman who donated the proceeds of the book to fund the construction and furnishing of her own church in Huntsville, Bessie Melville’s life of public religious service was the true ideal of southern Protestant womanhood.

Previous scholarship has focused overwhelmingly on the power of the first ideal found in Crane’s commencement address of the pious wife and mother whose religious power was contained to the domestic sphere. While the majority of Protestant women in the Gulf South did not become missionaries, many women, like the fictional Bessie Melville, claimed religious purpose—even a calling—outside of the home and many found a supportive community of likeminded women in the process. At the same time, they expanded the sphere of their activism into public religious spaces in ways that were still acceptable to gender norms in a patriarchal slave society. While the type of religious work women performed often varied by race, class, geography, and denomination, in general certain public spaces remained more accessible to women’s activism than others.

⁷ Cruse, *Bessie Melville*, 283.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 283.

Schools

As was the case in *Bessie Melville*, schools remained the most acceptable public space for Gulf South women to speak and lead in the name of religious duty because of the fact that they were working with children. Women were already expected to teach children how to be good Christians at home, and female academies, Sunday schools, and orphanages all served as public extensions of this domestic space. At the same time, however, these educational institutions also provided women with opportunities to expand their power and influence to adults as donors, founders, and principals or presidents of institutions; writers of teaching materials and advice; and, in larger institutions, as part of a community of Christian educators who supported one another's spiritual journey through prayer meetings and benevolence work. At female academies, women like Presbyterian Jane Copes used their influence as teachers to move into leadership positions in other public spaces including revivals, church aid sewing societies, and temperance societies. Martha Foster Crawford, Mary McClelland Lambuth, and Eliza Sexton Shuck all turned teaching in the Gulf South into founding their own missionary schools in China. Middle- and upper-class white students developed broader expectations for their religious lives beyond simply raising Christian children, as well. They left school prepared to teach or support Christian education at home and abroad and serve their churches as musicians, prayer leaders, female society officeholders, petitioners, and fundraisers.

While female academies excluded black and poorer white women as teachers and students, Sunday schools proved to be much more accessible. The majority held by women in teaching and leadership positions in Gulf South Sunday schools is evidence

that the feminization of Protestant churches continued, even as mainstream churches courted male members, and women's numerical dominance in churches was not just as passive attendees at Sunday worship.¹⁰ Male church leaders continued to rely on women to expand church presence in the region through education even up to the Civil War. White women found opportunities to bring poor and orphaned children into their churches as well as evangelize to the parents of students, and, as with female academies, support fellow teachers in their religious work.

While some women focused solely on their work in the Sunday school, for other women Sunday school was a stepping-stone to other types of church and benevolent work. Sunday school teachers like Presbyterians Martha Moss and Sophia Hays and Episcopalian Caroline Clitherall joined church sewing societies and female prayer meetings and donated to missionary causes.¹¹ Women who directed religious instruction for the enslaved like Episcopalian Louisa Harrison and Baptist Sarah Wright also helped fund church and parsonage construction and pay preacher salaries.¹² Female teachers at Tuscaloosa's Presbyterian Sunday school were also temperance and benevolence society members, donors to tract and Bible causes, colonizationists, and African missions

¹⁰ For scholarship on the feminization of Protestant churches in nineteenth-century America, see Barbara Welter, "The Feminization of American Religion" 1800-1860," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary S. Harman and Lois W. Banner (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 137-157; Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*; Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*; Richard D. Shiels, "The Feminization of American Congregationalism, 1730-1835," *American Quarterly* 33 (Spring 1981): 46-82.

¹¹ Moss, Diary, March 28, 1854, December 4, 1854; Hays, Diary, August 31, 1854, April 23, 1858, Hays-Ray-Webb Papers; Clitherall, Diary, January 11, 1851, January 17, 1857, Clitherall Diaries.

¹² "The Request of Mrs. Louisa M. Harrison for the Consecration of Faunsdale Chapel," Faunsdale Plantation Papers; Esther Wright Boyd, "Transcript of Responses," Jesse D. Wright Papers, 8.

supporters.¹³ It was also because of the infantilization of people of color that female-directed Sunday schools for enslaved children and adults became the face of the mission to the enslaved as an extension of the household. Sunday schools for the enslaved were politically charged spaces which female slaveholders helped create and which shaped the South's religious defense of slavery before and after the Civil War.

Free and enslaved women, like their white counterparts, found that the classroom was a more acceptable space to speak and lead than the pulpit. Some women of color found independent leadership opportunities teaching in classrooms in urban black churches or, as with Lucy Skipwith, in chapels on absentee-owner plantations. Other enslaved women, like Jane Lee in Louisiana, created informal classrooms within their workspaces and living quarters, challenging white control of these spaces and the religious message of their teaching in the process. The gender norm of women caring for the religious instruction of children justified women's claim to activism in the classroom, but at the same time, opened the door for students and teachers to claim other public spaces as well.

Homosocial Spaces

Protestant women throughout the Gulf South also found that spaces where they could work with and for other women were more accepting of their public leadership and voice than mixed-gender spaces. Justified by a socially acceptable religious duty to help less fortunate women, Protestant women founded benevolence societies that offered relief to sick and destitute widows and temperance societies to save women from intemperate husbands, gaining valuable experience as elected leaders and public speakers in the

¹³ Quist, "Slaveholding Operatives," 502-503.

process. Justified by the religious duty to bring and keep other women in the church, they exhorted at female prayer meetings, served as other women's confirmation sponsors and visiting committees for church morality trials, and supported foreign and domestic missionary efforts that specifically targeted unconverted women.

They also formed female societies where they could do religious work alongside other women, turning private spaces like parlors into public female meeting spaces, and creating new spaces like orphanages, book depositories, and church buildings where their organizations could meet. Working collectively, white women and women of color expanded private housekeeping and hostess roles into public fundraising opportunities through temporary spaces of fairs and suppers, and slaveholding women turned domestic management of enslaved female labor to sew, clean, and cook into a form of stewardship for the benefit of their ministers and sacred spaces. At the same time, working together gave churchwomen a larger voice in the affairs of the church and influence over how churches spent their money. Women created parallel organizations to male church governing bodies or female committees within male-run benevolence organizations that were often more successful at raising money than their male counterparts. In 1838, the white women of Trinity Episcopal Church, Natchez raised enough money at their fair to split the proceeds between a parsonage, domestic missions in the Diocese of Mississippi, the Natchez Female Orphan Asylum, and "objects of General Charity" as they saw fit, investing in the institutions of Christian benevolence and respectable churches.¹⁴

Mainstream Protestant denominations throughout the antebellum Gulf South remained

¹⁴ Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, *Journal of the Thirteenth Annual Convention*, 5.

dependent on women's collective activism to fund the institutional expansion of their churches.

Temporary Spaces and Maintaining the Social Order

While Protestant women could maintain permanent positions of power in homosocial spaces, speaking and leading in mixed-gender spaces was far more acceptable in exceptional, temporary circumstances. This included exhorting at outdoor revivals, speaking from the pulpit during a temperance rally or school commencement, or the once-in-a-lifetime confirmation service or sharing of a conversion experience. Enslaved women like Lucy Skipwith were able to direct adult Bible classes and worship services on absentee plantations because there was no permanent minister or white slaveholder to fill the role. Women served as temporary church sextons, pastoral advisors, deacons, prayer leaders, and organists when men were not available to do so, especially ministers' wives, who justified their work as an extension of their husband's duties. Almost always their service in these spaces was voluntary and unpaid.

Nor were Protestant women in the antebellum Gulf South challenging the social order of their patriarchal slave society through their religious activism. They were not advocating to become ordained preachers or to hold male, elected church offices, and they denounced association with northern political movements like women's suffrage and abolitionism that challenged the social and economic system in which they lived. Instead, white women's activism was crucial to the southern Christian defense of slavery in teaching and funding the mission to the enslaved, and Protestant free and enslaved women of color, by and large, worked *within* an oppressive system to carve out a space for religious community and activism rather than using religion to begin a revolt. Yet

Beth Barton Schweiger's argument, which can be applied to all southern Protestant women, rings true: "neither evangelical women nor Christian slaves began a revolution, but this fact does not begin to tell the story of their lives."¹⁵ In fact, it was because southern Protestant women conformed to accepted gender norms and did not challenge the status quo that they were so successful. In claiming to act as mothers, wives, housekeepers, hostesses, and caretakers—in seeking to make the world more homelike through education, moral reform, and evangelization—they expanded the physical spaces that counted as part of women's sphere, all through religious duty. Likewise, by finding white allies and embracing white gender norms, urban free women of color like Betsy Crissman in Jackson, Mississippi and the women of St. James AME, New Orleans, as well as enslaved rural women like Lucy Skipwith, used religious duty to create the schools, churches, and benevolence institutions that would support their communities. They also claimed leadership roles in those communities at a time when so few options were available. Referring to the early nineteenth-century North, Nancy Cott has argued, "No other avenue of self-expression besides religion at once offered women social approbation, the encouragement of male leaders (ministers) and, most important, the community of their peers."¹⁶ The ubiquity of Protestant women's religious activism and the lack of secular women's organizations as compared to the antebellum North are proof that Cott's claim remained true longer in the Gulf South: female religious duty remained the most accessible way for black and white southern women to lay claim to public spaces—to speak, lead, and create in public.

¹⁵ Schweiger, "Max Weber on Mount Airy," 48.

¹⁶ Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, 140-141.

Looking Forward

In acknowledging the widespread female religious activism in the antebellum Gulf South, the Civil War becomes less of a stark transition, especially for white southern women's public lives. The sewing societies of the war effort and the postwar ladies' memorial associations had their roots in antebellum women's church aid and benevolence societies, and often claimed religious motivation for their work as well.¹⁷ Certainly Gulf South women gained more official and state-wide roles in their churches in the decades after the Civil War, most evident in the creation of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and southern women's foreign mission boards in all four mainstream Protestant denominations in the 1870s.¹⁸ These organizations would have been less successful in the Gulf South, however, without the precursor local female temperance and missionary societies and the early female missionaries who paved the way for single women to serve in foreign stations. Elizabeth Caroline Dowdell of Auburn, Alabama, who served as a manager of the Methodist Women's Board of Foreign Missions and president of the Alabama Conference Society after the war, began her public service to the church as an antebellum Sunday school teacher and director of the mission to the enslaved on her father's plantation. As her female biographer wrote in 1942, Dowdell also petitioned

¹⁷ See Wadley, *Diary*, vol. 2, June 1861-April 17, 1863 Wadley Papers; Egbett W. Smith, "Origin and growth [sic] of the organized Women's work of the Southern Presbyterian Church," in *Scrapbook, 1820-1948, Records, First Presbyterian, Tuscaloosa, PCHS*; Boudreaux, "A History of Philanthropy in New Orleans," 66-67; Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, Charles Reagan Wilson, eds. *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Keller, Queen, Thomas, eds., *Women in New Worlds*, vol. 2, 237, 395-396, 196-210, 249-267; *ibid.*, vol. 1, 293-327; Caroline Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memories* (New York: Grafton Press, 1901), 142-144, 162-185; Smith, "Origin and growth," in *Records, First Presbyterian, Tuscaloosa, PCHS*.

Bishop J. O. Andrew in 1861, “asking the church fathers to give women of the church a definite plan of service in the church” and already donated to Methodist foreign missions.¹⁹ While it took seventeen years before the Methodist Church, South authorized an official Women’s Board of Foreign Missions, Dowdell, and other Gulf South women like her, were claiming and advocating for public spaces to serve their churches for decades before the war.

Southern Protestant black women after the end of slavery, on the other hand, saw a substantial increase in the number public spaces available to them for religious leadership and activism, especially outside of white-controlled churches and workspaces. They served as deaconesses and church mothers in independent black churches, as teachers in freedmen’s day schools and Sunday schools, organizers of mutual aid and missionary societies, and fundraisers for all of these new institutions.²⁰ To a different degree, however, black women, like their white counterparts, built on the associations and leadership roles claimed before the Civil War in order to take on more official positions in their postbellum religious communities.

Black and white Protestant women in the late antebellum Gulf South not only claimed powerful and fulfilling public identities outside of their families in the name of

¹⁹ Mrs. R.L. Hobdy, "Makers of Methodism in this Area," *Alabama Christian Advocate*, June 25, 1942.

²⁰ For scholarship on black southern Protestant women’s religious activism after 1865, see Charles Octavius Boothe, *The Cyclopedia of the Colored Baptists of Alabama: Their Leaders and Their Work* (Birmingham: Alabama Publishing Company, 1895), 80, 233, 251, 252, 285; Cornelius, *Slave Missions*, 203; Jones, *Labor of Love*, 76; Kathleen C. Berkeley, “Colored Ladies Also Contributed:” Black Women’s Activities from Benevolence to Social Welfare, 1866-1896,” in *The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, and Education*, ed. Walter J Fraser, Jr., R. Frank Saunders, Jr., Jon L. Wakelyn (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 181-203; William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African American Church in the African-American Church in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 95-98, 114.

religious duty, but they also were responsible for building the physical spaces and institutions of modern Protestantism. Women turned their homes and churches into public meeting spaces for female collective activism and added church buildings, parsonages, plantation chapels, mission stations, revival campgrounds, fundraiser fairs, schools, book depositories, and orphanages to the sacred landscape of the region. Even though their work often remained unpaid, unofficial, and rooted in domestic gender norms, women's expansion of their religious duties into the public sphere was necessary work to ensure the Gulf South's transition from itinerant missions to established, modern Protestant denominations. Like the fictional Bessie Melville, thousands of antebellum Protestant women in the Gulf South found a public "sphere of usefulness" through religion, claiming and creating sacred spaces that would define the religious geography of the Gulf South for decades to come.²¹

²¹ Cruse, *Bessie Melville*, 286. For another example of this phrase describing women's public activism in the church, see "Our Methodist Womanhood," *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, February 8, 1860.

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