



# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

**Listening to Our History**

*Inculturation and Jesuit Slaveholding*

**EDWARD F. BECKETT, S.J.**

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A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

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*Edward F. Beckett, S.J.*

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### *For your information . . .*

My remarks in the last issue of STUDIES began with the exclamation "You never know!" The remarks in this issue might well begin in the same way because of a quite unusual story of how a Jesuit vocation began.

In the last issue of STUDIES, we published as a Source an excerpt from an Alexandre Dumas novel, *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*. The excerpt purported to reveal the mysterious details involved in choosing a new Jesuit general. It was and is pure fantasy.

But last summer, as a young Jesuit from eastern Europe and I talked during breakfast at the Jesuit community on the Rue de Grenelle in Paris, the Dumas novel reappeared in an astonishing way. This Jesuit had grown up in a country behind the Iron Curtain where there were no members of the Society of Jesus. Russian was a compulsory language in his school, so to improve his knowledge of it he decided to read a Dumas novel in Russian translation. That novel was *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*, and there for the first time he met members of the Society of Jesus. He was so struck by them, even in the fantasyland of a Dumas novel, that he wanted to get in touch with them. When the Iron Curtain parted, he was able to do so, and a few years later he entered the Society of Jesus. You never know!

To continue these remarks on books and Jesuits, a new such book, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England, 1541-1588: "Our Way of Proceeding?"* (New York: E. J. Brill) is a first-rate publication, both fascinating and scholarly. The author is Thomas M. McCoog, S.J., a member of the Maryland Province, presently archivist of the British Province and a member of the Jesuit Historical Institute in Rome. From the introduction, entitled "Lewdly Cal Jebusites," to the conclusion, "Our Way of Proceeding," this is the "critical—and not apologetic—account of Jesuit activities between the first mission to Ireland (1541) and the collapse of the Armada (1588)."

A book soon to be published by the Institute of Jesuit Sources will for the first time gather into an English translation the *Memoriale* (the spiritual autobiography/diary of Pierre Favre) and a collection of his spiritual letters. It is timed to come out this year, the 450th anniversary of the death of Favre, the first companion of Ignatius of Loyola in Paris. Nineteen ninety six is of significance for other reasons as well: it marks the 350th anniversary of St. Francis Borgia's entrance into the Society and of St. Isaac Jogues's martyrdom. By coincidence I am writing these lines on September 18, the day on which Saint Isaac Jogues heroically went to his death.

This was a busy year for the IJS as it went about its book-publishing enterprises. In the course of the calendar year, we have published *Draw Me into Your Friendship* by David Fleming, S.J.; *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599* by Martin E. Palmer, S.J.; *A*



*Harvest of Hope: Jesuit Collegiate Education in England, 1794–1914* by Ian D. Roberts; and *The Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation*. Within the next two months will appear *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*; *Terpsichore at Louis-le-Grand: Baroque Dance on the Jesuit Stage in Paris* by Judith Rock; and *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre: His “Memoriale” and Selected Letters*. And finally, a somewhat different type of publication will issue from our workshop, a CD-ROM bearing the title *Polanco: The Writings of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, containing all of his almost 7,000 letters and his other works in their original languages. About all of these last-named publications, more in the next issue of STUDIES.

We live in a world of change; so, given the gradual increase in the price of paper, printing, and postage, we must expect an increase in the cost of producing and delivering STUDIES as well. Regretfully but necessarily, we must therefore increase the subscription price of the journal. The details of this first increase in two years will be found on the inside back cover of this issue.

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*  
*Editor*

**Please see new subscription-price  
information on inside back cover.**



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# LISTENING TO OUR HISTORY

## *Inculturation and Jesuit Slaveholding*

### Introduction: The Two-edged Sword

**T**his essay is an exercise in listening—listening to a chapter of our history and to what that history has to say about a particular instance of inculturation. That particular instance is Jesuit slaveholding in Maryland from the early eighteenth through the early nineteenth centuries. It may in places surprise, disconcert, anger, or edify the reader.

Inculturation has been a theological buzzword in Catholic circles for over a quarter of a century. Simply put, it refers to the proclamation of the Gospel within a given culture in such a way as to win for it a more ready reception. It is, for the most part, considered an almost unambiguous good and an absolute necessity if Christianity is to remain relevant in the twenty-first century. I would like to suggest that inculturation is more ambiguous than it might seem. As often as not, it is a two-edged sword.

For one thing, we must acknowledge that much of what we understand as the “Gospel” is, in fact, the product of a given culture and its outlook on things. We must also recognize that the Gospel—that is, the witness of Jesus to the Kingdom’s arrival and his subsequent life, death, and resurrection, “the power of God for salvation,” as Paul proclaimed it (Rom. 1:16)—often acts as a powerful critic in the face of certain cultural practices. Sorting out what is of God, and what is not, is no simple task. It involves much listening not only to our present circumstances but also to our past.

What are we talking about when we refer to “inculturation”? The Thirty-fourth General Congregation has adopted Peter-Hans Kolvenbach’s

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description of inculturation as “the existential dialogue between a living people and the living Gospel.” It also proclaims that this dialogue is, in fact, “a form of *incarnation* [emphasis in the original] of the Word of God in all the diversity of human experience.”<sup>1</sup> In the words of Pope John Paul II, addressed specifically to the church in Africa, the inculturated proclamation of the Gospel is a “question of bringing Christ into the very center of African life, and lifting up all African life to Christ. Thus not only is Christianity relevant to Africa, but Christ in the members of his body is himself African.”<sup>2</sup> As Peter Schineller has pointed out, inculturation is not, then, about imposition, translation, adaptation, and the like, but, above all, about incarnation.<sup>3</sup> Inculturation means the Gospel as flesh and bone within a given culture—fully human, fully divine.

All of the above I find exemplary. There is no question in my mind how necessary it is for us to remind ourselves frequently that inculturation must always be the expression of the attitude that “God is everywhere to be found in his world. . . . There is nothing in which he cannot be found. . . . We are united with God, not in spite of things but through them, not in spite of our humanity but through it,” as Joseph Veale has so simply phrased it (or, if you will, paraphrased it) in a recent issue of *STUDIES*.<sup>4</sup> My problem is not that inculturation is wrongheaded or a watering-down of the Gospel; quite the contrary. I only wish to emphasize that too often we are creatures of *our own culture’s blindness*. This, then, is the chief “vice” of inculturation: our own inability to transcend our limited perspective; this in turn breeds passivity and complicity in the face of the Gospel’s challenge to our own culture’s practices (or our own culture’s proclamation of the Gospel, as the case may be). And here I would include the Society and the Roman Catholic Church as “cultures.”<sup>5</sup>

What, then, is to be done? To paraphrase Paul, “Woe to us if we do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:17). The key, I think, is to cultivate what might be termed the “virtues” of inculturation: prudence, courage, faith, and,

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<sup>1</sup> Decree 4, in *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), §77 (p. 50).

<sup>2</sup> “The African Bishops’ Challenge,” an address to the bishops of Kenya given on May 7, 1980, quoted in Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 9. The original appeared in *Origins*, January 19, 1984.

<sup>3</sup> *Handbook*, 14–21.

<sup>4</sup> “St. Ignatius Speaks about “Ignatian Prayer,” *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 28, no. 2 (1996): 13.

<sup>5</sup> See Schineller, *Handbook*, 114.



above all, love.<sup>6</sup> What might the practice of these virtues consist of? Here I will name just one—listening. Listening is at the heart of Ignatian prayer and discernment: listening to God in one's own experience and history, listening to the experience of God in the lives of others. Quite simply, we need to listen. No other practice can be as fruitful or as worthwhile. For, as Frank Clooney recently reminded us, "If we listen, then we learn to speak."<sup>7</sup> So we should listen—to the voice of God emanating from the Scriptures, the liturgy, the cries of those in need, the sound of nature's murmurings, and, perhaps most carefully, to God's voice within our own hearts.

However, a complementary spirit must be given its due, the spirit of critical attentiveness. Listening does not supply only answers. In fact, more often than not it leads to questions. Cultivating a critical ear, one that allows one to ask the right question at the right time, is an absolute prerequisite to fruitful and mutually transformative dialogue. The critical discernment of spirits is at the heart of the kind of listening Ignatius considered the key to finding God in all things.

I suggest there is one other important source we, as a corporate body, need to listen to—our history.

To understand any Jesuit ministry, we must examine the modalities in which that ministry is given flesh-and-blood reality. Concretely put, we must answer the following questions: Who is engaged in ministry? For whom, with whom, and to whom does the minister exercise ministry? Whom does the minister work over or under? Where does the ministry take place? With what means and to what end? What qualities does the ministry make use of? What quantities or material resources? To understand any particular mission and ministry, we must fix our gaze on the concrete historical modalities through which Jesuit ministry took place. There is no other privileged point of access to understanding the minister and the ministry, as well as those ministered to.

What follows, as I said, is an exercise in listening. In the history of Jesuit slaveholding in the Maryland Province, we hear a variety of voices. Some clamor for further expression and our ears burn with what we think we hear in their undertones; other voices scald our ears in a different

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<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*, 116–18. See also William Spohn, S.J., "The Return of Virtue Ethics," *Theological Studies* 53, no. 1 (1992): 60–75, and the recent piece by James Keenan, S.J., "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 4 (1995): 709–29, on the role of the virtues in contemporary theology.

<sup>7</sup> "In Ten Thousand Places, in Every Blade of Grass: Uneventful but True Confessions about Finding God in India, and Here Too," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 28, no. 3 (1996): 37.



manner. Somewhere in the retelling, I am certain that you, like me, will recognize something of yourself. The point of the exercise is precisely that—drawing upon lessons from the past to enlighten our current attempts at inculturation.

## The Maryland Tradition

**O**n March 25, 1634, Fr. Andrew White of the Society of Jesus offered Mass on St. Clement's Island at the mouth of the Potomac River. Thus began the Maryland Mission. Roman Catholics never numbered more than one-twelfth of Maryland's colonial population at any given time.<sup>8</sup> However, because the settlement had originated as a proprietary colony, Cecil Calvert (the second Lord Baltimore, Maryland's first governor and himself a Roman Catholic) was able to avoid having any church established within its boundaries. Maryland's early experiment with religious liberty was rocky, but it provided the Roman Catholic Church with a foothold in the English-speaking colonies.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear that from the very beginning the Maryland Jesuits saw themselves as men sent to be of help to souls. Writing to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Andrew White boasted of the fertile soil in which the Catholic faith could be planted in Maryland. "Who then can doubt that by one such glorious work as this, many thousands of souls will be brought to Christ? I call the work of aiding and saving souls glorious: for it was the work of Christ, the king of glory."<sup>10</sup> Noble desires, no doubt. But what was the specific aim of this "work of glory"? And who was to do it? How was this work to be accomplished?

Jesuit missionaries came to Maryland as self-supporting settlers who took up land like any other colonists. Their chief interest was the evangelization of the indigenous peoples of America.<sup>11</sup> Zeal for the conversion of Maryland's natives led to a large number of recruits for the mission. This was, after all, the age of New France and the *Jesuit Relations*. Spanish Jesuits

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<sup>8</sup> R. Emmett Curran, ed., *American Jesuit Spirituality: The Maryland Tradition, 1634–1900* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988), 11.

<sup>9</sup> See James Hennesy, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 40–42, on the volatile history of Maryland's religious practice.

<sup>10</sup> Curran, *American Jesuit Spirituality*, 48.

<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.*, 8–14.



had been active in Florida and Virginia even as early as 1566.<sup>12</sup> The conversion of North America seemed well underway. As one would-be missionary wrote from Liège in 1640,

The ardent zeal and earnest desire of concurring in the conversion of those poore Indians of Maryland, which your Reverence in your exhorting letter doth sufficiently declare, stirred up in me a confidence that no employment whatsoever is like to prove an obstacle to such as find in themselves a true desire of going to assist those needy soules, so dearly bought, and so long neglected.<sup>13</sup>

Curran goes on to describe the rigors of the mission. Eight of the first twelve Jesuits sent to Maryland would die by violence or disease, and the average missionary lived less than ten years after he had arrived (10). There were never more than five Jesuits in the colony throughout the latter part of the seventeenth century and only twenty-three were at work on the eve of the Suppression in 1773 (13). The tenuous peace afforded by the Maryland Assembly's 1649 Act of Toleration was under constant threat. The Maryland Jesuits were forced to flee anti-Catholic Puritan persecutors in 1654, and in 1691 Maryland was declared a royal colony. Penal laws were applied the following year after the Church of England had been established within the colony. Maryland Catholics were completely disenfranchised in 1718, and until the revolution Catholic life within the colony was muted and wary.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the Maryland Mission was a difficult one, fraught with danger and uncertainty.

Within fifteen years of their arrival, the Maryland Jesuits had abandoned their mission to the natives and focused their work on the English-speaking Catholic population of the colony.<sup>15</sup> The decision to do so resulted in the Jesuits' becoming part of the Southern slaveholding system. From the early eighteenth century until the sale of the slaves in 1838, the Jesuits of the Maryland Mission owned slaves. Why? And how did they exercise their ministry among the slaves? What relationship existed between the slave and his or her Jesuit master?

The status of Jesuits as landholders—"priest-planters," if you will—was an integral element in their missionary strategy; it could be called an inculturated strategy. The Jesuits purchased land in order to support their mission in Maryland. Owning land and maintaining the farms made possible their ministry to the Catholic residents of the colony. By the mid-eighteenth

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<sup>12</sup> Hennesy, *American Catholics*, 12–25.

<sup>13</sup> Curran, *American Jesuit Spirituality*, 57.

<sup>14</sup> John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1965), 38f.

<sup>15</sup> Curran, *American Jesuit Spirituality*, 10.



century, the Jesuits owned over twelve thousand acres of farm land, thus ranking among the largest landowners in the colony.<sup>16</sup>

The Jesuits were, legally speaking, ordinary colonists. Their plantations were engaged in the ordinary occupations of the time: farming, raising and butchering livestock, and small-scale manufacturing. For example, they made candles and shoes, they engaged in weaving and smithery.<sup>17</sup> Jesuit farms were typical colonial plantations, except that the proprietors were missionary priests and the plantations were being used to support their missionary activities.

In addition to their managerial duties, the Jesuits were circuit riders and itinerant ministers to the scattered English-speaking Catholic population of colonial America.<sup>18</sup> Offering Mass in a house chapel, preaching and teaching catechism, visiting the sick and dying, presiding at weddings and funerals, administering the sacraments, hearing confessions, working among the native peoples—these activities were the lifeblood of the mission and ministry of the early Maryland Jesuits. To assist them in their duties, the planter-priests of Maryland hired plantation overseers.<sup>19</sup>

From the very beginning of their landholding in Maryland, the Jesuits were dependent upon servants bound to the land. At first they relied on indentured servants.<sup>20</sup> After a term of service that lasted on the average from four to seven years, these tenured servants became landowners or tenants in their own right and often leased land from the Jesuits to whom they were previously bound.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Peter C. Finn, "The Slaves of the Jesuits of Maryland" (M.A. thesis presented at Georgetown University), 1f.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3f.

<sup>18</sup> See Curran, *American Jesuit Spirituality*, 11f.

<sup>19</sup> Typical of this arrangement would be a contract by which the manager acted as overseer in return for some share of the crops. See "Contract between Fr. Pulton and John Pavat, the Overseer of the Slave Quarters (1743)," in the Maryland Province Archives, 99 W3-Z2. It is interesting to note that Pavat also received shares for his slave, Matthew. Apparently Matthew was employed on the Jesuit farm and therefore had to be supported by the Jesuits.

Lay brothers would eventually take over many of the manager's duties on the Jesuit farms. There were, however, never more than two in the entire mission until the nineteenth century (see Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 26).

<sup>20</sup> R. Emmett Curran, "Splendid Poverty: Jesuit Slave-Holding in Maryland, 1805-1838," in *Catholics in the Old South: Essays in Church and Culture*, ed. Randall Miller and Jon Waklyn (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), 126.

<sup>21</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 6-8.



The origins of slavery on the Jesuit farms are hazy. By 1765 there were 192 slaves at work there.<sup>22</sup> These slaves were either acquired along with large tracts of land given to the Jesuits by generous Catholic benefactors or purchased by the Jesuits when indentured labor was no longer available.<sup>23</sup> It is clear, however, that less than one hundred years after they had first purchased land in Maryland, the Jesuits of the Maryland Mission had become members of the slaveholding system that dominated the American South until the Civil War.

## The Slave System

Slavery is fundamentally a relation of domination.<sup>24</sup> Strictly speaking, to be a slave meant that one was legal property under the absolute control of one's owner: slaves had no legal claim upon society. They were not the subject of rights, but an object—a living tool, so to speak. Slavery has been described as a “human parasitism” in which slaveholders camouflage their dependence upon slave labor by creating an ideology of slavery.<sup>25</sup> According to this ideology, the right to enslave stems from the ability to do so. Superior peoples conquer and enslave inferior peoples. These people are, in fact, meant to be enslaved. They even benefit from their

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<sup>22</sup> Curran, “Splendid Poverty,” 126. Of these 192, only 102 were working, the others being too old or too young for such service. Fr. Joseph Zwinge, S.J., interviewed the ex-slave “Aunt Louise” in 1912; she claimed that her ancestors had been a gift from Lord Baltimore (Cecil Calvert) to the Jesuits. (See “The Jesuit Farms in Maryland,” *Woodstock Letters* 41 [April 1912]: 204.) We know that two mulattoes had accompanied Andrew White to Maryland in 1634. The question naturally arises whether the two mulattoes who accompanied the first Jesuits to Maryland were slaves. There is no definitive evidence that they were. There is also no definitive evidence that they were not. There is also speculation that two “servants” at St. Inigoes in 1696 may have been slaves. Given that St. Inigoes was the oldest of the Jesuit estates and the closest geographically to St. Mary's City, Fr. Andrew White's original mission station, a seventeenth-century origin for Jesuit slaveholding in Maryland cannot be ruled out (see Finn, “Slaves of the Jesuits,” 8).

<sup>23</sup> The Jesuits hired skilled and unskilled Irish labor throughout the middle part of the 1700s and did the same with black labor, slave or free. It was not unusual for a given plantation to hire another plantation's skilled slave for some specific work, or to hire out skilled slave labor as a source of income for the plantation (see Finn, “Slaves of the Jesuits,” 15–20).

<sup>24</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 334.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.



status, for they can participate in the culture and civilization of their superiors. Thus ran the logic that underlay the ideology of slavery.

Like any ideology, that of slavery attempted to freeze history into a sort of "second nature." However, the meaning of any given historical reality is not to be found in some deterministic universal structure or system of logic. The multiplicity and contingency of human history resist and relativize any such claim to rational systematization.<sup>26</sup> Ideology, however, maintains that a given social arrangement is eternal, a totality incapable of change.<sup>27</sup> In the concrete case of slavery, the belief prospered that "there is a need for the division of roles, and nature provides the casting. There was by nature a position to be filled, and there were people who by nature occupied it."<sup>28</sup> Popular belief held that slaves were slaves because of their natural inferiority.

Located at the bottom of the pyramid of power, the slave filled a position that was necessary if the American colonial and antebellum society was to function. Even though slavery apparently contradicted American democratic ideals, "considerations of justice and injustice were immobilised by the demands of what was seen as social and economic necessity."<sup>29</sup> In the arena of meaning making, where definitions of social reality shift in response to argumentation and negotiation, the ideology of slavery stacked the deck. An affective, preconscious "structure of feeling" was created in which reality was understood and defined.<sup>30</sup> While few Americans studied Aristotle's theory of "natural slavery," most were certain of the natural superiority of white over black, the free over the slave. This unexamined presumption, formed by the "structure of feeling" that was at the heart of the American slaveholding society, represents the core of the ideology of slavery.

Slavery was thus part of the ruling ideology of American society until the nineteenth century. The parasitical relation was secured, legitimated, and "transformed into an institutional process in parasitic involvement with the socioeconomic and cultural components of the total social system."<sup>31</sup> Slavery was viewed as a natural part of the social landscape. The contingency of historical reality and a given social arrangement had been

<sup>26</sup> See John O'Malley, *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1981), esp. 73-77, on historical consciousness.

<sup>27</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 59.

<sup>28</sup> Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 117f.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>30</sup> Eagleton, *Ideology*, 14-18 and 48.

<sup>31</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 341.



transformed into an unchanging or "natural" system of social, economic, and cultural relations. Some of the most effective agents of this transformation were the Christian churches.

Slavery formed an essential element in the social horizon of early Christianity. Despite the importance the early Christian community seemingly attached to differences in status, there was no denunciation of slavery in the New Testament.<sup>32</sup> While there is evidence of a patristic critique in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom, slavery was largely accepted by early Christianity.<sup>33</sup> Christian attitudes concerning slavery were drawn predominantly from Scripture, St. Augustine, or Roman law.<sup>34</sup> To compare the histories of the different Christian congregations and to determine whether or not they made use of slaves are monumental tasks. Suffice it to say, for our purposes, that slavery was considered acceptable by Catholic moral doctrine until the early twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> Millions of Catholics throughout history, including innumerable popes, bishops, priests, and religious, were slave owners.

However, there was also a dissonant strain in the Catholic tradition. Las Casas's condemnation of holding members of the indigenous peoples of the New World as slaves had an enormous impact on Spanish colonial legislation and papal thinking.<sup>36</sup> The ministry of Peter Claver among the slaves in New Granada, along with his co-worker Peter Sandoval's condemnation of the mistreatment of African slaves by their masters, also had an impact on colonial and Church practice.<sup>37</sup> Such criticism often focused on the abuse of slaves by their masters and fell short of an outright condemnation of the practice of slaveholding. Even Las Casas, to his later regret,

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<sup>32</sup> See Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale, 1983), 23-74.

<sup>33</sup> See Gideon Schor, "It Is Not Necessary to Have a Slave" (B.A. thesis presented at Harvard University, 1985), 1-18. Schor translates the pertinent Greek texts from both authors.

<sup>34</sup> See especially Paul's Letter to Philemon, 11-19. Augustine saw slavery as a result of sin but regarded it as legitimate, given the sinful condition of humanity. See his *City of God*, ed. David Knowles (London: Penguin, 1972), 874f. For the status of slavery in Roman law, see Thomas Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1981); this volume provides the most accessible collection of primary documents in English.

<sup>35</sup> John Noonan, "Development in Moral Doctrine," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 664-67.

<sup>36</sup> Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1990), 23-25.



supported the enslavement of Africans.<sup>38</sup> However, the critique of master/slave relations did influence Catholic attitudes towards slavery and papal teaching concerning the slave trade.

## A Church in Chains

**M**ore than one hundred years after Andrew White's arrival, a 1768 listing of the Congregation of St. Inigoes by Fr. Livers, S.J., includes 166 Whites and 33 "Negroes belonging to St. Inigoes Congregation."<sup>39</sup> All the latter are listed without last names, according to owner.

While we have very little in the way of historical records concerning the attitude of the colonial Jesuits towards their slaves (and vice versa), documents like the 1768 "parish census" do provide us with a fairly solid picture of Jesuit slaveholding during this time. The sacramental ministry exercised by the Jesuits among the members of their congregants who were slaves was, no doubt, similar to their ministry among their own slaves. Recognition of slave marriages was in line with Catholic moral teaching, and administration of baptism was not restricted by race or legal status.<sup>40</sup> As baptized Christians, the slaves were members of the worshipping community of the Catholic faith. Whether that community was segregated or not is unclear, but it seems likely that it was.

It is clear, however, that slaves were ministered to as members of the Christian community.<sup>41</sup> But what was the attitude of the Jesuits towards the slave as a fellow member of the Church? It is recorded that many Jesuits, like their Protestant and Catholic neighbors, regarded slaves as fellow Christians and members of the Body of Christ. George Hunter, the superior of the Maryland Mission in 1749, wrote that

[c]harity to negroes is due from all, particularly their masters. As they are members of Jesus Christ, . . . they are to be dealt with in a charitable,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 21–23.

<sup>39</sup> "Congregation of St. Inigoes, 1768," Maryland Province Archives, 50 Z 14–17. Hereafter, sources located in these archives will be identified by the initials MPA.

<sup>40</sup> Noonan, "Development in Moral Doctrine," 665.

<sup>41</sup> See Randall Miller, "A Church in Cultural Captivity: Some Speculations on Catholic Identity in the Old South," in *Catholics in the Old South*, 14. In an essay included in the same collection, Jon Wakelyn writes of Charles Carroll, John's cousin and a signer of the American Declaration of Independence, and his policies regarding the religious instruction and practice of his slaves (see "Catholic Elites in the Slave-Holding South," 214).



christian, paternal manner; which is at the same time a great means to bring them to their duty to God and therefore to gain their souls.<sup>42</sup>

The Maryland Jesuits saw themselves as providing for the spiritual needs of their slaves and encouraged Catholic slaveholders to do likewise. The baptism of slave children, the recognition of slave marriage and the integrity of slave families, and the listing of slaves as congregants point to acceptance of slaves as fellow Christians. To a certain extent, the plantation formed a kind of domestic parish to which the slaves belonged. As plantation manager and slave owner, a priest looked after the health, well-being, and spiritual development of the slaves belonging to the farm.<sup>43</sup> In this sense, we might speak of the Maryland Jesuits' practice as thoroughly inculturated. It certainly was in line with traditional Catholic doctrinal belief and practice thoughtfully adapted to the local culture. It certainly did not contradict the rule or any of the norms of their order. The Jesuit slaves formed part of the Jesuit ministry to the Catholics of the English colonies. The "help of souls" clearly included the souls of the slaves.

This was not, however, the whole story. As Hunter's comments make clear, there was among Jesuits a definite sense of the slave's inferiority. This attitude was rooted in the commonplace racist thinking of the day. The "structure of feeling" at the core of the slave system shaped and formed the attitudes of the Jesuits towards their slaves and informed their ministerial practice as well. Jesuit paternalism towards the slaves, long hailed as charitable sentiment, also contained more than a little bigotry and, as we shall see, cruelty.

While admittedly paternalistic, the Jesuits did give serious thought to the temporal realities of slave life. According to Finn, while infant mortality rates are sketchy, the large number of superannuated slaves on Jesuit farms, along with the general lack of epidemics, seems to indicate good general care (59f.). While it is unlikely that colonial Jesuits taught their slaves to read and write, they certainly encouraged and recognized the development of skills among the slaves on the Jesuit farms—something that benefited master as much as slave (67). Moreover, slaves were often invested with some measure of responsibility and freedom as well. In 1751 a Jesuit slave named "Ralph" traveled alone from Bohemia Manor to Philadelphia to

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in R. Emmett Curran, "Ministry to Slaves: USA" (unpublished manuscript), 2. Fr. Curran has also recorded the views of Fr. John Boone in the latter part of the 1760s and Fr. John Lewis, the last superior of the Maryland Mission before the Society's suppression, on these matters. Both Jesuits upbraided their fellow Catholics for regarding their slaves as "an inferior species" or denying them their status as "brothers in Jesus Christ" (see Curran "Splendid Poverty," 130).

<sup>43</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 26f.



contract for work, and Jesuit slaves held land or livestock for their own use, and some had both (83). Apparently, to some extent the practices inherited from the tenant-indenture system still influenced Jesuit/slave relations on the farms.

It would appear that the Jesuits treated their slaves no worse than did other slaveholders in the colony, and that in some particular instances they might have treated them somewhat better. However, despite certain basic rights due the slave as a human person and a Christian (food, shelter, medical care, the sacraments, and the integrity of the family unit), slavery on a Jesuit farm certainly carried with it all the evils prevalent elsewhere in the English colonies. As Finn writes, there was a certain moral schizophrenia at work in Jesuit slaveholding (65). On the one hand, they were seen as spiritual equals in that they were members of the Body of Christ; on the other hand, they were also classified as either dependent children or property (49). This contradictory reality would haunt relations between the Jesuits and their slaves and, as it were, give rise to a church in chains.<sup>44</sup>

### Collaborators in Mission

In the “Accounts for St. Joseph’s Church in Talbot County, Maryland (1764–1767),” Rev. Joseph Mosley, S.J., provides a list of “the Names of 8 Negroes that came from [White] Marsh to St. Joseph’s in Talbot County, Maryland 1765.”<sup>45</sup> Listed are eight slaves, ranging in age from Nanny, 55, to Henry, 2. Seven were born in America, Nanny was born in Guinea.

In a 1763 record book, White Marsh’s slaves are listed.<sup>46</sup> “Nanny” is listed with the surname “Cooper” and described as “far advanced in age and mother of many children.” Three of her children are listed as “not capable of work at Fingal.” (Fingal was a holding of the farm at White Marsh.) Seventy-six slaves are listed in all. Thirty-seven are children. Ten are listed as “past-service” because of age. One slave, Isaac, is listed as a carpenter. Two, Robert and another Tom, are listed as shoemakers and Nelly, a female slave, is listed as a cook.

In 1771 three of the eight slaves who arrived at St. Joseph’s from White Marsh (Lucy, age 18; the aforementioned Henry, now age 8; and Mary, now age 6) were subsequently sent to Bohemia, some miles to the

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<sup>44</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> MPA, 174 B.

<sup>46</sup> “Small Book (1763),” MPA, 102 T1–W5.



north of St. Joseph's. In 1766 two other slaves arrived from "Portotobacco," part of the St. Thomas Manor farm in Charles County. Another, David, arrived a year later from White Marsh. He was "formerly Mr. Neale's Negro at Deer-Creek in Baltimore." Later that same year he "returned to Mr. Neale's in Baltimore."<sup>47</sup> Another slave, Jerry, arrived from White Marsh in 1770. These data are listed here as evidence that the slave was considered part of a system larger than any single given plantation. He or she was available for service as needed on any one of the Jesuit farms.

The White Marsh list of 1763 and Mosley's list of 1765 tell us a great deal about the lives of the slaves and their relations with the Jesuits. As we have seen, slave families were recognized on the Jesuit farms. This ran counter to the practice of American slavery from the colonial through the antebellum period. Slaves also held skilled positions on Jesuit farms. This meant that they were able to acquire and transmit training in one skill or another. Most tellingly, slaves were often moved between Jesuit farms. This indicates that while the slave was legally the property of a given farm, he or she was in fact regarded as belonging to the Jesuit mission. This evidence leads one to surmise that Mosley and the Jesuits on the other farms felt that the slaves possessed a sort of apostolic portability. Slaves were available for service wherever the mission needed them.

As we might imagine, Father Mosley himself was constantly on the move.<sup>48</sup> He was the owner-manager of the farm, pastor of St. Joseph's Church, and a circuit priest who traveled throughout Maryland and Pennsylvania, even preaching "at Philadelphia in ye old chapel."<sup>49</sup> In addition to his institutional commitments as landholder and farm manager, Mosley was to go wherever the apostolic need was the greatest. So too with the slaves. They were, like the Jesuits, to travel to wherever the need for service was greatest. Yet the Jesuits also felt free to buy and sell slaves and to move them from plantation to plantation as seemed necessary.<sup>50</sup> Problems with

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<sup>47</sup> MPA, 174 B.

<sup>48</sup> For an excellent presentation of Mosley's labors as recorded in his correspondence with his sister over a number of years, see Curran, *American Jesuit Spirituality*, 100-124. When the Society was suppressed, Mosley remained in Maryland tending to his farm and circuit duties until his death in 1787. He represents an exemplary model of Jesuit perseverance in ministry during the Suppression.

<sup>49</sup> MPA, 174 B. The chapel was undoubtedly Old St. Joseph's at Willings Alley, established in 1732.

<sup>50</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 71, points out that Fr. Walton sold, exchanged, or transferred twenty-three slaves at Newtown in the 1770s. There is also documentation of the sale of slaves by former Maryland Jesuits in 1803. Perhaps the earliest record of Jesuit involvement in the selling of slaves is from 1727, when Peter Attwood (S.J.)



overseers were not unknown and slaves were often mistreated (see below, page 23).<sup>51</sup> As Finn records, slaves were also hired out, often to farmers who treated them badly, in order to produce income for the Jesuit farm (65). And, not surprisingly, some slaves ran away.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps the one clear advantage a Jesuit slave had was his or her right to appeal to an authority higher than the slave-master, namely, the master's religious superior. Slaves could, and did, protest to Jesuits in positions of authority within the Society when they considered that they had experienced mistreatment at the hands of Jesuits.<sup>53</sup> Availing of this right not only resulted in changes being made within the system but also led to certain Jesuits' being removed from positions of authority on the farms after being accused of mistreating the slaves.

The link between the mission and the farm, and the farm and the slave, formed the heart of the "Maryland tradition." The Jesuit mission was intimately tied to a plantation system where slavery was essential, and the slaves were part of the very backbone of the Jesuit mission in Maryland. Did Jesuits think of the slaves as co-laborers in any significant way? More important, did the slaves see themselves as collaborators in the Jesuit mission? Was there any sense on the slave's part of cooperating in "the help of souls"? The most interesting glimpse of a possible answer to this question can be found in a letter from "Thomas Brown, a coloured man," who was a slave at St. Louis University in 1833.<sup>54</sup>

Mr. Brown wrote to the provincial of Maryland, William McSherry, that he and his wife were being "very poorly treated by Rev. Father Verheagen [*sic*], President of the University of St. Louis who is my present Master." Mr. Brown goes on to say, "I have been a faithful servant in the Society going on 38 years, and my wife Molly has been born and raised in the Society, she is now about 53 years of age." Mr. Brown goes on to

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witnessed the sale of twelve slaves from George Attwood to Thomas Attwood for three hundred pounds. See "Sale of 12 Negro Slaves by George Attwood to Thomas Attwood (1727)," MPA, 107 R0-R7. See also "Deed of Sale of Negro Slave by William Hall (1803)" and "Papers Pertaining to Sale of Negro Slave Woman and Her Child by Dorothy Digges (1803)," 99 R1-3, for involvement of former Jesuits in selling of slaves.

<sup>51</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 22-24.

<sup>52</sup> Finn, *ibid.*, 91, tells of a slave, "Abraham," of St. Inigoes who ran away and was found in the woods nearby "nearly starved."

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>54</sup> See "Letter from Thomas Brown, a Slave, Lamenting Poor Living Conditions and Requesting to Purchase His Freedom from His Master, Fr. Verheagen [*sic*], President of St. Louis University (1833)," MPA, 112 B1-P6.



request that he be allowed to purchase his own and his wife's freedom for \$100, which he claims "is as much as I can raise and as much as our old bones are worth." Brown closes with the promise that "I will pray for you while I live."

This letter shows a sense of the slave's consciousness of himself as a "servant of the Society." Might this indicate the influence of Jesuit rhetoric concerning mission and identity? Was there any sense on the slave's part of being connected to a corporate ministry? The comment that his wife had been "born and raised in the Society" strongly suggests the close emotional and affective bond some slaves had not simply for individual Jesuits but *for the Society as a whole*. We have no record of sermons preached by Maryland Jesuits to slaves or of actual catechetical materials used on the farms, but the Society's rhetoric, self-understanding, and self-definition must have strongly influenced the religious consciousness of many of their slaves. It is clear that Thomas Brown saw himself and his wife, on some level, as co-laborers in the Society's mission.

Records of a "mission band" giving revivals on southern Maryland farms as a part of the Society's apostolic efforts in the Jubilee Year 1851 show a group of tertians working among the congregations traditionally served by the Society.<sup>55</sup> Curran reports that at St. Thomas large numbers of blacks "flocked to the exercises and the sacraments" (212). At a neighboring mission station, the following description of a mixed congregation, presumably made up of whites, free blacks, and slaves, was recorded by one of the tertians: "The faithful were so filled with spiritual joy that at times they seemed out of their heads, especially the negroes who for eighteen years or even more had been away from confession because of some vague fear instilled in them through the severity of priests" (212). At Cornwallis-neck, a mission of St. Thomas, the tertians heard over two hundred confessions and baptized six adults, among whom were "negroes well-instructed by their fellow slaves" (213). Here we have a ministry typically exercised by the Jesuits being exercised by the slaves among themselves.<sup>56</sup>

Were they exercising other ministries? While Randall Miller has written of the absence of slave preaching in the southern Catholic tradition as a major factor in losing slaves to Protestantism, it is difficult to imagine religious instruction taking place without at least some basic form of preaching.<sup>57</sup> It is clear that slaves participated in the revivals which formed an

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<sup>55</sup> Curran, *American Jesuit Spirituality*, 210-13.

<sup>56</sup> See O'Malley, *Tradition and Transition*, 80-85 and 116-26, on the Jesuit ministry of basic catechesis.

<sup>57</sup> "Church in Captivity," 38-40 and 48-50.



essential part of the Jesuit ministry in the South.<sup>58</sup> Revivals featured the typical Jesuit ministries of preaching, giving the Exercises, catechizing, and hearing confessions.<sup>59</sup> These ministries formed the core of Jesuit mission and ministry in Maryland.

The evidence of slaves catechizing one another when priests were absent is intriguing. What was the content of their catechetical instruction? Did it resemble Jesuit instruction of the time? Was there a particularly Jesuit “style” to their catechesis? We simply don’t know. What we do know is that the slave was not merely a passive recipient of Jesuit ministry. Slaves instructed one another in the Catholic faith and took measures to keep the faith alive in times when access to clergy and regular Church services and ministries were restricted. There is need for much more research into the question of slave ministry and its identification with Jesuit ministry, but it seems safe to say that some such identification existed, whatever form it may have taken.<sup>60</sup>

## Jesuit Mission without Jesuits: Slaves and the Diocesan System

**T**he Society of Jesus was suppressed in 1773 and the Maryland Mission officially ceased to exist. From 1634 until that time, Catholic affairs were almost entirely in the hands of the Jesuits who had served in the American colonies as missionaries.<sup>61</sup> In 1773 the Maryland Mission consisted of around fifty apostolic foundations.<sup>62</sup> Mission centers and

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<sup>58</sup> See O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 126–28, on the “mission” or revival as a basic form of Jesuit ministry. Curran, *American Jesuit Spirituality*, 193–216, provides an especially full portrait of Catholic revivalism’s role in the Jesuit ministry in Maryland, especially in the career of John McElroy. Finally, Miller, “Church in Captivity,” 44–48, points out the important role of the parish mission or revival in southern Catholicism.

<sup>59</sup> See “The Formula of the Institute,” in the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. with commentary by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), §3 (pp. 66f.).

<sup>60</sup> For example, we know that Jesuits founded *confradias* for free blacks in Spanish and Portuguese colonies and that there was a black Catholic society, not unlike a confraternity, meeting in Baltimore in the 1840s (see Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 24f. and 86–88).

<sup>61</sup> Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 43.

<sup>62</sup> Gerald Fogarty, “Origins of the Mission, 1634–1773,” in *The Maryland Jesuits* (Baltimore: Corporation of Roman Catholic Clergymen, the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus, 1976), 25f.



chapels were often located on a Jesuit farm or in a Catholic gentleman's home. A number of apostolic "substations" also existed, usually within a day's journey from a mission center or somehow attached to a Jesuit farm. Maryland Jesuits had also begun three schools, including Thomas Poulton's Bohemian Academy, at which such Catholic notables as John Carroll were educated before being sent abroad to St. Omers in Flanders.<sup>63</sup> The Maryland Mission was regarded as a moderate success, made all the more remarkable by the unusual circumstances under which it existed in the English colonies.<sup>64</sup> As Gerald Fogarty puts it, "For over 150 years, a Catholic Church had existed but there had never been a bishop."<sup>65</sup> With the Suppression, the Maryland Jesuits would cease to exist. But to a remarkable degree, the mission would go on.

Since there was, as yet, no bishop in the colony, there was no competent ecclesiastical authority to take possession of the order's property. In order to protect their property, the former Jesuits set up the Select Body of the Clergy in 1783 and in 1792 were recognized by the state of Maryland as the Corporation of the Roman Catholic Clergymen.<sup>66</sup> The erstwhile Jesuits adopted a constitution that in effect allowed the work of the Maryland Mission to continue. All the mission's holdings and works were now administered by the Corporation, whose head was John Carroll.

Carroll, a native Marylander, was a Jesuit before the Suppression. In 1788 the Select Body wrote to Rome requesting that a bishopric be established. The reply was prompt and surprising. Rome delegated the Select Body to choose where the episcopal see would be located and to decide whether the bishop was to be an ordinary or a titular. Moreover, Rome allowed the Select Body to nominate the bishop!<sup>67</sup> They were to "elect as bishop a person eminent in piety and prudence . . . from the said clergy, and present him to the Apostolic See to obtain confirmation" (87). By a vote of 24 to 2, John Carroll was elected first bishop of the United States on May 18, 1789, and confirmed by Pope Pius VI in the bull *Ex hac apostolicæ* about five months later. He was consecrated bishop of Baltimore on August 15, 1790, in England (88). The former Maryland Mission formed the bulk of the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 17f., and Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 32.

<sup>64</sup> The mission always had financial and manpower shortages. It was unable to pay the province tax of two hundred pounds sterling to the English Province in 1741 and 1759. On the eve of the Suppression, the mission still owed the English Province 1,400 pounds sterling (see Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 94).

<sup>65</sup> "Origins of the Mission," 26.

<sup>66</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 127.

<sup>67</sup> Hennesy, *American Catholics*, 87.



first diocese in America, embracing the entire United States as then constituted. It consisted of some 35,000 Catholics, of which Maryland had the greatest number; more than half of the Catholics lived in the South.<sup>68</sup> At the time of Carroll's election, Catholics had equal citizenship in only five of the thirteen states.<sup>69</sup> Clearly, the new bishop had his work cut out for him.

Carroll severed the Corporation's dependence upon the now defunct English Province in 1790 and moved quickly to set up an academy at Georgetown. This academy, established on paper in 1789, opened its doors to a single student in 1791.<sup>70</sup> Carroll also made good use of the former Jesuit farms. In 1801 the funds generated by the farm at Bohemia were earmarked for Georgetown. (These holdings, including two slaves who traveled from Bohemia, had previously been used from 1793 to 1799 to help establish the Sulpician Seminary in Baltimore.) In 1806 income from St. Inigoes went to Georgetown, while the income from Bohemia returned to Carroll.<sup>71</sup> Five years later the control of St. Inigoes passed to the president of Georgetown, who was by then once again a Jesuit. The slaves of these farms continued to provide the plantation with necessary labor to support the works of the Diocese of Baltimore and the Catholic Church in America.

These developments marked a clear departure from what had previously been the practice of the Maryland Mission. While it might be argued that the Maryland Jesuits were headed in the direction of establishing educational apostolates within the mission, Carroll's use of the farms to fund the establishment of two large-scale educational works indicates a shift in apostolic priorities that would affect the Jesuits in years to come. The diocesan system and the evolving institutional structures designed to serve a growing Church began to replace the ad hoc ministerial outposts founded by the Jesuits. The holdings that had formerly funded the Jesuit mission were now supporting the mission of the Church in this country and providing the first diocese in the United States with the income necessary to carry on its work among the Catholics in postrevolutionary America. And like the Jesuit mission which preceded it, the Diocese of Baltimore depended for its material resources on the plantation system, of which slavery was an integral element.

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<sup>68</sup> Raymond Schmandt, "An Overview of Institutional Establishments in the Antebellum Southern Church," in *Catholics in the Old South*, 55.

<sup>69</sup> Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> Schmandt, "Overview of Institutional Establishments," 73.

<sup>71</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 33-37.



Carroll himself came from a slave-owning family.<sup>72</sup> His own attitude towards slavery was ambivalent. On the one hand, he could defend the Corporation's practice of slaveholding, asserting that the priests "treat their Negroes with great mildness and guard them from hunger and nakedness. . . . They work less and are much better fed, lodged and clothed, than labouring men in almost any part of Europe."<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, he wrote to one of his priests that

I am as far as you from being easy in my mind at the many things I see, and know, relating to the treatment and manners of the Negroes. I do the best I can to correct the evils I see; and then recur to those principles, which, I suppose, influenced the many eminent and holy missionaries in S. America and Asia, where slavery equally exists.<sup>74</sup>

Apparently the bishop had read neither Las Casas nor Sandoval.

As bishop and landowner, Carroll had to deal with the issue of slavery. The contradictions in the slave system disturbed him, but the system itself made possible much of the Church's work. Slavery was seen as an economic and social necessity. The result was that questions of justice or injustice were restricted to the master/slave relationship. There was no public criticism of the institution of slavery itself.

The farms were, from the very beginning, both a vehicle and an arena for Jesuit ministry. The farms provided the necessary material support for the ministry of the planter-priest. Yet the farm was also a sort of domestic parish, in which the spiritual welfare of the slaves was clearly a part of the Jesuit's ministry. The planter-priest was just that—a hyphenated reality. The Jesuit's duties in the pre-Suppression period were defined by his status as landowner, colonist, slaveholder, pastor, and missionary. However, in the years after the Society's restoration in the nineteenth century, the farms became more and more simply an instrumental aid in Jesuit ministry. The eventual arena of Jesuit ministry, under the influence of decisions made by Carroll during the Suppression, shifted towards education. Jesuit ministry would become more and more concentrated on urban centers and the education of the Catholics living in those centers.

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<sup>72</sup> Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 40.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Hennesy, *American Catholics*, 43.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 41.



## Jesuit Ministry and Racism: The Example of Mobberly

In 1805 the Society of Jesus was reestablished in the United States. Catherine the Great of Russia had never promulgated the papal decree of 1773 that dissolved the Society. In 1801 Pope Pius VII recognized the Russian Province and allowed it to accept members from outside Russia's borders. A number of former Jesuits in America petitioned the Pope for permission to affiliate themselves with the Russian Province. In 1804 permission came and in the following year five of the ten former Maryland Jesuits still living renewed their vows. In 1806 novices were accepted at Georgetown College. The Society was universally restored in 1814.<sup>75</sup>

Many of the older and most influential American Jesuits of the time came from planter families and were well acquainted with the plantation system and with slavery. The Carrolls, Fenwicks, Neales, and Sewells had all been, and continued to be, slaveholders.<sup>76</sup> Foreign-born Jesuits sent to Maryland seemed to think of slavery in feudal terms.<sup>77</sup> Most Maryland Jesuits simply thought of slavery as a part of the social landscape. As we have seen, their attitude towards blacks, particularly slaves, was admittedly paternalistic. It was also, unwittingly or not, racist. Archbishop Neale, former Jesuit and successor to John Carroll in Baltimore, wrote to a Jesuit in Norfolk, Virginia, "I applaud your zeal in instructing the poor Negroes; consider it as a grand point of your duty. *Diamonds are sometimes found in dunghills.*"<sup>78</sup> Indeed, this blend of paternalism and, at times, thinly veiled racism, is exemplified in the most complete document we possess concerning Jesuit slaveholding during that time, the so-called "Diary" of Bro. Joseph Mobberly, S.J.<sup>79</sup>

The "Diary" is actually three documents. It consists of an account of Mobberly's years in the Maryland Mission, a treatise in defense of slavehold-

<sup>75</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 127.

<sup>76</sup> For example, "Letter to Nicholas from Charles Sewall (1783)," "Deed of Sale to Nicholas Sewall for 5 Negro Slaves (1790)," and "Letters of Administration on the Estate of N. L. Sewall Granted to Charles Sewall (1802)," MPA, 110 W1-W12. See also "Valuation of Rev. Ashton's Negroes (1816)," MPA, 107 R0-R7. Fr. Ashton had eleven slaves, age 8 to 40, total value approximately \$3,675.

<sup>77</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 131.

<sup>78</sup> "Letter from Abp. L. Neale to Fr. Lucas in Norfolk, Va. (1816)," MPA, 205 Z13-27 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>79</sup> "The Joseph P. Mobberly Papers," Georgetown University Archives. Henceforth documents located in these archives will be identified by the initials GUA. The "Mobberly Papers" will be abbreviated "MP."



ing, and a loosely kept diary dating from October 1824 to September 1827. Mobberly was a Maryland native who had served as manager of St. Inigoes from 1806 to 1820. He was removed as manager after the slaves of St. Inigoes lodged complaints against him.<sup>80</sup> The account of Mobberly's tenure at St. Inigoes is his side of the story, recorded for posterity.

The second document is an apology for slaveholding entitled "Slavery or Cham?" In this document Bro. Mobberly asks, "Can a man serve God faithfully and possess slaves?" As might be imagined, his answer is yes.<sup>81</sup> Mobberly begins by associating abolitionism with heresy and goes to great lengths to show how slavery is approved by the Old and New Testaments, even providing a list of Christian slaveholding saints. Finally, he claims slavery's universality in human history as proof that it is legitimate and in accord with divine law (2-33). At this point Mobberly claims that at least forty percent of humanity is "deficient in point of intellect and know not how to manage for and take care of themselves." Thus, "slavery is not only lawful, reasonable and good, but necessary" (33, 36) Those not capable of governing themselves are in need of government by those better equipped by nature to govern. Mobberly, of course, then goes on to "prove" that Africans are incapable of self-rule.

Much of Mobberly's thinking depends on his belief in a racial theory proving that Africans are the "children of Ham" punished by God. Marshaling copious quotations from Scripture, Thomas Jefferson, and a contemporary science text, Bro. Mobberly links the African's "skin color, hair texture, lusts of the flesh, stupidity, crimes of intoxication, lying, sleepy disposition, fondness of ridicule and love of magic" to his status as a descendant of Ham (37-67). Therefore Africans and their descendants "are doomed to be the Servants unto their brethren" (52). Whether Bro. Mobberly's writings are motivated by anger and resentment at his dismissal as manager or his own honest convictions, they serve as a unique witness to a certain intellectual climate prevalent among even the moderately educated religious persons of the time. While the tract was never published, its crude nineteenth-century racial theories stand as a reminder of just how commonplace it was to employ religious argumentation in order to create the ideology of slavery.

Mobberly also noted many of the practical realities of life on the farm. In doing so, he provides us with important documentation regarding the lives of the slaves. Mobberly records that Jesuits allowed their slaves to farm their own garden, raise their own livestock and fish, and to sell their

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<sup>80</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 133.

<sup>81</sup> "MP, Pt. 2," GUA, 1.



produce and goods as they saw fit.<sup>82</sup> He also claims that slaves too old to work received the same ration of food, clothing, and care as a laborer (131f.). Yet he holds that the current system is unsuccessful because “the slaves are very discontented in their present state of servitude, and are becoming more corrupt and more worthless every year” (140). Clearly a bitter and bigoted man, he asserts that “the better a negro is treated, the worse he becomes” (141). However, Mobberly also provides us one Jesuit’s view of the slave owner’s responsibility toward the slave.

Mobberly held that slave owners must provide their slaves with comfortable housing and beds, including enough space for the sexes to be segregated, provide them with sufficient food and clothing, and permit them to marry. The owner must also provide for religious instruction and the reception of the sacraments, as well as compel his slaves to perform their Christian duties while restraining them from evil conduct. He claims to eschew cruel methods of correction and asserts that slaves should not be neglected in their old age or during sickness. Finally, Mobberly sees the separation of man and wife through the selling of slaves as a culpable act that could cost the slave owner his soul (142f.). Mobberly’s list provides us with a minimal standard of justice that Catholic slave owners acknowledged as mandatory and presumably would wish to implement as an example to their coreligionists.

On the whole, Mobberly is dissatisfied with the slave system. Lest we rush to judgment regarding his motives, it is worthwhile to note that he had registered this dissatisfaction as early as 1815.<sup>83</sup> Mobberly considered the plantation system inefficient and too expensive. He greatly admired the Quakers of Pennsylvania who “will not have slaves and in this they are very wise.”<sup>84</sup> However, Mobberly’s approach reflected no humane opposition to slavery; he regarded the system as financially doomed, the slaves and overseers as incorrigible, and a slave uprising as a distinct possibility. Fear and frustration marked his relationship with the slaves. Mobberly wrote as follows:

I sincerely regret that slaves were ever introduced into the United States; but as we have them we know not how to get rid of them. It seems they become more corrupt every year and more discontented in their state of subjection. They are a great tax and a constant aggravation. (80f.)

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<sup>82</sup> “MP, Pt. 1,” GUA, 133.

<sup>83</sup> “Letter from Joseph Mobberly, S.J., to John Grassi, S.J. (1815),” MPA, 204 K1-7.

<sup>84</sup> “MP, Pt. 1,” GUA, 79.



Here is Mobberly's credo: The slaves are a danger and too much trouble. The obvious path to less danger and trouble is to get rid of the slaves.

Mobberly saw slavery as a double bind. On the one hand, slavery was unjustified economically. Slaves were like an inefficient crop. If the mission was to prosper, a change had to come. At times he seems to assume that if one could just get rid of corn, tobacco, and the slaves, the farms would be fine (82). Mobberly's uncritical acceptance of slavery, however uneasy at times, matches our earlier observations concerning Bishop Carroll and a good number of the Maryland Jesuits seem to have shared this view. Almost two hundred years after their arrival, there was no sense among the Jesuits that slavery was an evil in itself which needed to be addressed. In this they were complacent children of their own Catholic, and now American, culture.

### Cruelty and Consequences: Jesuits and the Maltreatment of Slaves

**A**s we have noted, the earlier record of Mobberly's years at St. Inigoes provides an important portrait of everyday life on the Jesuit farms after the reestablishment of the Society in the United States in 1805. In one of his entries, Mobberly records that the slave cook on the farm, "Granny Sucky," claimed to be ninety-six years old in 1806. She said she had known twenty-three Jesuit Masters "and she never had a bad one" (21). The old slave woman goes on to say that she had been whipped by a Jesuit only once, for watching the priest-master "take the discipline" and crying out that he "not be so cruel to himself." Sucky related that "he gave her so sound a thrashing that she was determined never to care much about his self-cruelties in the future." All of this occurred when Sucky was "then but a girl" (21f.).

It is certainly no surprise that slaves were subjected to physical punishment. Peter Brown described ancient slavery as a "domestic school of cruelty" that "generated a distinctive pathology of power."<sup>85</sup> Not much, if anything, had changed in the antebellum United States. Still, the chilling image of a Jesuit beating a slave girl leads one to ask whether the practice was common. Mobberly himself wrote that whipping slaves resulted in one's acquiring a reputation among the slaves as "a very bad man," which led to

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<sup>85</sup> Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 51.



their plotting “sabotage” or murder against the offender.<sup>86</sup> How widespread was the practice?

The General of the Society, Fr. Tadeusz Brzozowski, sent a special visitor, Peter Kenney, to Maryland in 1819. In the years following the Restoration, the farms were in financial disarray and their management a constant source of complaint. At the time of his visit, five of the six plantations in Maryland were under the control of lay brothers. One of the chief complaints leveled against them was their mistreatment of the slaves in their charge. Indeed, it was this charge that cost Mobberly his position and saw the other brothers either removed or demoted to assistant managers under the direct supervision of a priest.<sup>87</sup>

Among the directives Kenney gave during his visitation was an order that forbade Jesuits to engage in “any species of corporal chastisement on a female slave, as even to threaten by word or act. . . . Neither are the priests to inflict corporal chastisement on the male servants, but this, when necessary, may be allowed to lay brothers who have authority over them.”<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, Kenney approved the practice of delegating such corporal punishment to overseers, including the whipping of female slaves, although he decreed that “this chastisement should not be inflicted on any female in the house, where the priest lives. . . . Sometimes they [the slave women] have been tied up in the priest’s own parlour, which is very indecorous.” He also decreed that “pregnant females should not be whipped” (64). The facts are clear. Jesuits used the lash on their slaves, either delegating the task to an overseer or leaving it to the lay-brother manager.

The use of corporal punishment cuts to the core of the slave system. It was a system rooted in the use of force and violence. As Cyprian Davis has noted, “The fact that one individual had ownership of the person and labor of another provided the framework for inevitable acts of oppression and brutality.”<sup>89</sup> The threat of the whip and the humiliation of the auction block were key elements of social control in the slave system. If a slave did not keep his or her master happy, that slave would be punished. The Maryland Jesuits expressed no opposition in principle to slavery or corporal punishment.

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<sup>86</sup> “MP, Pt. 1,” GUA, 77. One wonders if we have here the kernel of Mobberly’s own story.

<sup>87</sup> Curran, “Splendid Poverty,” 129f.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Finn, “Slaves of the Jesuits,” 63.

<sup>89</sup> *History of Black Catholics*, 20.



## A Glimpse of Freedom?

**A**fter the Suppression, the growing financial difficulties of the farms and the Corporation prompted the sale of several slaves. St. Thomas Manor sold a slave for \$240 in 1798 to raise money to build a Church.<sup>90</sup> Ambrose Marechal, a Sulpician who would become the third bishop of Baltimore, leased St. Inigoes in 1795 for nine shillings an acre while providing for the care of the slaves on the property.<sup>91</sup> Marechal also hired out his “servant James, Blacksmith by trade, . . . for \$100 to John Morton, besides his lodgings, washing, victuals and cloathing [*sic*],” thus illustrating the continued policy of hiring out slaves for income.<sup>92</sup> The Corporation’s policies regarding slavery seemed, in practice, to differ in no way from the previous policies of the Jesuits. The only important divergence, and the one that touched on the most fundamental of matters, concerned the slave’s right to purchase his or her own freedom.

During the latter part of the 1790s, the Corporation adopted guidelines concerning manumission.<sup>93</sup> These guidelines included the decision that there would be no outright manumission of the slaves because of the “injurious precedent” it might set. A variety of motives worked against outright manumission, according to Finn. The first was paternal. Freed slaves were often, because of debt, in terrible shape financially (87f.). Some even sold themselves back into servitude. The second was more self-serving. American Catholics, particularly American Catholic clergy, were also very conscious of their status as an alien minority within American culture.<sup>94</sup> They feared attracting negative attention to themselves and sought whenever possible not to offend the cultural consensus. Finally, they shared with non-Catholic slaveholders the widespread belief that newly emancipated slaves in large numbers might incite those still enslaved to rise up in violence. Slave rebellions were not unknown in the United States, and the uprising which led to Haiti’s independence raged throughout the 1790s. Two of the three

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<sup>90</sup> Finn, “Slaves of the Jesuits,” 96.

<sup>91</sup> “Lease between Ambrose Marechal, S.S., and James O. Donald (1795),” and “Lease of Negro Slave by Ambrose Marechal to James O. Donald (1796),” MPA, 103 N1-P6.5.

<sup>92</sup> “Certificate of Contract for Hire of Negro Slave by A. Marechal to John Morton (1798),” MPA, 103 N1-P6.5.

<sup>93</sup> Finn, “Slaves of the Jesuits,” 89.

<sup>94</sup> R. Emmett Curran, “Catholic Church,” in *Dictionary of Afro-American Slavery*, ed. Randall Miller and John David Smith (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988), 95.



largest slave rebellions in the United States occurred across the border from Maryland in Virginia in 1800 and 1831.<sup>95</sup>

There is, of course, another angle to be considered. Despite their minority status and occasional harassment, the Maryland Jesuits seemed completely at home in the American slaveholding economy of their day. As mentioned earlier, the Jesuits were in most matters typical landowners. The Corporation's guidelines concerning manumission were concerned chiefly with economic matters, not questions of morality. There was no mention of challenging the practice of slaveholding as intrinsically evil. American practice and Catholic doctrine made the ideology of slavery seemingly unassailable, part of the very nature of things. Here we have a concrete example of what we earlier termed the "vice" of inculturation.

The Corporation decreed that slaves would be allowed to purchase their freedom. This assumes, of course, that a given slave would be able to amass enough capital to do so. As we have seen, slaves on the Jesuit farms were allowed to own property. Presumably they could make use of this property as they saw fit. This would include selling it as a source of income. There is also evidence of slaves being paid for certain kinds of work.<sup>96</sup> If a slave could accumulate enough wealth, he could purchase freedom. Finn writes that members of the Corporation could sell slaves only with the proviso that they would be set free after a certain number of years (89). This policy of "deferred emancipation" marked an important policy shift for the farms and for the Corporation's practice of slaveholding.<sup>97</sup> It clearly indicated a desire on the part of the Corporation, made up exclusively of former Jesuits, all of whom were United States citizens, to break away from the slaveholding system as it existed in the early nineteenth century. Did the policy succeed? And did it in any way influence a change in Catholic attitudes towards slavery?

In 1796 Marechal allowed Patrick Barnes to purchase his freedom for two hundred pounds while promising to "move 10 miles away from the Romish chapel."<sup>98</sup> We also have record of a slave, "Jack," buying his freedom at Conewago in 1801<sup>99</sup> and the unusual case in 1803 of a freed woman

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<sup>95</sup> Eric Foner, ed., *America's Black Past* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 113-15.

<sup>96</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 84.

<sup>97</sup> Curran, *American Jesuit Spirituality*, 134.

<sup>98</sup> "Bond between Ambrose Marechal and His Negro Slave Patrick Barnes for Purchase of Freedom," MPA, 103 N1-P6.5.

<sup>99</sup> The Corporation censured Peter Brosius for manumitting a slave at Conewago in 1801 and recommended that he have the slave purchase his freedom ex post facto (Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 134). Presumably that slave was "Jack."



buying her daughter from St. Thomas Manor and then freeing her.<sup>100</sup> The Corporation's policies concerning deferred manumission might also have served as an example for other Catholic slaveholders (or vice versa) (45-74). In 1797 Charles Carroll, John's cousin and a signatory of the American Declaration of Independence, introduced into the Maryland state senate a bill calling for gradual abolition, but the bill met with no success.<sup>101</sup> He adopted a policy of gradual manumission on his own estates and freed as many as thirty of his slaves at a time.<sup>102</sup>

The Corporation's measured willingness to allow slaves to buy their own freedom is clear. But it is also clear that the former slave owner feared the effect of such a policy on his other slaves. Hence the agreement of Patrick Barnes to move away from the site of his former bondage. Nothing so undermined the ideology and practice of slavery as the presence of a freed slave.

In adopting these procedures the Corporation seems to have desired a return to the early policy of indentured servitude that had been the norm on seventeenth-century Jesuit farms. However, it does not appear that this policy was undertaken because of any new sense of the slave's equal humanity or the basic injustice of the slaveholding system. Instead, it seems tied both to financial considerations—the farms were not prospering—and to sensitivity to public opinion. European criticism of the Corporation's practice of slaveholding was mounting, and Carroll's own ambivalence towards the institution was shared by many of the Corporation's members.<sup>103</sup>

In a well-known letter of 1805, Carroll wrote to Francis Neale denouncing the sale of White Marsh's slaves.

Mr. Fenwick [another former Jesuit and a member of the Select Body] and I were surprised and mortified to learn that in direct contradiction to the humane decision of the Corporation, sales of Negroes for life have been made and are making from the estate of the Whitemarsh. I doubt very much whether such sales are valid and think that the persons sold may recover, by law, their absolute freedom leaving on the Congregation an obligation to refund the purchase money.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 90.

<sup>101</sup> Hennesy, *American Catholics*, 146.

<sup>102</sup> Carroll freed thirty slaves in 1817 (see Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 90).

<sup>103</sup> Hennesy, *American Catholicism*, 43.

<sup>104</sup> "Letter from Abp. Carroll to F. Neale Denouncing Sales of Slaves in White Marsh (1805)," MPA, 203 T6-11. It should be noted that Baltimore did not become an archdiocese until 1808.



Some have argued that Carroll was behind the Corporation's policy shift as a way of countering criticism of slaveholding after the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire.<sup>105</sup> Deferred emancipation became the official policy of the Corporation in a resolution adopted in 1814.<sup>106</sup> There is even a record of the Corporation selling "[a] Negro Boy named Regis, aged 19 years, for 12 years—then he is free" in 1816.<sup>107</sup> But the policy of deferred emancipation was never to become common practice within the Corporation or the restored Society of Jesus. Slaves were sold to meet financial needs throughout the nineteenth century.

It is clear from Mobberly's writings and Carroll's concerns that the Jesuits of Maryland knew of other Christian groups who abandoned slaveholding on moral grounds. There was also the example of Benedict the Moor, born a slave of slave parents, who was canonized by Pius VII in 1807.<sup>108</sup> While they may have been disregarded or condemned, notions repudiating the morality of slavery were available to the Jesuits of Maryland and the members of the Corporation, both from their own Catholic tradition and from the American experience. Slavery was under assault from both a practical and a moral point of view. In the 1820s and 1830s, the Maryland Jesuits would definitively answer the question of what to do about the slaves in a way Carroll never anticipated.

## Foreign and Native Missioners

**A**fter 1816 membership in the Select Body of the Corporation was limited to Jesuits who were United States citizens.<sup>109</sup> This meant that while the mission's lands were again in Jesuit hands, they were not necessarily under the control of the Jesuit superior, who had no direct authority over the Corporation's temporal holdings. This separation between spiritual and temporal administration eventually proved unwieldy. It also fanned the flames of the tension between foreign-born and native Jesuits that marked the Maryland Mission's post-Restoration history.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Hennesy, *American Catholicism*, 143.

<sup>106</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 134.

<sup>107</sup> "Papers Pertaining to Sale and Manumission of Negro Slave Boy (1816)," MPA, 99 R1-3.

<sup>108</sup> Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 19.

<sup>109</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 127.

<sup>110</sup> See Curran, *American Jesuit Spirituality*, 21f., on post-Restoration, anti-Maryland feeling in Rome.



The continued immigration of Catholics from the continent and the end of large-scale English immigration influenced the composition and mission of the Society of Jesus. In the years immediately after the Suppression and prior to the establishment of the Maryland Province, the majority of Jesuits in the United States were foreigners. In the catalogue of the Maryland Mission of 1819, sixteen Irishmen, eight Belgians, four Germans, three Frenchmen, one Russian, one Italian, and, remarkably, one English Jesuit are listed as serving alongside nineteen American Jesuits.<sup>111</sup>

Mission superiors tended to be foreign-born. As Curran noted, they had no legal authority over the restored mission's property. A clear distinction had developed between spiritual and temporal jurisdiction. The former lay in the hands of the mission superior, the latter in the hands of the trustees of the Corporation.<sup>112</sup> The shift from the colonial mission to the postrevolution, restored Society could not have been more obvious. The mission was no longer the superior's to command. The provisional arrangement made by Carroll and the other former Jesuits to continue the mission's work now struck at the very heart of the mission's ability to function.

American Jesuits often regarded their continental counterparts as antidemocratic. European Jesuits thought the Americans were "too independent, too materialistic, and too little observant of the rules of religious life."<sup>113</sup> Concerning Jesuit landholding in Maryland, two tensions were at work: one nativist, the other generational. American-born Jesuits were often at odds with their foreign-born brethren over questions touching on national identity and the Society's way of proceeding. Simply put, the separation of temporal and spiritual authority was a sticking point for European Jesuits, particularly superiors. There was also a conflict between the generations. To an older generation, the mission and the lands were synonymous. To a new generation, made up of foreign- and American-born Jesuits who had no memory of the colonial tradition and were products of Carroll's diocesan system, the lands were simply an apostolic asset or hindrance and should be treated as such. How did this tension play itself out in Jesuit attitudes towards slaveholding and Jesuit ministry among the slaves?

While the conditions of the slaves improved after Kenney's 1819 visitation, it was clear that the plantation system's days were numbered.<sup>114</sup> Kenney instituted reforms that led to a significant improvement in the

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<sup>111</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 127 n. 9.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 128, esp. n. 10.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 128. See also Curran's essay "From Mission to Province: 1805-1833," in *The Maryland Jesuits* (1976), 47-68, esp. 48-51 on Jesuit nativism.

<sup>114</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 131.



management and productivity of the farms, but he was supportive of the Corporation's already manifested desire to dispose of the slaves. The debts incurred by the farms continued to mount and many of the older Jesuits blamed the foreigners for mismanaging them.<sup>115</sup> In the midst of all this internal debate, the archbishop of Baltimore, Ambrose Marechal, initiated claims against the Jesuit estates on the grounds that they were established for the support of the Church in the United States, not just the support of the Jesuit order.<sup>116</sup>

Marechal's case blocked the Corporation's policy of gradual manumission of the slaves and prevented their sale as well. In 1823 Pope Pius VII ordered the Maryland Jesuits to surrender White Marsh, its slaves, and other holdings to the archbishop. The Maryland Jesuits refused and appealed to the United States State Department, whose chief clerk was a relative of the Neale family. In turn, this official warned the archbishop that the federal government viewed any appeal to a foreign power in such a matter as an interference with the basic rights of American citizens.<sup>117</sup> Rome, the archdiocese of Baltimore, and the United States government were now at odds over the question of temporalities and ecclesial jurisdiction at exactly the same time as the lay-trustee controversy was raging throughout the Catholic community of America.<sup>118</sup> Some 190 years after the original mission, the unique understanding of the distinction between temporal and spiritual jurisdiction that had earlier served the Maryland Jesuits so well was now being put to the test.

In the summer of 1823, the Superior General of the Jesuits, Luigi Fortis, dispatched another visitor, Francis Dzierozynski, to Maryland to settle matters once and for all concerning the relationship between the Society and the Corporation. Fortis's view was that the Maryland Jesuits loved property too much and obedience not enough. His advice to Dzierozynski was "Let them renounce the property."<sup>119</sup> European attitudes towards the American Society's way of proceeding and the determination of the Maryland Jesuits to safeguard the success of their own mission were on a collision course. Charles Neale, the superior who defied Archbishop, Gen-

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<sup>115</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 112. One Jesuit's brother, Richard McSherry, wrote to his brother William in 1828 that it is "very bad policy to place foreigners as superiors who know nothing of this country or its institutions."

<sup>116</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 135.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 135, esp. n. 49.

<sup>118</sup> Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 53-55.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 135.



eral, and Pope, died just before Dzierozynski's arrival.<sup>120</sup> After Dzierozynski's visit, as Curran relates, the Corporation's trustees renounced their right to administer property without the consent of the general (136). However, the question of the viability of the farms had been raised publicly, and the conflict with Marechal only led to further questioning of whether the farms were a help or a hindrance to the Society's work in nineteenth-century America. The end of the Maryland Mission's dependence upon its farms would not be long in coming.

## Money and Schools

The Church in America during the mid-1820s was entering a period of rapid change. In 1808 the Diocese of Baltimore became an archdiocese and four new American dioceses were created, including three in the major cities of the North: Boston, New York and Philadelphia.<sup>121</sup> The system of lay trustees, approved by the first American bishop, John Carroll, in the years just after the revolution was now coming under fire from priests and bishops across the nation.<sup>122</sup> Anti-Catholic bias was surfacing, not simply as an attitude on the part of a particular colonial government, but as a national characteristic.<sup>123</sup>

The need for an educated Catholic population also asserted itself, particularly in the face of ever expanding Catholic immigration. As Monsignor Ellis noted, "It was estimated in the decade of the 1820's that 54,000 Catholics had entered the United States from abroad, a figure which rose steadily when the 1840's alone accounted for 700,000 more."<sup>124</sup> Clearly the Church was on the cusp of a historic moment. Over the next twenty-five years, the Church would become more urban, more centralized under the authority of bishop and priest, and more aggressive in defending its rights against an insurgent nativism. It would also sponsor an enormous publishing, educational, and social-service network designed to meet the pressing needs of an exponentially growing Catholic population pouring in from Europe in hopes of bread, work, and freedom.

By the time of the Suppression, the Society of Jesus was operating over eight hundred schools worldwide. As John O'Malley has pointed out,

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 136 fn. 51.

<sup>121</sup> Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 55, and Hennesy, *American Catholics*, 90f.

<sup>122</sup> Miller, "Church in Captivity," 20-26.

<sup>123</sup> Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 66f., and Miller, "Church in Captivity," 18f.

<sup>124</sup> *American Catholicism*, 67f.



the Jesuits were “the first religious order in the Catholic Church to undertake formal education as a major ministry.”<sup>125</sup> This decision profoundly shaped the culture of Catholicism and the Jesuit ministerial imagination.<sup>126</sup> The post-Restoration Society immediately reimmersed itself in the work of education on a large scale and adapted its *Ratio studiorum* to changed circumstances in Europe and throughout the world.<sup>127</sup> In the United States the Society’s work in the schools became the key to nineteenth-century Jesuit expansion.

As we have seen, many of the Jesuits who came of age in the 1820s had little or no loyalty to the “Maryland tradition.”<sup>128</sup> Economic realities convinced men such as Thomas Mulledy, William McSherry, and John McElroy that the Society’s dependence upon the plantation system was hampering its apostolic effectiveness. In 1830 Kenney returned as visitor. A new general, Fr. Jan Roothan, instructed him to investigate whether or not the mission should sell the farms, Curran recounts (136). While most of the farms had significantly improved, it seemed obvious that they were unable to provide for the mission’s institutional apostolic commitments.<sup>129</sup>

In 1832, at a meeting with the consultors of the Maryland Mission and the College of Georgetown, Peter Kenney made the following suggestions, which were then submitted to Fr. Roothan for his consideration: first, that the Maryland and Missouri Missions be reunited as a province within the Society of Jesus; further, that Georgetown College be given a dispensation from the Society’s ban on operating its schools as tuition-paying institutions; finally,

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<sup>125</sup> John O’Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 15.

<sup>126</sup> See *ibid.*, 200–42, on the impact of the schools on Jesuit ministry.

<sup>127</sup> William Bangert, S.J., *A History of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972), 436–38, 497.

<sup>128</sup> Curran, “Splendid Poverty,” 137.

<sup>129</sup> In 1822–23 the White Marsh novitiate (established in 1814) was near collapse. In 1823 the novice master, Fr. Charles Van Quickenborne, accompanied by seven Belgian novices, another priest, and three brothers, left for St. Louis and the proposed mission to the Native Americans. There would be no novitiate in Maryland until 1827, when it was reestablished at Georgetown. One of those novices who left with Van Quickenborne was, of course, Peter de Smet (see Curran, “From Mission to Province,” 62, and Finn, “Slaves of the Jesuits,” 107). There are several versions of what happened to bring about this decision and how it took place. De Smet’s record of the novices’ reactions is vivid: “We left home and country for the Indians. The Indians are in the West. To the West let us go” (see Gilbert J. Garraghan, *The Jesuits of the Middle United States*, 3 vols. [Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1938] 1:74). The early chapters of this volume give in great detail the story of the foundation of the Missouri Mission and its relation to Maryland.



[t]hat the state of public feeling on the subject of slavery and other disadvantages attending the system be accurately and in detail more known to the General with a view of obtaining his sanction for the adoption of some arrangement that will gradually liberate this mission from such servants and substitute free labourers in their place.<sup>130</sup>

The first two of Kenney's proposals were supported without reservation. The last proved to be more controversial. The majority of the consultors were in favor, but the measure was "decisively objected to by one consultor and another consented to it with an emphatic observation that great caution and circumspection should be used in the details and execution of any system that should be adopted."<sup>131</sup> A year later at Georgetown College, Kenney announced the establishment of the Maryland Province and the appointment of William McSherry as its first provincial. Georgetown, now enrolling 183 students, was also granted a dispensation from the Society's Constitutions and permitted to charge tuition.<sup>132</sup> These developments marked the end of the planter-priest in Maryland. The mission of the Society of Jesus in Maryland had assumed a new form.

The schools had now laid claim to the ministerial imagination of the Maryland Jesuits. A secondary school had been established in Washington, D.C., in 1821, and colleges and secondary schools would be established in Philadelphia and Baltimore less than twenty years after Kenney's extraordinary consultation. The Jesuit mission in Maryland had turned its face from the farms towards the cities and the work of education. By 1842 one-half of all Maryland Jesuits, including all fourteen scholastics, would be employed at schools.<sup>133</sup> A letter from Richard McSherry, a layman, to his brother William written around the time of the extraordinary consultation remarkably reflects the opinion of quite a few of the Jesuits and their supporters at that time. "I do not think it becoming that clergymen who ought to be engaged in teaching or mission should be farmers[;] if their property was all rented out it would produce 20x the income and the fathers could be better employed."<sup>134</sup> The paradigm shift in Jesuit thinking about mission and ministry could not have been stated more clearly. The farms were no longer an arena

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<sup>130</sup> "Record of Extraordinary Consultation with Consultors of Maryland Mission and of College of Georgetown (1832)," MPA, XM 1-3.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* and Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 137. Grivel, Muledy, and McSherry strongly supported the recommendation. Dzierozynski opposed it, and Dubuisson gave it his cautious support.

<sup>132</sup> Curran, "From Mission to Province," 65.

<sup>133</sup> Curran, *American Jesuit Spirituality*, 27.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 112.



for ministry, they were a burden. Jesuits could be better employed, presumably in a classroom, chapel, or administrative post at a school or parish. But what of the slaves?

A major part of the dissatisfaction with the farms was rooted in the feeling that the slaves were corrupt and that dealing with them in the current hopeless circumstances either wasted apostolic energy or served to contaminate the Jesuits themselves. One Jesuit wrote thus of the slaves under his charge: "None are charged with theft. One man and the old woman go to the sacraments—one is said to be a worthless fellow—the other notoriously [illegible] in habits of illicit intercourse, now wishes to be married."<sup>135</sup> In the same report, the slave's houses were described as "very few and very bad. There is not one that can afford comfortable shelter to man or beast." The report later lists the value of the working slaves as around \$1,000, "the boy, the old woman, the livestock, farm utensils, and house furniture may be worth 335 Dollars." A letter to Peter Kenney, presumably written by the same Jesuit, states the case even more baldly.

Overseers unworthy of the name have been employed and the two lay brothers who have resided here were not able or fit. . . . The priest receives nothing from his Congregation and must depend on farming. . . . with regard to the servants I have little to say favourably. Very few regard the frequentation of the sacraments, and most of them I fear are immoral. . . . Admonition is of little avail with most of our servants[;] and surrounded as they are by Methodists, free blacks and careless coloured Catholics their reformation will be difficult.<sup>136</sup>

The notion of the slave as lazy, immoral, inferior, given to theft, and incapable of self-rule—in short, completely lacking in the virtues of Christian civilization—was at the heart of the ideology of slavery. That the Jesuits had subscribed to such notions is not surprising. The long-standing complaints regarding the farms reflected the same fundamental sentiment.

Yet the tone seems to have changed. There is no talk of the slave as a fellow Christian or of the responsibility of the master for the slave's condition. The slaves were now seen by some as either a hindrance to Jesuit ministry or somehow unworthy of the Jesuits' ministrations. How widespread this notion was is impossible to pin down. The paternalistic image of the Jesuit master as "provider, counselor, just and merciful authority" for the slave that Mobberly portrayed would continue to exercise an influence in

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<sup>135</sup> "St. Joseph's General Charge and Discharge (1830-31)," MPA, 103.5 W7-W16.

<sup>136</sup> "Letter to Peter Kenney, S.J. (c. 1839)," MPA, 103.5 W7-W16. The letter is obviously of an earlier date because the slaves were sold in 1838.



Jesuit attitudes towards the sale of the slaves, but it would not stop the sale.<sup>137</sup> Nor would it argue for emancipation, gradual or otherwise.

Two developments signaled the death knell of Jesuit slaveholding in Maryland. The leadership within the province had passed to a generation who sought to be free of the farms and the slaves, and the ability of Georgetown to charge tuition eliminated any need for the farms to support the college. The revenues from the sale or rental of the farms would provide the province with a nest egg for the future. But what about the slaves? Were they to be gradually emancipated? Manumitted wholesale? Or sold along with the land? Without the need of their labor for the mission, how would the Jesuits see these “servants of the Society”?

## Selling the Slaves

It is interesting to note that even one as disgruntled as Mobberly felt that selling the slaves was a peril to the soul of the slave owner and an offense to the Christian conscience. Jesuit paternalism and self-interest conspired to undercut the Corporation’s policy of gradual emancipation. The same dynamics were at work in Mobberly as he expressed his fear that if the slaves were sold, they would

lose those Christian principles which they may have imbibed—to be separated, the wife from her husband, the children from their parents. Is this Christianity? And will the Planters of Maryland charge their consciences with deeds so shocking to the feelings of a Christian, and thus draw down the curse of God upon themselves and their posterity? Forbid it heaven!<sup>138</sup>

Such feelings seem not to have troubled Maryland’s new provincial, William McSherry. Reporting on all the farms, he advised the sale of the slaves. McSherry shared Mobberly’s opinion: the slaves cost too much to maintain and contributed to the indebtedness of the farms.<sup>139</sup>

According to McSherry, of the forty-five slaves at St. Thomas only sixteen were working. If everything was sold, “\$1000 could be made from the land besides supporting the missionaries. The sale of the servants should

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<sup>137</sup> Finn, “Slaves of the Jesuits,” 65f.

<sup>138</sup> “MP, Pt. 1,” GUA, 82f.

<sup>139</sup> “St. Thomas Manor Report of Income, Expenses, Servants by Wm. McSherry, S.J. (1833),” “Report of Income, Expenses, Servants at Newtown by Fr. McSherry (1833–37), and “Report on St Inigoes (1833–37),” MPA, 99 L 1–4.



bring at least \$16,000 which would bring \$1000 interest."<sup>140</sup> At Newtown, only seventeen of thirty-six slaves were working. "If the servants were sold they would bring at least \$25,000. The interest would be \$1100."<sup>141</sup> At St. Inigoes, McSherry recommended that all but two or three hundred acres of land be sold, "abundantly sufficient to support a priest or two."<sup>142</sup> Of the ninety slaves there, only forty-three were working. "The remainder are too old or too young to work, but all must be supported, clothed, their doctor's fees paid," and so forth. McSherry's report provided him with the information necessary to push the General on the issue of selling the slaves because of financial crisis.

The province also began looking for buyers. A letter from Bishop Martin Spalding of Louisville dated March 21, 1830, indicates that two years before Kenney's extraordinary consultation, some Maryland Jesuits were sounding out suitable buyers for their slaves. Bishop Spalding asks if the Jesuits were looking for Catholic buyers and mentions a possible contact in Louisville.<sup>143</sup>

In considering the motives for selling the province's slaves, the most obvious of explanations should not be overlooked—money. The Jesuits had previously sold slaves for financial reasons, in order to pay debts, for example. McSherry's major argument for the sale of the slaves also involved finances. But there was an additional reason for his enthusiasm—the schools. For McSherry and others, the Jesuits had to choose between the farms and the schools. In a letter written just before McSherry was to visit the General in Rome, Kenney instructed the former to make arguments for the schools and to focus the General's attention on education and the "good in our schools."<sup>144</sup> Clearly the schools and the farms were seen as incompatible.

As Emmett Curran has argued, McSherry and his supporters believed "pressing debts, lack of funds, struggling colleges, corrupt slaves—all stemmed from the attempt of the Maryland Jesuits to be both priests and planters."<sup>145</sup> Thomas Mulledy told the General that it was impossible to maintain the farms and Georgetown College (137). Before the First Province Congregation in 1835, McSherry had begun to sell slaves, pleading financial

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., "St. Thomas Manor Report."

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., "Report of . . . Newtown."

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., "Report on St. Inigoes."

<sup>143</sup> "Letter from Bishop Martin J. Spalding (1830)," MPA, 112 W0-Z1.

<sup>144</sup> "Instructions from Peter Kenney, S.J., to Wm. McSherry, S.J., re. latter's trip to Rome (1832)," MPA, XM1-3.

<sup>145</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 137.



hardship. He sold at least twenty-five slaves from St. Thomas and St. Inigoes. Eleven were sold to one Henry Johnson of Louisiana.<sup>146</sup> Apparently some slaves were sold to other Jesuits. In a letter to McSherry, Fr. de Theux of Missouri related that

last spring Fr. Grivel offered me in the name of Fr. Provincial of White Marsh some slaves for sale. They were to be paid for as our means would allow. I would like to know at your convenience . . . whether we could have Ned the Blacksmith, his wife and two or three of their smallest children and at what price. . . . we do stand in need of additional slaves, unless we make a new establishment either among the whites or indians.<sup>147</sup>

The older Jesuit attitude concerning the slave's portability and ability to contribute to the mission was evidently still current. And, at first glance, it seems that the preference was for keeping a slave family together. However, the reference to acquiring "two or three of their smallest children" raises the question: Would the Maryland Jesuits divide children from parents in the sale of slaves? When and if it came to selling the slaves, how bound would the Jesuits be to their own principles?

The province congregation of 1835 moved to shut down or rent some of the farms, sell the property (including the slaves), and concentrate Jesuit energies on establishing colleges in such cities as Baltimore, Richmond, New York, and Philadelphia.<sup>148</sup> The postulatum to sell the slaves was supported by a majority of Maryland Jesuits, with the strongest dissent coming from Aloysius Young, McSherry's assistant, and a supporter of the older system.<sup>149</sup> Young's position, as Curran relates, represented that of other plantation superiors (Young was himself at St. Thomas Manor) and of Europeans such as Dzierozynski and Dubuisson, who argued that the selling of the slaves would lead to their ruin and give cause for grave scandal, especially among the Protestants of the area (140f.). In 1836 Fr. Roothan wrote to McSherry that "it would be better to suffer financial disaster than suffer the loss of all our souls with the sale of the slaves."<sup>150</sup> Two camps had emerged within the province: those in favor of selling the slaves and the farms and moving into new apostolic ventures, and those who felt that some form of plantation system offered the best framework for continued apostolic success and satisfied the minimal requirements of justice.

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<sup>146</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 123f.

<sup>147</sup> "Letter from Fr. de Theux to Fr. McSherry (1834)," MPA, XXX G1-9.

<sup>148</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 138f., and Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 122.

<sup>149</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 139.

<sup>150</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 141.



Stephen Dubuisson, the cautious voice of the 1832 consultants' meeting, wrote that the province's slaves "would despair when they should be dragged from their ancient manors and churches. Isn't the very idea of being forced to go with new masters a cruel one?"<sup>151</sup> The selling of some slaves by McSherry and the rumors of an impending sale of all the slaves had an undeniable impact upon the slaves themselves. As one Jesuit wrote in July of 1832, "There is only one thing that makes me gloomy and it is the present situation of our servants. They have all heard that they are sold, or are to be sold, and that they are to be carried out of the State. This has put a most unpleasant feeling on them."<sup>152</sup> The slave as the object of pity and sympathy was the reverse image of the slave as the object of contempt. As William Westermann has written,

There has seldom been in history . . . any slaveholding community in which the theoretical slave—that is, a thing totally devoid of legal personality and without possessions of his own—has really existed in the actual practice of that community. . . . This inability to coerce human beings into a situation of total slave subjection produces a fundamental contradiction inherent in the very structure of the institution of slavery.<sup>153</sup>

Daily contact with slaves, the dependence on their labor, and the skilled positions which they filled all served to erode the ideology of slavery's claim that the slave was not really a human being. The Christian recognition of the slave's status as a member of the Body of Christ only served to further underscore the contradictory reality at the core of the system. It was precisely this that fueled many of the Christian critiques of slavery, Catholic and Protestant.

Many Jesuits had developed close ministerial ties to slaves and free blacks. Thomas Lilly operated a school and enrolled blacks in the sodality at Fredrick, Maryland, in the 1830s, and he attempted to establish a school and sodality for free blacks in Philadelphia in 1833.<sup>154</sup> Charles Lancaster taught catechism to the slaves at White Marsh and prayed with them nightly (47). A nineteenth-century census from one farm records that thirty-seven slave children were baptized over a twenty-nine-year period. The record also indicates that the marriages of the slaves were stable and long lasting.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Quoted in Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 141.

<sup>152</sup> "Letter from Peter Havermans to George Fenwick (1832)," MPA, 210 P1-10.

<sup>153</sup> William Westermann, "Slavery and the Elements of Freedom in Ancient Greece," in *Slavery in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Moses Finley (Cambridge: Heffer, 1960), 18.

<sup>154</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 46.

<sup>155</sup> "List of Negro Children Baptized (1806-1835)," MPA, 100.5 A3-L5. Out of the thirty-seven children baptized, only two were illegitimate.



According to the Catholic moral doctrine that legitimated slavery, the sale of the slaves, especially without guarantees as to their continued religious practice, represented a departure from religious obligation to provide for the temporal and spiritual welfare of the slave.

In 1836 Dubuisson wrote from Rome to McSherry summing up the pros and cons of the possible sale. As factors weighing heavily in favor of the sale, he lists the success of Bohemia after selling slaves and reducing the size of the farm, the danger of slave insurrection amidst reports of slave discontent, the inability of the farms to support the province's ministries, the incompatibility of farm management and the spiritual life, and the readiness of two buyers to allow the slaves free practice of their religion. He then goes on to list the loss of the farms, the negative publicity, the financial risk involved, and the objection of the slaves to being sold, especially being sold further South, as notable contraindications to the sale.<sup>156</sup>

McSherry continued to press the General for permission to sell the slaves in view of the province's precarious financial position. In October of 1836 Fr. Roothan approved the sale of the slaves, subject to the following conditions. First, the slaves were to be guaranteed the free exercise of their religion. Second, the slaves were not to be separated indiscriminately. The buyer must agree that husbands and wives and children and parents would never be separated. Third, slaves with spouses on other plantations were to be sold together or not separated at all. If necessary, the province should sell a slave to the neighboring plantation where his or her spouse resided. Fourth, the old and the sick were not to be sold and were to be provided for "as justice and charity demand." Finally, the money received was not to be spent making further purchases for the province or its works, nor was it to be used to settle debts. Instead, it was to be invested in "capital which fructifies," in particular, for the education of Jesuits in formation (127f.). The panic of 1837 prevented McSherry from selling immediately, and poor health forced him to step down and accept the post of rector at Georgetown. He was replaced by Thomas Mulledy in October 1837.

By June of 1838 Mulledy was deep in negotiations to sell the slaves en masse. He wrote to McElroy, "I am now so busily engaged in trading off our negroes. . . . I find it difficult to dispose of our servants to persons in a Catholic neighbourhood—I have now a fine opportunity if we agree on prices."<sup>157</sup> He goes on to write that the buyer wanted to pay an average of \$345 per slave, while Mulledy wanted \$400. Later that month, Mulledy agreed to sell 272 slaves to the former governor of Louisiana, Henry John-

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<sup>156</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 125f.

<sup>157</sup> "Letter from Mulledy to McElroy (1838)," MPA, 212 P1-13.



son, and his partner, Jess Batey, for \$115,000. Johnson had previously bought slaves from the province in 1835. He and Batey paid \$25,000 down in the 1838 sale and were given ten years to pay off their debt.<sup>158</sup> The slaves were almost all removed to Louisiana by November of 1838. Mulledy wrote as follows to McElroy that month:

Thank God I have succeeded in getting on board ship all the negroes except those who are married off the farm—Gov. Johnson wished, very prudently, to leave those to see if he could purchase their wives or husbands, as the case may be—we start this week together to visit all the masters. . . . This next tour will I hope be the last which I have to take regarding the Negroes.<sup>159</sup>

## The Aftermath of the Sale: Mulledy's Disgrace

Mulledy wrote to Roothan that Catholics of southern Maryland approved of the sale and that, while some Jesuits on the farms were not happy with the sale, he hoped that they would, in time, become better Jesuits as a result of it.<sup>160</sup> This was, however, far from Mulledy's last dealing with the controversial question of selling the slaves. He would have to make one more trip, a trip from which he would return only after three years of humiliation and exile.

It is important to note the scale of Jesuit slaveholding. The Society was one of the larger slaveholders in America.<sup>161</sup> The mass sale of almost all its slaves caused an immediate reaction within both the order and the wider Catholic community. In Louisiana all seemed well. Henry Johnson wrote to McSherry in 1839 that "[t]he slaves purchased from Rev. Mulledy and transported to this State are all healthy and were pleased with their situa-

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<sup>158</sup> See Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 142, and "Certificate of mortgage belonging to Henry Johnson (1839)," and "Paper Documents Sale of 56 Negroes (1838)," MPA, 112 T0-T6. MPA, 112 S1-S4, includes later documents recording the details of the sale. See "Certificate of Terrebonne Parish Provides Names of 64 Slaves (1843)," "Mortgage Certificate of Parish of Pointe Coupee concerning Henry Johnson (1843)," and "Letter to Mr. Vespre (1843)," which includes "L. Janin's Memorandum (1843)," a judge's documentation of the sale. It is noted in this document that "the Rev. Thomas Mulledy was not the real owner of the slaves. . . . Georgetown College was the real proprietor."

<sup>159</sup> "Letter from T. Mulledy to J. McElroy Georgetown to Willings Alley (1838)," MPA, 212 M1-12.

<sup>160</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 142.

<sup>161</sup> Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 11. As late as 1850 only fifty-six slaveholders in the United States owned more than three hundred slaves.



tion.”<sup>162</sup> Opinion in Maryland, however, varied. While Mulledy thought the sale successful, others were not so sure. One of the Jesuits who had initially supported the sale noted that

all our people who had married out of our farms have been sold to the masters of their husbands or wives [*sic*], or to the next neighbours of them, so that husbands and wives are together, but some children who could not be sold with their mothers, have been sent with the others to Louisiana. There remain on our farms only few old people, well provided for their lifetimes.<sup>163</sup>

It was this scene which outraged Thomas Lilly, then assigned to St. Thomas Manor. Lilly wrote to the General that the slaves “were dragged off by force to the ship and led off to Louisiana. The danger to their souls is certain.”<sup>164</sup> Lilly went on to inform the General that the majority of the province was appalled at the sale. Peter Havermans joined Lilly’s opinion and in a separate letter to the General wrote of the “heroic courage and Christian resignation” the slaves displayed. In a particularly pathetic scene, an old woman begged Havermans to tell her what she had done to deserve such a fate. “All the others came to me seeking rosaries. . . . If ever any one had reason to despair, it was I.”<sup>165</sup> These reports, along with others, reflected badly on Mulledy. The widespread sense of scandal among the Catholics of the area led the archbishop of Baltimore, John Eccleston, to pen a letter to Roothan denouncing the sale of the slaves.<sup>166</sup> The General in turn sought either to remove Mulledy, dismiss him, or force him to resign as provincial. Mulledy went to Rome to defend himself and did not return from Europe for three years.<sup>167</sup> In the aftermath of this imbroglio, after the Civil War the majority of Maryland provincials were European immigrants.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> “Letter from. Johnson, Gov. of Louisiana, to Fr. Wm. McSherry (1839),” MPA, 212 G0-11.

<sup>163</sup> “Letter on Disposition of Conewago Land, Fr. Grivel to Fr. Lancaster (1839),” MPA, 212 G0-11.

<sup>164</sup> Quoted in Curran, “Splendid Poverty,” 142f.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 143, and n. 84.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 144f. It should be noted that Eccleston had proposed to McSherry in 1837 that the farms and slaves be sold.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 145. In 1840 Grivel wrote to Lancaster that Mulledy was in Europe serving as “chaplain to 49 English Catholics” (“Letter from Grivel to Lancaster [1840],” MPA, 213 W0-11).

<sup>168</sup> See Curran, *American Jesuit Spirituality*, 22-25, on Roman suspicion of Maryland.



Clearly the break-up of families was a crucial factor in Mulledy's disgrace, as was the general sense of the sale's impropriety. The slave's status as a member of the Catholic community and the notion of basic justice that should govern relationships between slave and master led to an outcry against the pragmatic apostolic strategies of the architects of the sale. Evidently McSherry and Mulledy had underestimated the widespread and deep feeling of so many Catholics associated with the farms, slaveholding, and the Jesuit mission. Benedict Fenwick, then the bishop of Boston, wrote these lines to George Fenwick, his brother and a Jesuit at Georgetown:

Poor Negroes! I pity them, but I suppose the measure has become a necessary one from the strong feeling manifested of late against slavery by a large party in the U[nited] States, whose efforts are continually executed to effect their emancipation. I hope, however, as they are all Catholics, every security has been given by the purchasers that they shall have the benefit of their religion in whatever place they may be located, and the attendance of a priest. How is the purchase money to be appropriated or received?<sup>169</sup>

The great majority of Jesuit slaves went to Louisiana. Some, however, never left Maryland. Many of the aged and infirm continued to reside at the farms where they had worked. A few ran away, apparently with the approval and encouragement of their Jesuit masters.<sup>170</sup> Henry Johnson had promised to allow the slaves to practice their religion and to provide for that practice. In a letter written during the month of the sale, it is clear that the Jesuits were confident of Johnson's intentions in this regard. "Governor Johnson will have a priest at his plantation every Sunday and St. [saint] days. These last years the priest has been there 35 times and he paid him \$135 for his trouble. It's a fact."<sup>171</sup> In 1840, Fidele de Grivel wrote to Charles Lancaster that

Rev. M. Bomiller, P.P. at Donaldsonville, he goes once a month to Gov. Johnson's farm 12 miles distant, where all our people from W[hite] Marsh and St. Inigoes are. He praises them much. He married 2 couples on Easter Sunday. Gov. Johnson did not and will not sell any, but this summer will build a chapel for them, and even pay a priest, if he can get one. The last year they were unhappy, on account of a cruel overseer, but now they are pleased in their new place.<sup>172</sup>

Apparently the commitment to weekly service had gone by the wayside. The question naturally arises, how well did Johnson keep his other promises?

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<sup>169</sup> "Letter from B. Fenwick to G. Fenwick (1838)," MPA, 212 N1-4.

<sup>170</sup> Curran "Splendid Poverty," 143.

<sup>171</sup> "Letter from Fr. Grivel to Lancaster (1838)," MPA, 212 M1-12.

<sup>172</sup> "Letter from Grivel to Lancaster (1840)," MPA, 213 W0-11.



In 1848 a lengthy letter from Cincinnati arrived for Mulledy at Georgetown. In it Fr. James van de Velde, S.J., reported that while visiting a former student of his at St. Louis University, he discovered that this student, William Thompson, was “owner of a great number of the coloured people that once belonged to the Province of Maryland.”<sup>173</sup> Apparently Johnson and Thompson were in some kind of partnership and “about one-third of the whole number” of slaves were living on Thompson’s plantation. Van de Velde visited with the slaves and wrote that “they have scarcely any chance to attend their religious duties and the children, several of them not yet baptized, grow up without any religious instruction whatever.” The nearest chapel was ten miles away and the sermons were always in French, which none of the slaves understood. Van de Velde added that “some of the women told me *weeping* [emphasis in the original] that they had not been to church for more than a year.” He goes on to report that the priest cannot visit on Sundays, but could come out to the plantation on a weekday. However, “the people would have to work, [and] many would not be permitted to attend.”

Van de Velde’s anger boiled over at one point, and he accused Johnson of bad faith, claiming that the latter had broken the terms of the original contract.

It seems that one of the conditions of the contract yr Reverence made with Mr Johnson was that they [the slaves] should have a chapel and that they should be permitted to attend to their religious duties. The above account must convince yr Reverence that this condition is not complied with. . . . Besides, at least one-half, probably two-thirds of the colored that have come down from Maryland live on two other plantations, far distant from any church . . . where they never see a Catholic priest.

Van de Velde enlisted Thompson’s wife and some local Catholics in an attempt to have a chapel built for the former slaves. He asked Mulledy to request \$1,000 from the province to help this project succeed. He finally ends his letter with the suggestion that the Maryland Jesuits continued to have some responsibility for the spiritual welfare of their former slaves.

I am of the opinion that the Prov[ince] of Md is in conscience bound to contribute to it, and thus to provide for the salvation of those poor people who are now utterly neglected. . . . Justice as well as charity require that their former masters should step in and with other well-disposed persons to procure them the means of salvation. . . . lose no time in providing for those poor abandoned people who though neglected are still firmly attached to their religion.

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<sup>173</sup> “Letter from James van de Velde to T. Mulledy (1848),” MPA, 216 T1-12. All the citations from Van de Velde are from the same document.



In 1849 Henry Johnson sold half of his estate, including the slaves, to one John Thompson.<sup>174</sup> In 1852 the latter assured the Jesuits at Georgetown that he intended “to fulfill the promises of Gov. Johnson by erecting a little chapel for the Negroes.”<sup>175</sup> Charles Lancaster responded that “we are much gratified to learn that it is your intention to carry out Gov J’s engagements by erecting a chapel for your Servants.”<sup>176</sup> A letter from Henry Johnson the year before had not even mentioned a chapel.<sup>177</sup> In eight additional letters between Thompson and Lancaster, dating from 1852 to 1859, no mention is made of the chapel.<sup>178</sup> Van de Velde’s letter is the last eyewitness report we have of the Maryland slaves. Thompson’s promise of a chapel is the last mention of them.

What of the farms? Peter Havermans wrote in 1841 that “the money spent on the farms since 1839 ought to have placed everything in first-rate order, and now the buildings are . . . badly done, and several new ones are still wanted.”<sup>179</sup> John McElroy, reporting the following year, wrote of the “great uncertainty of revenue” and deficient crops on the farms. He recommended leasing the fields and retaining the buildings.<sup>180</sup> That same year, McElroy received a request for a field hand from another Jesuit.<sup>181</sup> It seems that the sale of the slaves did not immediately solve the problems of the farms.

And the money? Was it used as Fr. Roothan had instructed for the education of young Jesuits? Yes and no. \$8,000 settled the archbishop of Baltimore’s claims against the Society’s lands by providing him with a pension, \$17,000 went to pay debts incurred at Georgetown College during a building campaign, and the remaining \$90,000 was invested for the support

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<sup>174</sup> “Letter from C. C Lancaster, S.J., to Th. F. Mully, S.J., (1859),” MPA, 112 B1-P6, and “New Arrangements Made with Henry Johnson regarding the Mortgages (1844),” MPA, 112 R5-R6.

<sup>175</sup> “Letter from John Thompson to Charles Stonestreet, S.J. (1852),” MPA, 112 B1-P6.

<sup>176</sup> “Letter from C. C. Lancaster to John Thompson (1852),” MPA, 112 B1-P6.

<sup>177</sup> “Letter from Henry Johnson, Governor of Louisiana, to Charles C. Lancaster, S.J. (1851),” MPA, 112 B-P6.

<sup>178</sup> MPA, 112 B1-P6.

<sup>179</sup> “Report of St. Inigoes Manor (1841),” MPA, 99 L1-4.

<sup>180</sup> “Notes on the Present State of the Farms of St. Inigoes Manor, St. Thomas Manor, and White Marsh by John McElroy (1841-42),” MPA, 99 L1-4.

<sup>181</sup> “Memorandum for Fr. McElroy as Requested (1842),” MPA, 99 L1-4.



of Jesuits in formation.<sup>182</sup> The selling of the slaves was a personal disaster for Mully, solved few if any of the financial problems of the province, and was seen as a scandal by many within the Church and the Society. It was, without question, a disaster for the slaves.

## Conclusion: History, Discernment, and Inculturation

As Randall Miller pointed out, the Catholic Church's ministry to black Catholics was a "failed mission."<sup>183</sup> Seen against the background of the success of the American church's response to immigration and its consistent striving to evangelize Native Americans, Catholic ministry to free blacks and slaves was never high in priority. As Cyprian Davis put it, "The story of African American Catholicism is the story of a people who obstinately clung to a faith that gave them sustenance, even when it did not always make them feel welcome."<sup>184</sup>

Although the Society of Jesus was not the only religious community to own slaves, it was the most visible and prosperous.<sup>185</sup> Jesuit ministry to the slaves was marked by a paternalism that, at best, somewhat tempered slavery's harsh regime. At worst, it was tainted by all that was evil in American slaveholding. For the most part, the Jesuits treated their slaves much as did the other American Catholic slaveholders. While individual Jesuits may have developed close ministerial ties to blacks, there was no concerted effort on the part of the Society of Jesus as a whole to respond to the needs of black Catholics in America, free or slave. In fact, apart from inconsistently applying minimal standards of justice in their treatment of their slaves, the Jesuits acquiesced in the peculiar institution of American slavery. No Jesuit voiced public opposition to slavery. There were, however, nineteenth-century Jesuits who spoke in favor of slavery and against abolition.<sup>186</sup> While the abolitionist movement often allied itself with the worst

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<sup>182</sup> Curran, "Splendid Poverty," 142.

<sup>183</sup> Randall Miller, "The Failed Mission: The Catholic Church and Black Catholics in the Old South," in *Catholics in the Old South*, 149-70.

<sup>184</sup> *History of Black Catholics*, 259.

<sup>185</sup> The Vincentians, Sulpicians, Ursulines, Carmelites, Sisters of Charity, Sisters of Loretto, Religious of the Sacred Heart, Visitation Sisters, and Dominicans also owned slaves during the antebellum period (see Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 37-39).

<sup>186</sup> John Ryder of Georgetown College addressed an audience in Richmond in 1835 and defended slavery as a positive benefit to the slaves, while arguing that abolitionism was incompatible with Catholicism (see the *Richmond Enquirer*, Sept. 4, 1835). I am thankful to Fr. Gerald Fogarty, S.J., of the University of Virginia for passing on Ryder's



form of anti-Catholic nativism, the failure of any North American Jesuit to protest in principle against slavery is difficult to reconcile with the example of Claver and Sandoval in South America.<sup>187</sup>

Ironically, perhaps, the first graduate of Georgetown, William Gaston, opposed slavery publicly as early as 1832 in a commencement address delivered at the University of North Carolina.<sup>188</sup> As a member of Congress and a justice on North Carolina's supreme court, Gaston also campaigned in support of granting free blacks the vote; and in his legal decisions he defended the rights of blacks, both free and slave (65). As a prominent American Catholic proponent of racial justice, Gaston contrasts sharply with his mentors. Why was it that the Maryland Jesuits acquiesced so easily in the American slave system?

Financial expediency and an uncritical acceptance of American cultural attitudes towards slavery and Catholic moral doctrine were factors influencing the Maryland Jesuits and rationalizing their practice of slaveholding. The example of the Maryland Quakers, who recognized the unchristian nature of slavery and manumitted their slaves in the 1790s at great personal expense, was ignored, envied, or condemned, but never imitated.<sup>189</sup> The failure of the Corporation of Roman Catholic Clergymen's policy of gradual emancipation represents one of the great lost opportunities of American Catholicism. The sale of the slaves by the Maryland Province represents the nadir of Jesuit mission and ministry among the slaves. In the final analysis, despite persistent anti-Catholic harassment, the Maryland Jesuits were all too comfortable in the dominant slaveholding culture of America. In their uncritical acceptance and practice of slavery, they can be accused of harming the very souls they sought to help.

One cannot but reflect how differently it might have turned out if during the late eighteenth century and until 1838, when the province sold the slaves, the Maryland Jesuits had been more alert to the impending collapse of the slaveholding tradition. Tragically, it would seem, they failed to observe and evaluate critically the evolving situation. Yet in our own day a variety of voices call out to us and clamor for our attention. We have sought to respond to some in our recent general congregation; one thinks of

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address to me.

<sup>187</sup> See Hennesy, *American Catholics*, 118-27 and 145-48, on anti-Catholic nativism and abolitionism.

<sup>188</sup> Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, 64f.

<sup>189</sup> See Finn, "Slaves of the Jesuits," 140f.



decree 14 as a particular example.<sup>190</sup> Yet even when we acknowledge our failings, we must be careful not to do so in such a way as to minimize them.<sup>191</sup> This is crucial if we are to hope for reconciliation, especially the reconciliation necessary to effect a healing not only within ourselves but within those whom we have deeply wounded. Gordon Bennett, former novice master and at the time the sole African-American Jesuit in the California Province, remarked that

[o]ur history as Jesuits in America is built upon the rock of slavery, and upon the presence of African men and women who were living endowments by which the ministries of the Society were secured. . . . This seems to me to be a history that cries out for reconciliation.<sup>192</sup>

The history of Jesuit slaveholding in Maryland provides an important example for contemporary companions of Jesus. In particular, it underlines how absolutely necessary it is that we critically discern issues having to do with inculturation. If Jesuit ministry is to be an authentic ministry of consolation—of “living open to God’s action”<sup>193</sup>—it must seek to discern how a given culture shapes the religious imagination’s experience of that action. Sensitivity to the role of ideology in the shaping of cultural consensus, the role of society in shaping religious theory and practice, and the role of religion in the creation of social reality are fundamental requirements for authentic discipleship. Historically conscious, critically informed discernment is of the utmost importance for our current way of proceeding. In the words of the Thirty-second General Congregation, “We ourselves share in the blindness and injustice of our age. We ourselves stand in need of being evangelized. We ourselves need to know how to meet Christ as He works in the world through the power of His Spirit. And it is to this world, our world, that we are sent.”<sup>194</sup> The call to reconciliation, seen against the horizon of our history, is the current context of our ministries. The resilience of certain patterns of social and economic domination that were served by the ideology of slavery are all too familiar to us even today. Our history

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<sup>190</sup> “Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society,” in *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation* 171–78.

<sup>191</sup> “Our Mission and Culture,” in *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation*, §91–96 (p. 55).

<sup>192</sup> “Address to the California Province Congregation” (1991), 5.

<sup>193</sup> O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 19.

<sup>194</sup> “Our Mission Today,” in *Documents of the Thirty-First and Thirty-Second General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institutes of Jesuit Sources, 1977), §72 (p. 418).



is both a reality that shapes our present and a resource for shaping our future. Appropriating that history as reality and a resource in the discernment process is an essential step in meeting the challenge of an inculturated evangelization in our own time and in acting to transform the structures impeding that evangelization.





Martin E. Palmer, S.J.

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