

# 150 YEARS ON GEORGE STREET



**Essays on S. Stephen's, Providence by**  
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*150 Years on George Street: Essays on S. Stephen's, Providence*

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## FOREWORD

**I** FIRST MET S. Stephen's, Providence through Fr. Catir's 1964 parish history — one of eight copies of the fine book in the library at St. Andrew's, Stamford is now a treasure of my personal library. Written at a time when the memories of parish elders were still informed by the oral history of generations closer to the parish's founding, Fr. Catir's history opened my eyes to the significance of the individual parish church as the epicenter of Tractarian and later Anglo-Catholic life in the American Episcopal Church. Parish histories are often skeletal collections of dates and names from committees with little narrative flesh to situate congregational life in regional, national, and international contexts, but here was something different. I wanted to know more.

I next met S. Stephen's through a chance discovery on eBay of a vast trove of manuscript sermons by the Rev. Dr. Henry Water, rector of the church during critical years from 1841 to 1845 and again from 1850 to 1874. The quick action of Fr. Alexander and committed lay members helped save most of this material from almost certain loss to the future ecclesiastical historian, even though the process through which the sermons arrived at an upstate New York music memorabilia shop is still opaque. Nevertheless, I saw a priest and parish deeply committed to the preservation of their heritage in creative ways, and I wanted to know still more.

Still later, I made use of graduate school insomnia at Yale to digitize the extensive writings of George McClellan

Fiske, an overlooked figure in American Church history who was rector during another long and important period from 1884 to 1919. I became convinced further of the significance of S. Stephen's in the long arcs of American Anglicanism. Through Fiske, we can read and observe the crucial changes that took place from the work of early Tractarians and their Ritualist successors, blooming in what came to coalesce as a distinctive churchmanship, culture, identity, and school of Christian living with one of its major homelands in the Boswash corridor.

In more recent years, I have been an honored guest at occasional services, during the impressive Grafton Lectures, and for an Advent Quiet Day undaunted by ice, snow, or wind. The church on George Street – in but not of Brown University, in but not exactly of Providence itself – is an island of Christian piety in its compelling Anglo-Catholic register, rooted intentionally in its past and carrying a good work forward with energetic ongoing ministry to the city and indeed to all of Rhode Island and New England.

The essays in this collection each offer an exploration of some dimension of life at S. Stephen's, through its clergy and lay members, through the indefatigable Sisterhood of the Nativity, through its built architectural and aural musical legacies, through the critical lens of African-American history, through lasting academic and diocesan involvement, through manuscript source material, and through organizations within the parish. Few American Anglo-Catholic parishes have ever been embarrassed with such a richness. This sesquicentennial monument is a chronicle of what the Apostle was pleased to call "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" brought together to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called them into his marvellous light."

That this light shines on George Street is certain to any who have visited S. Stephen's; may it continue to enlighten and inspire for another century and a half.

*Richard J. Mammama, Jr.*

*Trinity Sunday, New Haven, Connecticut, 2019*

## INTRODUCTION

IN THE YEAR 2012, S. Stephen's Church in Providence marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication on February 22, 1862 of its current church building at 114 George Street by Bishop Thomas March Clark of the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island. (The parish itself had already been in existence since 1839, worshipping since 1840 in what is now the Barker Playhouse on Benefit Street.)

Two principal activities were planned to mark this milestone. A Solemn Evensong was offered on Sunday, February 19, 2012, followed by a festive dinner at the Hope Club. To prepare for this celebration, the parish undertook during Lent of 2011 a Sunday evening supper and lecture series, entitled "150 Years on George Street: Scenes from the Life of S. Stephen's Church in Providence." From the beginning, the plan was to include the original five addresses in a commemorative book, along with other relevant essays, talks, and memoirs. The present volume, delayed by several years, is the fulfillment of this aspiration.

More than fifty years ago, Fr. Norman J. Catir, Jr. wrote *S. Stephen's Church in Providence: The History of a New England Tractarian Parish, 1839-1964*. The articles in the present volume take Fr. Catir's work as their starting point. Our aim was to focus on specific people and events that for reasons of space Fr. Catir could treat only in passing. The format of a collection of essays and addresses allowed for more depth, sometimes making use of research materials that have more recently come to light. The present volume should thus be read as a companion and supplement to Fr. Catir's work, which remains the definitive telling of the parish's story through 1964. One of the highlights of the 2011 Lenten series was Fr. Catir's talk, reminiscing on what it was like to write the parish history as a young curate. My short history of S.

Stephen's from the parish website was originally written in 2006 as a thumbnail summary of key points in Fr. Catir's narrative.

Ministry to the academic community at Brown University (and since 1877 Rhode Island School of Design) has been a major component of S. Stephen's mission since the move to our present location in 1862. Michael G. Tuck, Curate and Episcopal College Minister from 2009 to 2012, tells the story of the Bishop Seabury Society, the original Episcopal student association at Brown, founded by S. Stephen's Rector Henry Waterman in 1865. A notable feature of parish life is welcoming return visits from Episcopal clergy and laity who first encountered Anglican worship at S. Stephen's and the diocesan chaplaincy at Brown. The memoirs by Arthur B. Williams, Jr. (Bishop Suffragan of Ohio, 1986–2002), and Hays H. Rockwell (Ninth Bishop of Missouri, 1990–2002) offer a tiny sampling of such formative student experiences at S. Stephen's.

S. Stephen's church building on George Street was completed and consecrated in February 1862, ten months into the American Civil War. In two historical essays, I examine aspects of that war's impact on parish life. One looks at Robert Hale Ives, Jr., the young parishioner who was mortally wounded at the Battle of Antietam in September 1862, and whose deathbed bequest made it possible for the parish to pay off the debt it had incurred in the construction of its new church building. The other looks at the sermon preached in 1864 by the Rector, Henry Waterman, on the Christian's civic obligations to the state.

One of the blessings marking S. Stephen's parish life since the 1850s has been the racial integration of our congregation. During a period when most Episcopal parishes remained segregated, S. Stephen's expressed its Anglo-Catholic ethos by welcoming people of all races, national origins, and social

classes to worship alongside one another as equals in the sight of God. In my essay on Christ Church, Providence (1837–1851), I look at the troubled history of the short-lived African-American parish whose members were transferred to S. Stephen's following its closure, thus accomplishing the racial integration of our parish. Bishop Arthur Williams's after-dinner talk at the sesquicentennial dinner offers poignant reminiscences of growing up black in Providence, studying at Brown University, and being sponsored by S. Stephen's for ordination to the diaconate and priesthood.

The remaining contributions address other aspects of the rich variety of parish life through the years. S. Stephen's participation in the life of the Diocese of Rhode Island has been complex but mostly cordial and mutually rewarding. In this vein, Diocesan Historiographer Lawrence H. Bradner offers an intriguing analysis of the involvement of S. Stephen's Rectors in the Episcopal elections of 1910 and 1952. Sacristan and Clerk of the Vestry Phoebe Pettingell contributes an article on George McClellan Fiske (Rector 1884–1919), who decisively established the parish's Anglo-Catholic identity within the context of the nineteenth century Ritualist Movement. In another article, Pettingell tells the moving story of how the Sisters of the Holy Nativity (SHN) shaped S. Stephen's life and mission from their arrival in 1888 to their tragic departure in 1983.

In compiling this volume, our hope was to make a contribute to the historiography of S. Stephen's that present and future readers will find not only interesting – and maybe even in some places inspiring – but also a stimulus to further historical research and writing. These essays are enormously selective, overlooking vast areas of potential inquiry, and focusing in on topics whose choice was subconsciously conditioned in many ways by our own concerns and preoccupations in the second decade of the twenty-first

century. That was unavoidable. Joyfully, the story continues, and so must the task of its telling.

*Fr. John D. Alexander, Rector  
Epiphany, 2017*

## **S. Stephen's Church in Providence: A Short History**

John D. Alexander

*From the Parish Website*

**S**OMETIME in the early 1830s, a group of parishioners of Saint John's Church (later Cathedral) in Providence, who lived in the southern part of the city's East Side, began to hold services in a private home on stormy Sundays. Subsequently, in 1837, the Rev. Francis Vinton of Grace Church, Providence, and the Rev. Dr. Nathan B. Crocker of Saint John's started a religious school in the area, which met one evening per week, initially in a schoolhouse, and subsequently in a chapel on Thayer Street.

The two groups eventually came together with the plan of forming a new parish. On January 31, 1839, the united body elected a Vestry and voted to adopt the name of Saint Stephen's Church. On April 12, 1839, the fledgling congregation called the Rev. Francis Vinton, then twenty-nine years old, to be the first Rector. The newly formed parish was admitted to the Convention of the Eastern Diocese of the Episcopal Church in June 1839.

Construction of the first church building – now the Barker Playhouse – at the corner of Benefit and Transit Streets began on April 15, 1840. Just as construction got under way, Mr. Vinton resigned as Rector on Easter Monday, 1840. The second Rector, the Rev. George Leeds, arrived in August. Bishop Alexander Viets Griswold consecrated the completed church on November 26, 1840.

### **Early Intimations of Tractarianism**

The founding of S. Stephen's occurred within a decade of the two events conventionally used to date the beginning of the theological and spiritual renewal known as the Oxford Movement: John Keble's Assize Sermon on National

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Apostasy in the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin at Oxford on July 14, 1833; and the launching of the series of pamphlets known as the *Tracts for the Times* later in the same year. The Tracts gave the Oxford Movement its other name, Tractarianism.

The consecration of S. Stephen's new church building on Benefit Street came barely two months before the publication of the last of the *Tracts for the Times*—John Henry Newman's Tract 90—on January 25, 1841. Almost from its inception, S. Stephen's became identified with the ideals and aspirations of this movement later known as Anglo-Catholicism.

Tractarian influence first manifested itself during the short rectorate of Mr. Leeds, who began to hold services on holy days as well as Sundays, and to read prayers sideways, facing the Communion Table, rather than facing the people from behind the reading desk. This practice incurred the wrath of Bishop Griswold, who denounced it in his address to the 1841 Diocesan Convention as sanctioning "the abominable doctrine of Transubstantiation."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Leeds resigned shortly afterwards—whether as the result of Bishop Griswold's censure we do not know.

### **The Waterman Years**

On July 9, 1841, the Vestry called as Rector the Rev. Henry Waterman—"an early Tractarian of the school of Keble and Pusey."<sup>2</sup> Dr. Waterman's influence was decisive in shaping the Catholic identity of the young parish. He served as third Rector from 1841 to 1845, and again as fifth Rector from 1850 until his retirement in 1874.

From the beginning, it appears that some parishioners had misgivings about the church's location on Benefit Street.

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Joseph Catir, Jr., *Saint Stephen's Church in Providence: The History of a New England Tractarian Parish, 1839–1964* (Providence, Rhode Island: Saint Stephen's Church, 1964), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Catir, *Saint Stephen's Church*, 18.

When the parish corporation called Dr. Waterman to return for his second term as rector in 1850, it was with the avowed intention of constructing “another and larger Church in a more central location.”<sup>3</sup>

During the 1850s, the parish continued to grow. In 1851, the African-American parish of Christ Church in downtown Providence was forced to disband. Its communicants were transferred to S. Stephen’s, which thus became one of the first racially integrated parishes in the country. At the same time, Dr. Waterman’s Tractarian teaching was attracting members of prominent Providence families, so that the envisioned project of building a new church gradually became more attainable.

On January 12, 1860, the parish purchased a lot on George Street. Richard Upjohn was engaged as architect, and submitted a gothic design in the Middle Pointed or Decorated style. Upjohn was himself a Tractarian and one of the pioneers of the gothic revival in church architecture in the United States. The cornerstone was laid on Saint Matthew’s Day, September 21, 1860. (Its location is a long-standing mystery.) The completed building was consecrated on Thursday, February 27, 1862, during a snowstorm.

Not everyone in the congregation chose to follow the move to the new church building. For reasons of location, and possibly social class, twenty-two men and women remained at the less fashionable Benefit Street address and formed a new parish, the Church of the Savior. Churchmanship also played a role: “the founders of the Church of the Savior were Low Churchmen who preferred to stay clear of the Oxford Movement. . . .”<sup>4</sup> In 1912, this group merged with another parish to form the present-day St. Martin’s Church on

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<sup>3</sup> Catir, *Saint Stephen’s Church*, 26.

<sup>4</sup> Catir, *Saint Stephen’s Church*, 40.

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Orchard Avenue. The Benefit Street building was sold to the Barker Playhouse in 1932.

Construction of the new church on George Street saddled S. Stephen's with two mortgages. On September 17, 1862, parishioner Robert Hale Ives, Jr., was mortally wounded on the battlefield at Antietam. On September 27, the day before his death, he requested his father to offer \$5,000 towards the liquidation of the \$20,000 debt, provided that the remaining \$15,000 could be raised within one year of his death. The parish rose to the challenge, and the necessary funds to retire the debt were raised by April 5, 1863.

Following the Civil War, many of S. Stephen's characteristically Anglo-Catholic commitments began to take shape in the new church building. In 1865, Dr. Waterman started the Bishop Seabury Society for Episcopal Students at Brown University. In 1866, Henry Carter of the Church of the Advent in Boston was engaged as organist and choirmaster and formed a men and boys choir—which included a number of Brown students—to replace the paid quartet that had previously accompanied services. The parish has ever since maintained its commitment to offering the finest liturgical music possible. Weekly celebration of the Holy Communion at the 8 o'clock Sunday service also began in 1866. In 1869 an altar dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary was set up in the present Lady Chapel—which had originally been designed to be a Sunday School classroom. Dr. Waterman is also believed to have been the first priest in Rhode Island to hear confessions on a regular basis.

**Setback and Recovery**

After Dr. Waterman's retirement in 1874, a Low Church reaction set in, possibly fueled by controversies in the wider Episcopal Church. Some parishioners complained at the amount of the service that was sung. A Low-Church clergyman, Charles W. Ward, was called as Rector in March

1875. Less than two years later, however, he resigned, citing his inability to reconcile the factions in the congregation. A number of his Low-Church supporters immediately transferred to other parishes.

In 1878, Dr. James Colwell was called as Rector and immediately began working to restore the Catholic foundations laid by Dr. Waterman. During his seven-year rectorate, Dr. Colwell presided over the redesign of the chancel in the Perpendicular style by Boston architect Henry Vaughan. Saint Stephen's Day, 1883, saw the consecration of the newly installed rood screen, pulpit, choir stalls, altar rail, credence table, high altar, and reredos.

### **The Fiske Years**

In 1884, the Rev. George McClellan Fiske arrived as Rector. His thirty-five year rectorate (1884–1919) marked the flowering of S. Stephen's as a full-fledged Anglo-Catholic parish. If Dr. Waterman had represented the first generation of Tractarians, Dr. Fiske represented the second generation, known as the Ritualists, who sought to give full liturgical expression to Tractarian teachings. Dr. Fiske instituted the daily reading of Matins and Evensong in 1885 and the daily celebration of Mass in 1886. He introduced such Catholic practices as reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, the wearing of eucharistic vestments, the use of incense, and Stations of the Cross. Parish branches of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament and the Guild of All Souls were established, initiating the involvement of Anglo-Catholic devotional societies in the life of S. Stephen's, which continues to the present. Also, in December 1885, he launched *The S. Stephen*, the first parish newsletter in Rhode Island.

During the Fiske years, S. Stephen's became the parish home of the Sisters of the Holy Nativity, founded in Boston in 1882 by the Rev. Charles Chapman Grafton, Rector of the Church of the Advent. When Grafton was elected Bishop of

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Fond-du-Lac, Wisconsin, in 1888, he placed the Sisters under the care of Dr. Fiske at a new convent at 385 Benefit Street. The motherhouse remained in Providence until 1905, when most of the Sisters relocated to a new convent in Wisconsin. Two Sisters remained in Providence, however, and were soon joined by others. The order maintained a branch house here until 1983, often numbering as many as eight Sisters. During their 95 years in Providence, the Sisters made an enormous contribution to the life of the parish—not only by their example of prayer and devotion, but also by teaching in the Sunday School, working with the Altar Guild, and helping to establish new mission churches in the Diocese of Rhode Island.

The Fiske years also saw the construction of the present church tower (1900) and the Guildhouse (1901). The Rev. Dr. Walter Gardner Webster, a Curate of S. Stephen's who lost his life in the sinking of the liner *La Bourgogne* in July 1898, had left \$10,000 to the parish. His father, Josiah Locke Webster, offered another \$25,000 to build a parish house in his son's memory. So, the Walter Gardner Webster Memorial Guildhouse, which stands to the west of the church building on George Street, was completed and blessed on January 1, 1901.

In the closing years of Dr. Fiske's rectorate, the parish engaged the Austin Company of Hartford, Connecticut, to build the present pipe organ, which incorporated elements of the previous Roosevelt organ of 1893. Prior to 1893, the only organ had been a small instrument of unknown make that had been brought from the Benefit Street church. The new Austin organ was first played on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, 1917.

### Between Two World Wars

In the early to mid-twentieth century, S. Stephen's was served by a succession of capable Anglo-Catholic Rectors, including Frederick Spies Penfold (1919–1926); Frederic Fleming (1927–1930); and Charles Townsend (1930–1945). During this period, the parish's Catholic liturgical and sacramental practices continued to advance. In 1919, Fr. Penfold instituted the weekly celebration of Mass at the principal Sunday service, in place of the three-Sunday-a-month pattern to which Dr. Fiske had brought the parish. The Maundy Thursday Watch before the Altar of Repose was first observed in 1920, and the Good Friday Mass of the Presanctified in 1921. In 1920, also, the number of regular penitents had grown to the point that a second confessional was installed in the church, and the confession period on Saturday extended to three hours. In 1930, Fr. Townsend celebrated the first Christmas Eve Midnight Mass at S. Stephen's.

In 1931, the parish abolished pew rents and went fully to the pledge envelope system—at precisely a time in history when income from pledges was about to become uncertain. On Whitsunday and Trinity Sunday of 1933, members of the parish contributed old pieces of gold and silver to be melted down and given for the relief of the poor afflicted by the Great Depression.

In many respects, the period between the World Wars was the international heyday of Anglo-Catholicism. In 1920, 1923, 1930, and 1933, great Anglo-Catholic Congresses were held in London, filling cathedrals, concert halls, and soccer stadiums to capacity, and drawing numbers that increased steadily from 13,000 in 1920 to 70,000 in 1933.<sup>5</sup> S. Stephen's prominent

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<sup>5</sup> Hylson-Smith, Kenneth, *High-Churchmanship in the Church of England: From the Sixteenth Century to the Late Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 257.

place in the movement is indicated by the presence of Senior Warden H. Anthony Dyer as a speaker at the opening meeting of the 1930 Congress in the Royal Albert Hall.

The parish's importance during this period is also reflected in the list of distinguished bishops, theologians, and religious who visited S. Stephen's to preach, celebrate, or give missions. The list includes James O.S. Huntington, OHC (1894, 1922, 1926); Shirley Carter Hughson, OHC (1922); Archbishop Cosmo Gordon Lang (1918); Paul B. Bull, CR (1928); Bernard Iddings Bell (1933); Sergei Bulgakov (1934); Archbishop William Temple (1935); Gabriel Hebert, SSM (1948); Alan G. Whittemore, OHC (1948); and Dom Augustine Morris (1949).

### **Post-War Developments**

The parish suffered a shock in 1949 when its promising young Rector of four years, Fr. Paul Van K. Thomson, resigned to become a Roman Catholic. The effect on the parish was devastating, as some parishioners fell away and others stopped making their confessions and communions.

In the wake of Fr. Thomson's defection, Bishop Bennett appointed the Curate, Warren R. Ward, to be Priest-in-Charge; and the Vestry subsequently elected Fr. Ward as Rector. Through Fr. Ward's tireless efforts the wounds inflicted by Fr. Thomson's departure began to heal.<sup>6</sup>

In 1955, the church's Austin pipe organ of 1917 was rebuilt with a gift of \$68,000 from Mrs. R.H. Ives Goddard in memory of her late husband, Robert Hale Ives Goddard, a long-

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<sup>6</sup> An interesting measure of ecumenical progress is that the resignation in 1999 of the seventeenth Rector, David L. Stokes, Jr., to become a Roman Catholic caused the parish far less pastoral trauma than the departure of Fr. Thomson fifty years earlier. A number of S. Stephen's parishioners, and two of its clergy, attended Fr. Stokes' ordination to the Roman Catholic priesthood in November of 2002.

standing Vestryman and Senior Warden of the parish, in whose name the organ was subsequently dedicated. (More recently, the inner workings of the organ console were completely replaced and digitized during the summer of 2006 at a cost of \$81,000.)

The year 1964 saw an event of momentous significance for the history of the parish: the publication of Fr. Norman Catir's *Saint Stephen's Church in Providence: The History of a New England Tractarian Parish, 1839–1964*, which is the source of most of the information in this essay. Fr. Catir was the young Curate of S. Stephen's, who went on to a distinguished career as Rector of Saint Andrew's Church, Stamford, Connecticut (1964–1971) and the Church of the Transfiguration (the Little Church Around the Corner) in New York City (1971–1998). In retirement, he has happily returned to Providence, where he attends S. Stephen's.

### **University Ministries**

During Fr. Ward's rectorate (1949–1965), S. Stephen's became home to the Diocese of Rhode Island's chaplaincy to Brown University. From the days of Dr. Waterman's Bishop Seabury Association to the present, S. Stephen's clergy have been active in ministering to students at Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design; during the academic year, the congregation has always comprised a significant contingent of students. From 1952 until 1986, the Episcopal University Chaplains—Hébert Bolles, Samuel Wylie, John Crocker, Sheldon Florey, and David Ames—worked from an office in the Guild House. The chaplains also conducted Sunday morning university services following the parish Mass in S. Stephen's until 1978, when these services were moved to Brown University's Manning Chapel.

In 2009, S. Stephen's and the Diocese of Rhode Island reached an historic agreement in which the parish and the diocese would jointly fund a full-time clergy staff position

combining the roles of Curate and Episcopal Minister at Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design. Under the leadership of the Rev. Michael G. Tuck (2009–2012), the Rev. Blake A. Sawicky (2013–2015), and the Rev. Martin C. Yost (2015–2017), a reconstituted Episcopal Student Group began holding services of Evening Prayer in the Lady Chapel on Sundays followed by a meal and activities in the Guild House. In this way, S. Stephen's has reaffirmed its historic commitment to ministry among the Brown and RISD communities.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Continuing Story**

The definitive history of the parish in the period since the publication of Fr. Catir's book in 1964 is yet to be written. It is difficult to summarize the many events that have taken place within living memory, as well as the many colorful and sometimes eccentric personalities who have contributed so much to the richness of our parish life. The problem is perhaps not too little information but too much, and insufficient distance for historical perspective.

The latter part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first have been a time when the parish has struggled to find the right balance in remaining faithful to its Anglo-Catholic tradition while adapting appropriately to the rapid changes taking place in the wider Church and society. Different Rectors, Wardens, and Vestries have sought to strike this balance in different ways. As might be expected, the process has not been without moments of controversy and conflict.

In all its wonderful diversity, our congregation manifests a deep unity rooted in the worship of God. After a period of

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<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing, the future shape of this arrangement is under review and subject to further discussions with the Diocese owing to budgetary constraints on both sides. Whatever the outcome, S. Stephen's is committed to maintaining an active role in student ministry.

modest liturgical experimentation in the 1970s and 1980s, which included free standing altars and west-facing celebration of the Eucharist, the parish returned to its settled pattern of east-facing celebration and exclusive use of traditional Prayer-Book language based on Rite I with minor propers and interpolations from the Anglican Missal.

Certain constants mark our life together: a commitment to bearing witness to the truth of the Catholic faith through traditional Anglican liturgy and sound preaching and teaching; the finest church music; and an abiding sense of mission to the university and the wider community. The best part of our parish history is yet to be written; and it will be written in the lives and hearts of those faithful parishioners who continue our Anglo-Catholic tradition of worship, prayer, learning, and service in the years to come.

*Written July 2006*

*Revised January 2015*

*Revised January 2017*

**RECTORS OF S. STEPHEN'S CHURCH**

1. Francis Vinton, 1839–1840
2. George Leeds, 1840–1841
3. Henry Waterman, 1841–1845
4. James H. Eames, 1845–1850
5. Henry Waterman, 1850–1874
6. Charles W. Ward, 1875–1877
7. James W. Colwell, 1878–1884
8. George McClellan Fiske, 1884–1919
9. Frederick Spies Penfold, 1919–1926
10. Frederic Fleming, 1927–1930
11. Charles Townsend, Jr., 1930–1945
12. Paul Van K. Thomson, 1946–1949
13. Warren R. Ward, 1949–1965
14. Paul C. Kintzing, 1965–1976
15. Livingston T. Merchant, 1977–1980
16. Ronald P. Conner, 1981–1989
17. David L. Stokes, Jr., 1991–1999
18. John D. Alexander, 2000–2019

## Writing the Parish History 1962–1964

Norman J. Catir, Jr.

*Address given at S. Stephen's on March 13, 2011*

**T**HANK YOU Fr. Alexander for your generous introduction and, in fact, for your request that I gather up the fragments of my tattered memory to tell the story of how I came to write *S. Stephen's Church in Providence, the History of a New England Tractarian Parish*.

I have enjoyed the exercise immensely because it has required me to look back on a significant and pleasurable time in my own personal life and history. The germ for the idea came from an off-handed remark from Fr. Warren Ward, our thirteenth rector, at the time of my interview with him concerning a call to the curacy of Saint Stephen's Church. The interview was wide ranging from both sides of his study desk. Among the observations that Fr. Ward made was this one: "You know, Father, that this historic Anglo-Catholic parish has never been treated to a full story of its life from 1839 onward. In three years we shall be celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of this parish. Most of the other old, large Anglo-Catholic parishes in New England have parish histories: Advent, Boston; All Saints, Ashmont; Christ Church, New Haven—all have extensive parish histories. We have none. I notice that you are soon to write a thesis for a Master's Degree in History. Would you be interested in writing a parish history for this parish when you finish your thesis?"

"I shall have to think about that," I replied.

I had been thinking about writing about the non-Oxford, pre-Tractarian roots of the nineteenth century Catholic Revival in England. Not much had been done on that subject. Consequently, the subject might offer me some more or less

original work, if one could find a relatively untouched subject in such a modern history.

I drove home to Wallingford that night where I was serving my first curacy at S. Paul's Church. The next night I drove the thirty miles from Wallingford to my undergraduate alma mater, Trinity College, Hartford, where I was completing my course work for the Master's Degree in history, studying at night.

After the class that evening, I discussed changing my thesis topic with my advisor, Dr. Glen Weaver. He knew that I had been considering some fresh work on the non-Oxford precursors of the Oxford Movement. I asked him if he thought that a change of location, though not of subject, might be a possibility. He thought that taking a subject nearer at hand to examine the ripple effects and the tides of the Oxford Movement might be interesting. For me, the idea of a parish history, taken mainly from primary sources, was a constructive thought; but how many sources did my proposed topic offer?

A few days later, I telephoned Fr. Ward to accept his call to be his curate, and asked him if a study of Saint Stephen's history might offer many primary resources. He replied, "Well, we have a large, pink safe in our Guild House Ladies' Room which is crammed full of vestry minutes, old photos, and old copies of our parish newspaper, *The S. Stephen*. Do you suppose that these would be of any help?"

I so supposed and then asked him, "How would you like me to write a parish history for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Saint Stephen's?"

"That would be fine, Father. When will you begin?" he replied, without hesitation.

Well, I began the curacy at S. Stephen's on March 15, 1961, fifty years ago, the Ides of March, with ruffles and flourishes of a welcome from the rector and from his congregation. I

began doing research for the writing of the *History of S. Stephen's Church in Providence* sometime in April, a few weeks after my arrival. I still had one graduate course to complete in the spring of 1961. I would have the summer and autumn to think about the actual writing of our story.

As it turned out I did not have much time in the summer of 1961 because Fr. Ward became seriously ill from a chronic heart condition shortly after he began his holiday. Much of this time he spent in the Rhode Island Hospital and the rest in rehabilitation and at home.

I did find a little time while I was holding the fort during our daytime office hours, which were daily, to sneak a few peeks at the historic documents in the pink ladies' room safe. (This hallowed room was just across the corridor from my study, the same one which Fr. Tuck uses today.) When there was a gap in visitors to my study, I would sneak across the corridor, check to see that no women were there, armed with the combination to the pink ladies' room safe – today no longer pink. Out would tumble a huge jumble of books, papers, disorganized notes and pictures, etc. For my summer of 1961 it was survey work which I did, simply trying to determine what we had.

Fr. Ward returned to the parish office in late August, just in time to give me a week off on Cape Cod after Labor Day. I was twenty-eight years old, unmarried, and so spent the week with my parents who came down from Maine to join me.

When I returned to the parish office in mid-September, things were in a flurry. The College Work Committee of the Diocese, that is Fr. Ward, Dr. Horner of Grace Church, and Fr. Wilding of Saint Martin's, were having an emergency meeting to decide who would do the college work in the absence of the College Chaplain, Fr. Johnny Crocker, who had taken off on the second Freedom Ride to Selma, Alabama. As

you might suppose I had already been elected before my return.

As it turned out, Fr. Crocker had not been arrested on his Freedom Ride, as some had anticipated, but returned after a week or two of absence. In the meantime, I was getting to know the new students, many of whom were Episcopalians.

One day during the last week in September, a glorious looking young woman walked into the office and asked to see Sister Veronica, the head sister who was in charge of the Altar Society. This young woman, Zulette Masson, wanted to be trained to do altar work for the 11:15 am Sunday College Mass. That day she did not find Sister Veronica but she did find me. Or perhaps, closer to the facts, I found her. She would be of great help to me in future in many areas of my life; but immediately she became of great help to me in reading and criticizing my early manuscript of the history.

I started in earnest in the autumn of 1961 and continued occasionally to return to Hartford to get advice from Professor Weaver, my advisor. I collected old shoe boxes from a number of people in the parish, bought a couple of packs of index cards, and started my work, done mostly in the evenings. I was unmarried and, although I was invited around the parish every now and then for drinks and dinner, I had many evenings to myself. And so the notes piled up and were duly arranged in some order in the shoe boxes which I had collected. It became clear to me that my thesis for my Master's at Trinity should not encompass the entire history of this parish.

Too much had happened in the parish life between 1839 and 1962 to limit the work to 100 pages or less, which was the length suggested by the college. In fact I probably would have had to extend my thesis research and writing time over two years, considering that work on the history was very much part-time, rather like "moonlighting." In consequence I made

the decision to write my thesis up to the year 1903, near the height of Dr. Fiske's rectorate, and spend the season of 1962-63 writing from 1904 to the then present 1963, not for degree credit. And so I presented chapters one through four, eighty-eight pages in the book, for my Master's Degree in History at Trinity College. I can't remember what I got for a grade on the thesis, but it was a good one. And so in 1962 I passed from the hallowed halls of Trinity College, Hartford, to the more sacred precincts of Saint Stephen's Church in Providence, to finish chapters five through eight for the entire book.

A host of people helped me in my research and writing. I have already mentioned Zulie; and there were many other students who weighed in as I got to know them, especially two young students, now Mrs. Tom Wilkins Bard and Mike French, she an English writing major, and he a photographer; and Peter Wehmann, whom many of you know in these latter days. Shirley Mulligan, who ran our Sunday School, had many helpful suggestions regarding both style and content. Both Mr. and Mrs. John Nicholas Brown and Robert Jacobson, our Senior Warden, read the entire manuscript when it had been finished. Fr. Emerson Hall, our long-time honorary assistant, supplied his long, vivid memory and much parish memorabilia which he had collected for my historical grist mill. Hollis Grant, our organist and long-term parishioner, was full of suggestions. Washington Irving, then president of the Providence Preservation Society and a parishioner, made the Society's records available to me. Clifford Monahan, director of the Rhode Island Historical Society, made everything I had wanted from the Society available. Both Mary Quinn, archivist of the State of Rhode Island, and David Jonah, the librarian of the John Hay Library, were equally generous in putting the materials of their institutions at my disposal.

I interviewed Dr. Paul Thompson, our twelfth rector, in his study at Providence College. Both Lena Thatcher, and Wallace and Louise Chandler, who lived at the Minden apartments on Waterman Street, provided me with rich and amusing anecdotes and memories of Saint Stephen's over a period which covered ninety years. Mr. Chandler was ninety-six and in sound mind when I interviewed him. Elise Steadman and Mary Wells, Dr. Fiske's granddaughters, and Blanche Fiske, his daughter-in-law, were a great help.

Brown professor Henry B. Huntington, an elderly gentleman who lived on John Street and had written *The History of Grace Church, Providence*, was of immeasurable help. His son had been one of our curates and his daughter Aria was our faithful communicant until 1997 when she died. In particular Professor Huntington remembered a lot about the neighborhood of John and Thayer Streets where the first Saint Stephen's chapel was established. He also knew much about our founding because of his work on the Grace Church history.

At this point I should say something about the importance of place in the writing of Saint Stephen's history. If I had to write our history from a place of some remove, it would have been an entirely different history. Fortunately, I lived and worked amidst the physical institution about which I was writing. I visited the Barker Playhouse, the old Saint Stephen's building. I visited the Thayer Street Chapel, two doors south of the house which was one day to be mine. I had heard about the convexed ceiling of the Thayer Street Chapel which Professor Huntington told me was there. I glimpsed through the window of 14 John Street, Nicholas Stillwell's old home, where the people from Saint John's first met on key dates in 1837. I haunted the nave, choir, sanctuary and chapels of our present church, said Mass and Offices and worshipped there. I lived on the top of the Guild House. I became close, or

so it seemed to me, to Dr. Waterman, Dr. Fiske, Fr. Penfold, and the others. Whenever there was a nighttime creak in the roof of the church, I said to myself, or Dr. Waterman, or Dr. Fiske, "This is a hard thing to figure out, but I shall try to do better."

When I had finished writing in late 1963, I brought forth a manuscript which turned out to be 222 pages with scholarly apparatus and all. I gave the completed proof text to the rector and vestry for their approval in order to get the book funded. They were astonished at its length. Bob Jacobson, the Senior Warden and the Chancellor of the Diocese, was delegated to come downstairs and speak with me. "I am amazed at the length of your history," he said. "The vestry expected something shorter, forty or fifty pages. Can't you shorten it?"

"No, I cannot and give a comprehensive idea of where we have been in 125 years."

"Well, how much do you expect this book to cost?" he continued.

"I have checked with Grant Dugdale of the Brown University Press, who helped prepare my book for printing, and he thinks that the entire job can be done, 5,000 copies, for \$5,000." I replied.

"That is a lot of money," replied Bob. I admitted this, but said I thought that the parish budget could stand it, if we charged \$5 a copy. If we charged \$5 a copy and printed 5,000 copies, on the long run we could realize \$25,000. This to tantalize the vestry.

I do not remember how many copies we sold in the first year, perhaps around 500. So there was half the cost in the first year. We could then give the book to a sizeable number of libraries, colleges, seminaries, and to a selection of parish libraries. We would still have 4,000 books to sell over succeeding years. I think that I projected that the last of the 4,000 copies might be sold by the end of the twentieth century.

*150 Years on George Street*

This was a wild guess. They were sold during Fr. Kintzing's and Fr. Merchant's rectorates, up to 1981. At some point before or after Fr. Connor's rectorate, the books must have run out because, by 1991, Fr. Stokes had run out of books and had the original edition photocopied. The photocopies then ran out, I believe, before Zulie and I returned in 1999.

Now, what to say about the entire experience? Saint Stephen's origins showed one small but significant difference from most Anglo-Catholic parishes in the Northeast. We were founded not especially as an Oxford Movement parish. We were founded more out of physical necessity at a time when walking downtown to Grace Church or further north to Saint John's was sometimes difficult, particularly in winter. The services first held on John Street in Nicholas Stillwell's parlor and the Sunday School classes held in the little school house chapel, two doors south of my present home; both were prompted by growth and necessity. The Oxford Movement, generally reckoned to have started in July 1833 with John Keble's sermon preached before the Judges of Assize, did not have an immediate effect in parish life either in England or in the United States. The ripples from the first ten years of the Oxford Movement and the *Tracts for the Times* only began to come to shore in the US about ten years later, from 1843 to 1845. Saint Stephen's began to develop a trace of Tractarian character in 1841. The other early Tractarian parishes were founded later: Advent in Boston (1844), Transfiguration in New York (1848), and Christ Church, New Haven (1854). They were founded out of distinct Tractarian principles.

All of the parishes were originally placed in residential neighborhoods to serve families and individuals. They were never set up as shrine churches. Of necessity both worship and teaching developed slowly and in a pastoral manner. After seventy-five or a hundred years, the teaching and the worship of the high style Anglo-Catholic Movement

blossomed as an organic growth from the doctrine and teaching of the Oxford Movement. Saint Stephen's did not have Mass all Sundays in the month until 1921. None of the original Tractarian leaders were greatly concerned with music and ornament, though architectural style—Gothic Revival—and medieval music did come along in the 1860s or 1870s with the work of the Cambridge Camden Society of Fr. John Mason Neale.

Most of the nineteenth century Anglo-Catholic parishes remained largely residential parishes until the advent of the automobile in the early twentieth century, and the construction of suburbs. Saint Stephen's remained a residential parish long after most had become largely shrine churches. I attribute this continuing parish character to the removal of the church building in 1862 from the South Benefit to the George Street location. Our first permanent building had at least two defects which would have hindered parish development in the South Benefit-Transit Street area: one, that the southerly end of town had nowhere to grow; and two, that this parish had a small building which could not accommodate later Anglo-Catholic ceremonial development. Gothic revival was the architecture of choice of the Tractarian Movement, more even in the United States than in England. It gave a signal of what the parish was about.

The new church building on George Street adjoined the Brown Campus and the growing area of the East Side, east to the Seekonk River. Gradually the interior of the new Saint Stephen's was altered and developed between 1864 and 1890 to give a clearer signal of the nature and teaching of the parish church which it represented.

Still, in 1964, at the publication of this book, half of Saint Stephen's members lived on the East Side. About a quarter lived someplace else in Providence. The last quarter commuted in from the surrounding towns. This will give you

*150 Years on George Street*

an idea of how residential we remained into the 1960s. The fact that our church was built here 150 years ago is a significant factor.

I enjoyed one particular personal benefit from the writing of this book. I met and came to marry my wife, now of forty-six years. This was payment enough and more for a story to which I devoted three years. I never made a red cent out of the writing; but who cares for money when one can earn the love and confidence of a wife like Zulie for the rest of his life?

**Christ Church, Providence, 1839–1851:  
The African-American Parish  
that Merged with Saint Stephen's**

John D. Alexander

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**M**EETING IN the newly-constructed Saint Stephen's Church on Benefit Street, the diocesan convention of June 1843 took two actions of historical importance. Following the death in February of Bishop Alexander Viets Griswold of the Eastern Diocese—which comprised all of New England except Connecticut—the delegates elected John P.K. Henshaw bishop of a newly independent Diocese of Rhode Island. They also formally admitted into the diocese the African-American parish of Christ Church, Providence, thus seating black delegates with voice and vote in a diocesan convention for the first time in the history of the Episcopal Church. The delegates were James W. Johnson, Benjamin Barney, John M. Ray, and George Head. Johnson and Ray were the parish wardens, and Head was the clerk.<sup>1</sup> Within ten years, however, Christ Church had disbanded and its members had been transferred to Saint Stephen's. While Christ Church never numbered much more than forty families, its story affords a glimpse not only into the social history of the nineteenth century Episcopal Church, but also into the background of the early formation of Saint Stephen's congregation. It is an aspect of our parish history that deserves more attention than it has hitherto received.

Christ Church was the fourth black parish in the Episcopal Church, after Saint Thomas's African Church, Philadelphia

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<sup>1</sup> George Freeman Bragg, *History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church* (Baltimore: Church Advocate Press, 1922), 102.

(1794); Saint Philip's Church, New York (1818); and Saint James's First African Church, Baltimore (1824).<sup>2</sup> It was also the fourth black Christian congregation in Providence, after the African Union Meeting House (1818), the Second Freewill Baptist Church, and Zion Methodist Church.<sup>3</sup> The formation of these congregations reflected the desire of black Christians in northern cities to escape second-class treatment in white churches. In Philadelphia, for example, blacks walked out of Saint George's Methodist Church in 1794 when the congregation tried to segregate them in the upstairs gallery. Led by Absalom Jones, one group formed Saint Thomas's African Church, which subsequently gained admission to the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania; Jones became the first African-American to be ordained to the diaconate and priesthood in the Episcopal Church. Another group, led by Richard Allen, eventually constituted itself as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Such congregations often received the support of wealthy white patrons. Here in Providence, for example, Moses Brown assisted in the creation of the African Union Meeting House. Robert J. Cottrol writes that white support of black congregations had mixed motives: "partly to get black members out of white congregations, partly to minister to the large numbers of blacks in Providence who were not church members because they would not abide segregated pews."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On the participation of blacks in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Episcopal Church, see Bragg, *History of the African-American Group*, passim.; Robert Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, Revised Edition (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1999), 111-114; and David L. Holmes, *A Brief History of the Episcopal Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 78-87.

<sup>3</sup> Robert J. Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees: Providence's Black Community in the Antebellum Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 67.

<sup>4</sup> Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees*, 57.

Christ Church, Providence, was organized in 1839 and initially met in a schoolhouse on Washington Street with S.G. Degrasse as its minister.<sup>5</sup> In March of 1841, however, the Vestry extended a call to Alexander Crummell, then twenty-two years old, to take charge of the parish as Lay Reader.<sup>6</sup> Crummell had grown up in Saint Philip's Church in New York, and was already well known as the aspirant for holy orders whose admission to the General Theological Seminary had been blocked on account of his race by New York Bishop Benjamin T. Onderdonk. He had instead pursued theological studies at Yale University, where he had come to the attention of Bishop Griswold of the Eastern Diocese. Griswold encouraged Crummell to pursue ordination, and the call from Christ Church, Providence, soon followed. Crummell's achievements at Christ Church included planning and supervising the construction of a new church building on Union Street: "a small, neat, wooden building thirty-eight by fifty-two feet."<sup>7</sup> The parish was legally incorporated in March, 1842.

Arriving in Providence at a time of mounting political crisis, Crummell was to play a pivotal role in the bizarre episode of Rhode Island history known as the Dorr Rebellion.<sup>8</sup> As a legacy of its colonial charter, Rhode Island

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<sup>5</sup> William R. Staples, *Annals of the Town of Providence*, Collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society, Volume 5 (Providence, RI: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1843), 641.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Alexander Crummell: A Study in Civilization and Discontent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 34.

<sup>7</sup> Staples, *Annals of the Town of Providence*, 641.

<sup>8</sup> My sources on the Dorr Rebellion, including the role of Alexander Crummell and Providence's black community, are: Eric J. Chaput and Russell Desimone, "Strange Bedfellows: The Politics of Race in Antebellum Rhode Island," *Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (January 2010), accessed December 19, 2011 at <http://www.common-place.org/vol-10/no-02/chaput-desimone/>;

limited voting rights to men who owned at least \$134 of real estate; and in 1822 had further restricted the suffrage to whites. By the 1830s, with industrialization and the growth of a working-class population—which included many Irish immigrants—the property qualification had effectively disenfranchised most of the state’s adult male population. In response, Thomas Wilson Dorr of Providence, a Jacksonian Democrat, had joined with others to form the Suffrage Association, which convened a “People’s Convention” to write a new state Constitution in October 1841. (Dorr was, incidentally, a brother-in-law of Samuel T. Ames, one of the founding members of Saint Stephen’s.<sup>9</sup>)

Meanwhile, noticing a small but growing pattern of property ownership by blacks, city officials in Providence decided to levy taxes on black-owned property. Questioning how they could be taxed without representation, Providence’s blacks initially supported the Suffragist Movement in the hope that it would secure voting rights for both blacks and whites. However, initial drafts of the proposed Constitution extended the suffrage only to adult white males. On October 8, a delegation to the People’s Convention presented a petition, drafted by Crummell and signed by the leaders of Providence’s black community, requesting removal of the restriction of the vote to whites. Although Dorr himself supported the petition, the majority of delegates were opposed. Some historians have suggested that the Suffragists knew that most of their support came from working-class whites who were largely hostile to black

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Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees*, 68–77; and Mark S. Schantz, *Piety in Providence: Class Dimensions of Religious Experience in Antebellum Rhode Island* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 197–226.

<sup>9</sup> Norman J. Catir, Jr., *Saint Stephen’s Church in Providence: The History of a New England Tractarian Parish 1839–1964* (Providence, Rhode Island: Saint Stephen’s Church, 1964), 7.

aspirations for political equality, and that they also wanted to avoid any association in the public mind with the unpopular Abolitionist movement.<sup>10</sup> During the debate over the petition, however, some Suffragist delegates expressed their opposition to the petition in overtly racist terms. So, the convention voted forty-six to eighteen to keep the restriction, albeit with the promise—a concession to Dorr himself—that once the new Constitution was in place, the question of black voting rights would be put to a general referendum.

In early 1842, an election was conducted according to the rules of the People's Constitution and Thomas Dorr was overwhelmingly elected Governor. While this election was certainly illegal, it attracted the participation of the vast majority of potential voters in the state. At the same time, in a parallel election, the Whig "Law and Order" candidate Samuel Ward King was elected Governor under the voting requirements of the existing Constitution. Rhode Island thus found itself with two constitutions and two governors—one enormously popular but illegally elected, and the other legitimate but representing a small minority of the citizens. After the Federal Government in Washington refused to intervene, Dorr attempted to take Providence by force. In the pre-dawn hours of May 18, 1842, he marched on the city arsenal with two hundred men and two pieces of antiquated field artillery. (Dorr's father and brother were among the Law and Order forces defending the arsenal.) The attack disintegrated when the cannons failed to fire. Dorr and his supporters fled, taking refuge in the mill towns of Woonsocket, Cumberland, Smithfield, and Chepachet, where their support was greatest.

At about nine o'clock in the evening of May 24, barely a week after the attack on the arsenal, a fire was set at the

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees*, 73-75; Schantz, *Piety in Providence*, 218-219.

northwest corner of Christ Church. The fire was contained, and the church's insurance covered repairs of the \$500 worth of damage. While we do not know the identity or motives of the arsonists, the attack fit a pattern of continuing Suffragist hostility to blacks, and historians speculate that it was a factor in the decision of Providence's African-American community to support the Law and Order Party.<sup>11</sup> In the weeks following, Governor King's administration organized Providence's blacks into militias, armed them, and set them to patrolling the streets of the city. Two companies also joined the forces that marched to Chepachet to put down the remaining Dorrite rebels. Dorr himself fled the state. After hiding out in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, he finally surrendered in 1843 and was tried and sentenced in 1844 to life imprisonment in solitary confinement at hard labor. His sentence was commuted after one year, however, and he was released in 1845. (Henry Waterman, Rector of Saint Stephen's, preached at Dorr's funeral in 1854.)<sup>12</sup>

The Law and Order Party rewarded Rhode Island's blacks for their loyalty by enfranchising them. The Dorr Rebellion had persuaded the elites of the state that the demand for universal suffrage could not be put off. In September 1842, a reformed Constitution extended the suffrage to all native-born adult males, black and white, while continuing to require a freehold of the foreign-born — making it difficult for Irish immigrants in particular to vote. Rhode Island thus became the only state that, having disenfranchised blacks, re-enfranchised them before the Civil War. For years afterward, working-class whites in Rhode Island blamed blacks for the

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<sup>11</sup> So Schantz, *Piety in Providence*, 219.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Waterman, *Remarks made at the Funeral of Thomas Wilson Dorr, December 30, 1854* (No Publisher, No Date; archives of the John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI).

defeat of the Dorr Rebellion, and derided them as servants and dependents of the white aristocracy.

Alexander Crummell seems to have played a key role in organizing and leading the black community during this political crisis. He later wrote: "I secured . . . their political rights in Rhode Island. During the political agitation in that state the leading colored men communicated their interests to my hand and judgment; and laid upon me the burden of drafting the documents and addresses and of taking the steps which secured in the end their political rights."<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, Crummell's relations with the vestry of Christ Church were deteriorating.<sup>14</sup> On May 29, 1842, at the height of the political crisis, Crummell was ordained to the diaconate in Boston. About a fortnight before his ordination, Crummell called on Bishop Griswold, who told him that the congregation was disappointed with his ministry. The bishop's informant, Dr. Crocker at Saint John's Church (later Cathedral), had relayed the congregation's concerns that Crummell was lacking in piety and zeal, and had become so proud that he would no longer visit them. Crummell expressed his hurt and indignation in a letter to the vestry, reminding them of his labors to secure funds for the church's construction, a task which he had never promised to undertake. By the Fall of 1842, the Vestry was openly expressing dissatisfaction with Crummell. In September, his precarious financial situation forced him to take his wife to her mother's home in New York. Finally, on Sunday, October 27, he announced his resignation with immediate effect; the Vestry refused to open the church that evening for a meeting in which he had planned to make

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<sup>13</sup> Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 35.

<sup>14</sup> Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 35–38.

a final address. Interestingly, Bishop Griswold consecrated the building one week later, on November 3.<sup>15</sup>

His ministry in Providence having failed, Crummell went to Philadelphia—a larger city with a larger black population—in the hopes of founding a second African-American parish there in addition to Saint Thomas's African Church. The Bishop of Pennsylvania was Henry Onderdonk, brother of the Bishop of New York who had blocked Crummell's admission to General Theological Seminary. Onderdonk expressed willingness to receive Crummell into his diocese on the condition that he promise not to seek admission to the Diocesan Convention either for himself or for any congregation that he might establish. Crummell refused to comply: "That, sir, I shall never do." After several weeks, Onderdonk did accept Crummell's letters dimissory from Rhode Island, but only after having secured a change to the diocesan canons formally barring black clergy and congregations from the Diocesan Convention.<sup>16</sup>

Against this background, the Rhode Island Diocesan Convention's 1843 admission of delegates from Christ Church was all the more remarkable. At least one historian has supposed that this action reflected the socially progressive Evangelical tendencies of the Episcopal Church in the state.<sup>17</sup> Another explanation is, however, more plausible: namely, that it was a product of the recent alliance between Providence's black community and the state's conservative elites.<sup>18</sup> Mark S. Schantz shows that Episcopalians largely

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<sup>15</sup> Christ Church (Episcopal), Records, 1841–1851, Mss 9000-C, The Research Library, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, RI.

<sup>16</sup> Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 38–39.

<sup>17</sup> Diana Butler-Bass, *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 151.

<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to the Rev. Larry Bradner for suggesting the alternative explanation.

supported the Law and Order forces during the Dorr War.<sup>19</sup> When Governor King called for a day of Thanksgiving on Sunday, July 21, 1842, Episcopal clergy throughout the state preached sermons denouncing the wickedness of rebellion. One such sermon was preached at Trinity Church in Newport and subsequently published by Francis Vinton, who had been the first Rector of Saint Stephen's just two years before.<sup>20</sup> Christ Church's admission to the Diocesan Convention would thus have fit into a package of rewards for African-American support for the Law and Order party during the recent political crisis.

Following Crummell's departure for Philadelphia, the Vestry of Christ Church voted December 4, 1842, to call Benjamin Franklin, a white, as rector.<sup>21</sup> (Franklin had been one of the founding members of Saint Stephen's in 1839.<sup>22</sup>) Franklin was ordained Deacon in Boston on December 21, and began work at Christ Church on Christmas Day. His tenure was short-lived, however, as he announced his resignation at a Vestry meeting on April 18 of the following year, to take effect a week later on April 23. The parish's financial situation appears to have been the decisive factor. Having served just four months, Franklin presented a bill for \$100, one-third of his annual salary of \$300, and then announced that he was contributing \$25 of his salary to the church, thus reducing his bill to \$75, for which the vestry voted to thank him. Franklin received his salary on April 26. In the meantime, the Vestry voted on April 24 not to call another clergyman for the time being, as the church was unable to pay one. But then the Vestry minutes of May 8

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<sup>19</sup> Schantz, *Piety in Providence*, 213.

<sup>20</sup> Francis Vinton, *Loyalty and Piety; or, the Christian's Civil Obligations Defined* (Providence, 1842).

<sup>21</sup> Christ Church (Episcopal), Records.

<sup>22</sup> Catir, *Saint Stephen's Church in Providence*, 4.

record that James C. Richmond had accepted the call to become Rector.<sup>23</sup> It appears from the Journal of Convention that Richmond was a diocesan missionary serving several parishes with no compensation, so that his services came without cost to Christ Church.<sup>24</sup>

James C. Richmond was thus the white rector of Christ Church in June 1843, when the parish was formally admitted into the Rhode Island Diocesan Convention. In his *History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church* (1922), George Freeman Bragg quotes the following touching passage from Richmond's report to the Convention:

This is the only colored church in New England, although there are several meeting houses of different sects in the city of Providence. The services, the church and the worshippers, present an appearance of order, neatness and regularity which are seldom equaled, and can hardly be surpassed. The organist is a colored girl under twenty years of age, and the music is excellent. It is hoped that all persons truly interested in this portion of the people will attend the services when able, see for themselves, and assist this needy branch of our vine (which has just been received into our Convention) with their prayers and their substance.<sup>25</sup>

Despite this moving plea for support, the subsequent history of Christ Church through the 1840s comprises the sad record of a doomed congregation's struggle to survive. Although

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<sup>23</sup> Christ Church (Episcopal), Records.

<sup>24</sup> Diocese of Rhode Island (Episcopal), *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fifty-Fourth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Rhode-Island* (Providence: H. H. Brown, 1844), 20.

<sup>25</sup> Bragg, *The Afro-American Group*, 102-103.

funds had been raised by Crummell and others to help pay for the new church building, at the beginning of 1843 the parish was encumbered with a debt of approximately \$2,000. In 1844, Bishop Henshaw reported to the Diocesan Convention that he had met with the Vestry to "suggest a plan by which they might relieve themselves from their embarrassment," involving an annual subscription payable over ten years.<sup>26</sup> The following year, the bishop reported that Christ Church was "still destitute of a rector," with services being taken by Lay Readers and the occasional visiting clergyman.<sup>27</sup>

By 1846 the parish's situation had improved to the point where it was able to call a rector. Eli Worthington Stokes was a black clergyman from Maryland who had become friends with the future Bishop Henshaw of Rhode Island when Henshaw was Rector of Saint Peter's Church, Baltimore. Stokes was serving a black parish in New Haven, Connecticut, when Bishop Henshaw asked him to come to Providence to take charge of Christ Church.<sup>28</sup> Stokes began his work there on May 29, 1846. Bishop Henshaw reported the following to the 1846 Diocesan Convention:

The Rev. Eli Worthington Stokes has been elected Rector of Christ Church, Providence. He has entered upon his labors for the spiritual benefit of our coloured brethren, with encouraging prospects of success. This congregation has again adopted a plan for relieving their place of worship from a debt (by which it has been embarrassed ever since its

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<sup>26</sup> Diocese of Rhode Island (Episcopal), *Journal of the Fifty-Fourth Annual Convention*, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Diocese of Rhode Island (Episcopal), *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fifty-Fifth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Rhode-Island* (Providence: Printed for the Convention, 1845), 17.

<sup>28</sup> Bragg, *The Afro-American Group*, 103.

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erection) by their own systematic contributions. If they persevere in it with spirit and energy, they will deserve, and I doubt not, receive, the liberal aid of more favored parishes, and thus, by God's blessing, secure for their permanent use, a neat and commodious edifice which they may justly call their own.<sup>29</sup>

The bishop's words reflect the assumption that the indebtedness was deterring the wealthier parishes of Rhode Island from assisting Christ Church financially, so that if the debt could be liquidated such support would be more forthcoming. This assumption proved unfounded.

On August 5, 1847, Stokes left on a trip to England to raise funds, and returned in January 1849. During his absence, the services of the church were again taken by Lay Readers and occasional visiting clergy. At the Diocesan Convention of 1849, Bishop Henshaw reported the success of Stokes's mission in glowing terms. Stokes had been received cordially by the "Archbishops, Bishops, and Clergy" of the Church of England. He had raised the funds to pay off the mortgage on the building so that Christ Church was now debt-free. Bishop Henshaw had written the Archbishop of Canterbury to thank him for the generous support that Stokes had received in England.<sup>30</sup> Reading these words, it is hard to avoid a feeling of bewilderment and disappointment that Stokes had to travel all the way to England to raise these funds when wealthy residents of Providence and Newport were paying exorbitant pew rents in parishes such as Grace, Trinity, Saint

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<sup>29</sup> Diocese of Rhode Island (Episcopal), *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fifty-Sixth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Rhode-Island* (Providence: Printed for the Convention, 1846), 19.

<sup>30</sup> Diocese of Rhode Island (Episcopal), *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fifty-Ninth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Rhode-Island* (Newport: Printed for the Convention 1849), 16-17.

John's, and indeed Saint Stephen's.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps it was Bishop Henshaw's intention to point subtly to the irony of the situation.

For Christ Church, the assistance was too little, too late. Stokes had resolved to move to Liberia and work there among the freed slaves who were establishing their own colony in West Africa. On December 9, 1849, the Second Sunday of Advent, a service was held at Saint Stephen's for Stokes and several other missionaries bound for Liberia.<sup>32</sup> No further mention is made of Christ Church in the Journals of the Diocesan Convention. The final entries in the Vestry log indicate that the parish voted to direct its trustees to convey the church building to the "Rhode Island Episcopal Convention for the Missionary and other purposes" on December 2, 1851.<sup>33</sup> Thereafter, the historical record concerning Christ Church, Providence, falls silent.

According to George Freeman Bragg, the former members of Christ Church were transferred to Saint Stephen's.<sup>34</sup> Fr. Norman Catir writes that although the first notation of a "colored" communicant in the parish registers of Saint Stephen's is found in 1856, it is more likely that the transfer took place in the early 1850s shortly after Eli Stokes went to Africa and the parish was dissolved.<sup>35</sup> Writing in 1922, Bragg recalls preaching in Saint Stephen's during the rectorate of Fr. Fiske (1884-1919), when "there were some eighty or one hundred colored communicants attached to that parish."<sup>36</sup> Writing forty-four years later, Fr. Catir described the

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<sup>31</sup> See Schantz, *Piety in Providence*, 241.

<sup>32</sup> Diocese of Rhode Island (Episcopal), *Journal of the Proceedings of the Sixtieth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Rhode-Island* (Newport: Printed for the Convention 1850), 10.

<sup>33</sup> Christ Church (Episcopal), Records.

<sup>34</sup> Bragg, *The Afro-American Group*, 105.

<sup>35</sup> Catir, *Saint Stephen's Church in Providence*, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Bragg, *The Afro-American Group*, 105.

transfer's significance: "from the time of this transfer, one of the earliest American parochial integrations, to the present, Saint Stephen's has counted a sizable number of Negro communicants among its members."<sup>37</sup>

Assuming that the former members of Christ Church had some say in where they were transferred, the obvious question arises: Why Saint Stephen's? Here we can only speculate. During the short rectorate of George Leeds (1840–1841) Saint Stephen's had taken its first steps in an Anglo-Catholic direction, and in 1850 Henry Waterman, a full-blown Tractarian, had returned to begin his second term as rector. It is just possible that during its short existence, Christ Church had also tended in an Anglo-Catholic direction. Alexander Crummell's biographer Wilson Jeremiah Moses describes him a "moderately high churchman" who was once accused of Romeward tendencies on account of his belief that humanity had a natural need for outward "forms, rules, and observances." Toward the end of his life, Crummell expressed admiration for the revival of Ritual in the Church of England, as well as for the work of the Anglo-Catholic sisterhoods.<sup>38</sup> In Liberia, Eli Stokes was known as a High Churchman, and blamed his troubles with the Evangelical Bishop Payne on differences in churchmanship. Since Providence already had three African-American congregations representing various strands of Evangelical spirituality, it is plausible that blacks who joined the Episcopal Church might be attracted to more formal expressions of Anglican worship. As a Tractarian parish, moreover, Saint Stephen's likely professed a theology emphasizing the equality in Christ of all baptized people, regardless of race, national origin, or social class. Whatever the reasons, the congregation that eventually moved to the new Saint Stephen's church building on George Street in 1862

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<sup>37</sup> Catir, *Saint Stephen's Church in Providence*, 27–28.

<sup>38</sup> Moses, *Alexander Crummell*, 282.

was already the product of what was in effect an early parish merger between the “old” Saint Stephen’s on Benefit Street and the former Christ Church on Union Street. The racial integration then established remains to this day one of our parish’s greatest gifts.

## God of Dust and Rainbows

*Address given at the Hope Club in Providence on the occasion of  
the 150 Year Anniversary Celebration of the Dedication of S.  
Stephen's Church, February 19, 2012*

Arthur B. Williams, Jr.

Oh, God of dust and rainbows, help us to see  
That without dust the rainbow would not be.

THESE LINES OF POETRY were written by Langston Hughes who lived most of his life in New York City during the first half of the twentieth century, dying there in 1967. When he graduated from Central High School in Cleveland, Ohio, where I now live, he was named by his classmates the “class poet.” After a brief stay at Columbia University in New York City he went on to study and graduate from Lincoln University, a predominately black college in Pennsylvania. He came to be described by many as the poet laureate of African American life and culture.

As I prepared this evening’s remarks Langston’s words, “God of dust and rainbows,” came to my mind. This phrase spoke especially to me as I prepared to share with you some of my experiences in the Diocese of Rhode Island where I was formed and shaped for my life and ministry. In describing my own pilgrimage through this corner of Christ’s vineyard, the words of Saint Paul from his letter to the Romans have rung true: “Endurance produces character, character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us” (Romans 5:4–5).

Before continuing I wish to thank again Father Alexander, Rector of Saint Stephen’s parish, for inviting me to be here for this anniversary event – 150 years since the Dedication of the building where this congregation has worshiped since 1862. This morning’s sermon gave me the opportunity to celebrate with parishioners the glory of that edifice designed by

Richard Upjohn, the pre-eminent church architect of the mid-nineteenth century, renowned for his Gothic Revival style. He co-founded the American Institute of Architects and is now commemorated on December 16 on the calendar of the Episcopal Church. His architectural genius provided for this congregation, founded in 1839, a distinctive space where, year in and year out, the beauty and majesty of Anglo-Catholic worship has been celebrated in the Diocese of Rhode Island.

I am honored to be here. Looking out I see my mother's cousin and her family who live in Cranston and are the remaining members of my family here in Rhode Island. I also see many friends and colleagues whom I've known and cherished along the way. Thank you for being here.

I stand here primarily as a son of Saint Stephen's, the parish which set me on the path of my life's journey. Tonight I hope to share with you some of that journey which I took here in Rhode Island. As I tell my story I would like you also to know some of what was transpiring in the lives of African Americans inside and outside of the Episcopal Church.

I really am home. When I was born we lived in my grandmother's house located a mile and a half north of where we are gathered tonight. If you keep looking north and shift a little to the west, you come to the Cathedral of Saint John where I was baptized at the age of four. In that building, in 1940, the Cathedral congregation and the black congregation did not worship together; so I was baptized on the second floor in what is now the Chapel of Christ the King.

My parents believed that the public schools in East Providence at that time were superior to those in Providence; so they purchased my other grandmother's house and we moved there — two miles to the east from here just on the other side of the Seekonk River. When it came time for me to choose a college, I applied to one school, Brown University, which I know now, in retrospect, even in the early 1950s was perhaps

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a naïve thing to do. But God is a God of rainbows and I was accepted. I majored in music history and theory and spent a lot of my time meeting in class with faculty members of the music department who taught two blocks from here in a building that no longer exists. So, you see, I have indeed come home.

But home is such a different place and experience compared to what it was fifty years ago, especially for an African American student at Brown. This year, Dr. Ruth Simmons will step down as President of Brown after heading that institution for eleven years as the first African American to lead an Ivy League school. I rejoice!—but that accomplishment contrasts sharply with the racial quotas that Brown practiced in its admission policies when I applied in 1952 during my senior year at East Providence High School. A classmate and friend, Augustus White, who became a leading orthopedic surgeon, wrote in a recent article in the *Brown Alumni Magazine*:

We African-American students at Brown didn't feel affronted by the plain discrimination. Quite the opposite, we felt good to be at a place so liberal that it accepted blacks at all. The word on the grape vine was that Brown accepted four or five blacks a year (in a class of 600)—no more and never fewer either. And those they accepted they treated well.<sup>1</sup>

All of us received an excellent education at Brown but as you can imagine there were from time to time periods of loneliness and isolation.

But 2012 is a new day. If you walk across the campus today you come to realize that thirty per cent of the undergraduate

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Schwartzapfel, "The Doctor of Prejudice," *Brown Alumni Magazine*, September/October 2011.

students are now non-white and that you just might run into President Simmons.

I re-found the Episcopal Church during those years at Brown. During my second year, a friend, Robert Duffy, during a conversation about church, said, "Come to church with me." And I did. It was Trinity Sunday and Saint Stephen's was celebrating that feast day in 1954 in a way similar to the way I assume it still does—Solemn procession, Solemn High Mass and Solemn Te Deum. I was taken up in the majesty and mystery of it all and shortly thereafter found myself at daily Mass, serving at the Sunday celebrations and filling the role of sub-deacon at High Mass.

Unlike many of the parishes in the Diocese of Rhode Island, Saint Stephen's had historic roots which included African Americans, going back over a hundred years. I'm delighted that one of the essays written by Father Alexander, and soon to be published to mark this 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is a history of Christ Church in Providence, a little known African American parish organized in 1839 and located downtown on Union Street. This congregation had a short but significant existence in this diocese for a little over ten years. The Rev. Alexander Crummell, whose ministry we now commemorate on September 10 in our calendar of saints, was lay leader and later priest at Christ Church. Because of his race he had been refused entrance into the General Theological Seminary. Following his theological training at Yale, he was ordained in the Diocese of Massachusetts. After his brief time as priest at Christ Church, he went on to study at Cambridge in England, later becoming recognized as one of the leading missionaries and intellectual lights of the nineteenth century.

While Crummell was at Christ Church, the Convention of the Diocese of Rhode Island met at Saint Stephen's Church when the parish was still worshipping at its first building on the corner of Transit and Benefit Street. That Convention took

a significant action by recognizing and seating delegates from Christ Church, making this diocese the first one in the history of the Episcopal Church to seat Blacks on the convention floor. The names of those delegates, James W. Johnson, Benjamin Barney, John M. Ray, and George Head, have been written in the annals of our Church.<sup>2</sup> Because of financial challenges, Christ Church, the fourth black parish to be organized in the Episcopal Church and the first in New England, voted to disband. Records show that in 1851 members of Christ Church were transferred in a block to Saint Stephen's. Father Norman Catir, in his 1964 history of Saint Stephen's, records that the first notation of a person of color among those on the list of communicants was in 1856.<sup>3</sup> The Rev. George Bragg, rector of the African American parish of Saint James Church in Baltimore, wrote that when he preached at Saint Stephen's during the rectorship of Dr. George Fiske there were "eighty to one hundred colored communicants connected with the parish."<sup>4</sup> So from the early 1850s Saint Stephen's was among the first Episcopal parishes in Rhode Island or in the country to have integrated worship and where blacks did not sit in slave galleries.

A hundred years later, when I began my association with this parish, African Americans, though small in number, were present and warmly welcomed. Saint Stephen's included people of color before the advent of the Civil Rights Movement and Dr. King's dream for America. I think it is also worth noting that the three African Americans ordained in the Diocese of Rhode Island were all sponsored for seminary by Saint Stephen's Church.

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<sup>2</sup> George F. Bragg, *History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church* (Baltimore, MD: Church Advocate Press, 1922), 102.

<sup>3</sup> Norman J. Catir, Jr., *Saint Stephen's Church in Providence: The History of a New England Tractarian Parish 1839-1964* (Providence, Rhode Island: Saint Stephen's Church, 1964), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Bragg, *History of the Afro-American Group*, 105.

During and following Confirmation classes, Father Warren Ward, the rector of Saint Stephen's, began to talk to me about a possible vocation to the priesthood. After a time he encouraged me to arrange a conversation with Bishop John Seville Higgins, who had recently been seated as the Bishop of Rhode Island. One would have thought that it would have been a happy day as I articulated to him my sense of call. His response, however, was not encouraging.

He told me if I were to be ordained he would not know where he would place me. He must have surmised that Church of the Savior, the black congregation organized in 1914, would in the near future be merged with the cathedral. So as not to offend the rector of Saint Stephen's, however, he did add me to his list of postulants. Father Ward was furious when he heard my report of this meeting since he had expected that the bishop's perspectives about my placement in the church would have been more catholic and wider than the Diocese of Rhode Island.

This lack of support by the bishop was indeed discouraging and led me back to his office during my senior year with a request that he remove my name from his postulancy list. He accommodated my request and upon graduation I applied to Officer Candidate School (OCS) and began a four year military commitment with the US Navy.

I went to OCS in Newport in the summer of 1957. I did not know then what I know now – that the US Navy, the most southern-dominated of the Armed Forces, had only been commissioning African American officers for a dozen years or so. Samuel Gravely was the first in 1944. Most enlisted blacks and Filipinos were cooks and stewards serving officers in their ward rooms. Normally, commissioned officers were deployed without reference to who would be their commanding officers. In my case, commanding officers were notified ahead of time that I was slated to be assigned to their

staffs and the opportunity was given for them to refuse. If that happened, my orders would then be changed

This kind of discrimination toward minorities was tolerated until 1970 when Admiral Elmo Zumwalt was made Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). In his capacity as the highest ranking naval officer he set about challenging the practices in what he called “the lily-white racist Navy.” He issued his “Equal Opportunity in the Navy” directives in which he made clear that, “There is no black navy, no white navy—just the United States Navy.” He went on to say, “When I became CNO there had never been a black admiral, black officers had few prospects for advancement, and women were not allowed to serve on ships.”<sup>5</sup> He changed all that, and in 1971 Samuel Gravely was made Admiral, the first African American officer to reach flag rank.

But the old Navy was not for me. More importantly by the time of my fourth year in the Navy, my sense of vocation to the priesthood had become clearer and stronger. I lacked, however, another necessary perspective. I needed to have an in-depth conversation with an African American who had long served the church in the trenches and would be honest with me about life and ministry in the Episcopal Church. My ship was home ported in Boston so I arranged to have a talk with the Ven. John Burgess who was then the Archdeacon of the Diocese of Massachusetts. I’ve always remembered the last words of our conversation, “What matters, Arthur, is not having your every question answered or determining what may or may not lie ahead for you. You need to be convinced that God is calling you to the priesthood. If your answer is yes, you had best respond and get on with it and let God be God.” Ten years later, in 1970, John Burgess was elected

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<sup>5</sup> Obituary of Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., *New York Times*, January 3, 2000.

Bishop of Massachusetts, the first African American in the Episcopal Church to become a diocesan bishop.

I returned to Bishop Higgins' office to talk with him again about vocation and seminary. By 1961 the Civil Rights Movement was well underway and now he readily returned me to his postulancy list. He said I had matured in the Navy — and indeed I had — but it was also clear to me who else had matured! When we began to talk about seminaries he told me that since I was from Saint Stephen's he wanted me to attend the Low Church Episcopal Theological School in Massachusetts where my churchmanship could be "balanced." The Rector of Saint Stephen's, who was on the Board of Trustees of Nashotah House, thought I should attend his seminary. I left that decision for the two of them to work out. They came to a compromise and off I went to the General Theological Seminary which was the seminary of my choice. God of dust and rainbows.

When I arrived at seminary I noticed that I was the only member of the entering junior class who was not assigned to room with another entering junior. Dean Lawrence Rose was quite honest with me. He was still recovering from recent conversations with several southern bishops who had visited the seminary and discovered that postulants from their dioceses had been placed with African American roommates. The Dean was warned that if this practice continued, their seminarians would be transferred to another seminary. So in the assignment of rooms I ended up rooming with a member of the senior class who was asked ahead of time what he thought about rooming with a person of color. He was from the Diocese of Pennsylvania and made it clear that he and his bishop could not have cared less.

This curious beginning gave way to a powerful witness three years later when, as student body president, I was able to join fellow seminarians from General, Hebrew Union,

Fordham and Union Theological Seminary on a pilgrimage to Washington, D.C., to stand a twenty-four-hour-a-day vigil at the Lincoln Memorial until the Congress passed the Civil Rights Bill of 1964.

Meanwhile, back here at home, Rhode Islanders were struggling with the Fair Housing Bill which was before the state legislature. The Very Rev. Ronald Stenning, Dean of the Cathedral, and his Christian Social Relations Committee had brought to diocesan convention a resolution calling for the convention to vote its support of this legislation. When the debate was completed and the vote had been taken the resolution had passed by a strong majority. But to my dismay Saint Stephen's, the parish who had sponsored me through seminary, had voted with the minority against supporting the Fair Housing Bill. What to do?

The Rector and vestry of Grace Church, Providence, had already called me to serve on that staff as the first Clarence Horner Fellow—a deacon training program established in memory of the former rector who had served the parish for almost twenty-five years. But, of course, this call was dependent on my ordination to the diaconate. It was the custom of the Diocese then to have new deacons presented at their ordination service by their sponsoring parish. After much prayer, thought, and consultation, I approached the bishop with my dilemma. Bishop Higgins had not always risen to issues around race, but he did in this case. At my request, he altered the custom so that I would be presented for ordination by the Rector of Grace Church, with the understanding that soon I would initiate a conversation with Father Ward with an eye toward healing and reconciliation. My action disappointed Father Ward profoundly but he did come to understand why my conscience and convictions had led to my decision.

When I began ministry at Grace Church, the Fair Housing Bill still had not passed the state legislature, continuing to occupy the attention of Episcopalians and other Christians across the state. The first thing I had to do following my ordination was to find a place to live, which was no easy task. I ran into discriminatory practices everywhere. When I reported this to the vestry, which was comprised mostly of city leaders in the Providence community, they were disbelieving. Most of them could hardly comprehend that a Brown graduate, a former naval officer, a deacon in the Episcopal Church could not find a place to live because he was an African American. I eventually found an apartment, which is a story for another time.

Most important for the parishioners of Grace Church and civic leaders in the city of Providence was their plan to hold a series of dinners in the parish hall with guests from the black community. There, all sat down at round tables to discuss frankly and openly the issue of fair housing and other matters having to do with race relations in the community. I would like to believe that these efforts contributed in a major way to the ultimate passage of a Fair Housing law in this state in 1965.

During the first summer of my ordination I was loaned out to be chaplain to the staff of the Urban Pilot Program, where I worked under the leadership of the Reverend Alan Mason at Church House in South Providence. This program was one of the early diocesan forays of the Episcopal Church into urban ministry among poor black people in Rhode Island. I would be remiss if I did not highlight one particular relationship I developed through this ministry.

Just last week, my heart was warmed to read in the national *Episcopal Church News* that the Diocese of Rhode Island is planning to build Jonathan Daniels House, a residence for young adults, as a way to maintain an active

presence of the Episcopal Church in South Providence. You probably know Jonathan's story. He was murdered in 1965 while working in the civil rights movement in Alabama. Following that incident, twenty-five years passed before anyone completed a comprehensive biography of Jonathan's life and ministry. Charles Eagles did that work in 1993 and made it explicit that Jonathan's experience with poor black city folks first happened when he came to work in the Urban Pilot Program in South Providence. In the words of Eagles, "Jonathan's work in South Providence was crucial to his own 'holy history.' For the first time he was confronted by the enormous social problems involving race and poverty."<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Martin Luther King said of him, "One of the most heroic Christian deeds of which I have heard in my entire ministry was performed by Jonathan Daniels."<sup>7</sup> It was formative for me to do ministry alongside Jonathan at Church House when he was here in 1964. He left us as a martyr and the Diocese of Rhode Island is right to seize on the importance of his work here.

Two years of ministry assisting the Reverend Alexander Stewart at Saint Mark's in Riverside gave me the opportunity to be part of a suburban congregation which was literally rising from the ashes following a devastating fire.

My last months in the Diocese were spent as Sub-Dean of the Cathedral of Saint John. In many ways for me this was coming full circle since that was the building in which I had been baptized in 1940. Let me say a little more about Church of the Savior, the African American congregation which, over the years, had gathered in several places in Providence and

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Eagles, *Outside Agitator: Jon Daniels and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Ivy Jeanne Merrill, *Decency and Nobility: The life of Jonathan Myrick Daniels* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2005).

which for a time worshipped on the second floor of the cathedral. My grandparents were, with others, founding members of this mission church and were the first couple to be married there. They were the ones who made sure that my brother and I were baptized when that time came. Father Percival Moore-Browne served this congregation for all the years of his active priesthood and almost all of the years of the congregation's existence. Bishop Perry, the seventh bishop of Rhode Island, had assigned him to the congregation after ordaining him to the priesthood in 1916 where he continued as vicar for over thirty years.

Of note is the fact that in May of 1933, the Vestry of Saint Stephen's went on record in favor of taking on the Church of the Savior as a parochial mission. By then the congregation had moved into the former home of Saint Stephen's on the corner of Transit and Benefit streets. But financial restraints brought on by the Great Depression prevented Saint Stephen's from extending its ministry in this way.<sup>8</sup> In 1958 Church of the Savior merged with the cathedral congregation.

I went to the cathedral to work primarily with Dean Stenning; his unexpected departure to accept a call in the Diocese of Southern Ohio left me in a dilemma. Should I remain at the Cathedral with a new Dean, who now wanted to curtail the wide responsibilities I had been given in my original position description as Sub-Dean? Should I respond to Father Paul Kintzing, the rector of Saint Stephen's, who was preparing to issue me a call to be his curate? Was it now time for me to think about ministry beyond Rhode Island?

The voice of God seemed to be saying to me, "Go west young man!" In the midst of my prayers about what to do next I received a telephone call from a priest whom I had never met. He identified himself as the rector of a historic, middle class African American parish in the inner city of

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<sup>8</sup> Catir, *Saint Stephen's Church in Providence*, p. 139.

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Detroit located on Twelfth Street, six blocks from where this county's most destructive riot had taken place six months earlier. He told me he was looking for someone to share ministry with him even though he had been told by one of my seminary classmates that he would never be able to convince me to leave Rhode Island.

Grateful for all that ministry in Rhode Island had meant to me, I accepted the call, and just before Holy Week of 1968, I packed up and moved to Detroit, Michigan. Within three days of my arrival, and even before I had found a permanent place to live, Dr. King was assassinated on a motel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee. And so new directions in ministry opened up to me.

So I stand before you with a full and grateful heart, celebrating all that this parish of Saint Stephen's was to me in my growing and formative years. Especially, I am profoundly appreciative to Saint Stephen's, where at nineteen I re-found the Episcopal Church. In the beauty and the holiness of its Catholic liturgy and sacramental life I was drawn close to Jesus, my Lord and Savior. In the fellowship of its community my life's vocation was confirmed. My college years were enhanced by my associations with priests, parishioners, and friends who came and went. Recalling that it was at the altars of Saint Stephen's that my mother and grandmothers were commended to the larger life has deepened my belief in the communion of saints and life eternal.

The City of Providence, the Diocese of Rhode Island, and especially this parish of Saint Stephen's have furthered my understanding of God as a God of both dust and rainbows. You have enabled me to see that without the dust,, the rainbows would not have been. And for that I say thank you from the bottom of my heart. May God bless you always in your ministry of prayer, learning and service. May your

wonderful diversity continue to be a blessing to the whole Church.

**An Officer and a Churchman:  
The Life and Death of Robert Hale Ives, Jr., 1837-1862**

John D. Alexander

*Address given at the symposium*

*America's Bloodiest Day:*

*Antietam, Emancipation, and Memorialization*

*Rhode Island College, September 28, 2012*

AT THE WESTERNMOST END of the north aisle of Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church in Providence, a stained glass window bears the memorial inscription "Robert Hale Ives, Jr. Antietam, 1862." The double lancet window displays images of who we think are Saint John and Saint Clement—or perhaps allegorical figures of faith and hope—executed in bold colors against a deep blue background. In addition to the memorial inscription is a combined quotation from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians and his Second Letter to the Corinthians: "we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith" . . . "our consolation aboundeth also by Christ."

At the time of the Battle of Antietam in September 1862, our church building was brand new, having been consecrated only the previous February. We don't know exactly when the memorial window was installed, but it was no later than 1867, since John Russell Bartlett refers to it in his *Memoirs of Rhode Island Officers*, published in that year.<sup>1</sup>

The story of Robert Hale Ives, Jr. is an integral part of our parish history at Saint Stephen's. We marked the hundred-

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<sup>1</sup> John Russell Bartlett, *Memoirs of Rhode Island Officers who were engaged in the Service of their Country during the Great Rebellion of the South* (Providence: Sidney S. Rider & Brother, 1867), 350-356. Excerpt on "Robert Hale Ives, Jr." downloaded from <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~rigenweb/Ives.html>, September 27, 2012.

and-fiftieth anniversary of his death yesterday with prayers at his memorial window. He was, of course, only one of many Rhode Island officers and enlisted men killed or mortally wounded on that “bloodiest day.” Yet perhaps his story can give us insights into the mindset and worldview of many of the young men and women who volunteered for service in that terrible war.

Robert Hale Ives, Jr., was born in Providence on April 3, 1837, the only son of Robert Hale and Harriet Bowen Ives. His grandfather was Thomas Poynton Ives, who together with Nicholas Brown had founded the famous Providence firm of Brown and Ives in 1796, and who had married his partner’s sister, Hope Brown. His father, Robert Hale Ives, Sr., likewise became a partner in Brown and Ives, and took an active part in establishing Rhode Island Hospital and Butler Hospital, as well as serving as a trustee of Brown University for 45 years. In short, Ives was born into the mercantile aristocracy of nineteenth century Rhode Island.<sup>2</sup>

Ives graduated from Brown University in 1857 at the age of twenty. During the following two years, he twice visited Europe for study and travel, as was the fashion among cultured young gentlemen of the time. On his final return in 1860, he went into business as a partner in the firm of his cousins, the Goddard brothers of Providence. In his *Memoirs of Rhode Island Officers*, Bartlett writes:

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<sup>2</sup> See the “historical note” on the Ives-Gammell-Safe Papers on the website of the Rhode Island Historical Society, at <http://www.rihs.org/mssinv/Mss509.HTM> (downloaded September 27, 2012). See also *The Chad Browne Memorial consisting of Geneological Memoirs of a Portion of the Descendants of Chad and Elizabeth Browne, with an Appendix containing Sketches of other early Rhode Island Settlers, 1638–1888*, Compiled by a Descendant (Brooklyn, New York: Printed for the Family, 1888), 81–82.

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His character was marked by generous and manly traits, and adorned with social graces that made him the delight of the circle with which he was connected. Christian piety had also blended itself with his personal virtues, and the aspiration of his heart was not only to be an accomplished merchant and a worthy citizen, but also a disciple and servant of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

According to the Rev. Henry Waterman, Ives was confirmed at Saint Stephen's Church in June of 1859—perhaps between his two European trips. From that time forward, Ives adopted Saint Stephen's as his spiritual home, regularly attending worship and devoutly receiving Holy Communion. Located on Benefit Street in the building now occupied by the Barker Playhouse, Saint Stephen's was about to embark on the project of constructing a new and much larger Gothic revival church on George Street in the middle of what is now Brown University. From the beginning, Ives enthusiastically involved himself in the project, "both by his liberality and his personal exertions."<sup>4</sup>

When the Civil War broke out in the summer of 1861, caught up in the initial wave of enthusiasm that swelled the ranks of recruits for the regiment raised in Rhode Island, Ives desperately wanted to volunteer. But family and business obligations prevented him from doing so. In particular, he was his parents' only son, and the family was already bereaved by the death of his older sister the previous year. During the summer of 1862, however, after a series of Union defeats and Confederate forces preparing to invade Maryland and encircle Washington DC, Ives made the decision to

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<sup>3</sup> Bartlett, *Memoirs of Rhode Island Officers*.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Waterman, "Communion Address St. Stephen's Sunday October 5<sup>th</sup> 1862." Rhode Island Historical Society, Ives-Gammell-Safe Papers, Mss. 509, Box 5, Folder 5.

volunteer. By this time, the gruesome reality of the war had become apparent, and the initial fervor had abated. Some of Ives's friends tried to persuade him that he could do as much for his country in other ways, and that as the only son of his parents he ought not to leave them. According to Bartlett, Ives had no military ambitions or desire for adventure; his decision proceeded purely from a religious sense of duty that conflicted with "his most cherished tastes and his most valued enjoyments."<sup>5</sup>

Entertaining only the most modest estimate of his aptitude for military life, Ives offered himself as a volunteer aide to General Isaac P. Rodman. On August 19, 1862, the Governor of Rhode Island commissioned Ives a first lieutenant with permission to report to General Rodman for duty. On September 1, Ives departed from Providence to join Rodman in Washington. Rodman was then in command of the third division of General Ambrose Burnside's ninth Army, about to move into Maryland which had already been invaded by the Confederate forces. Ives's pocket diary for 1862 in the library of the Rhode Island Historical Society records in hastily scribbled entries his departure from Providence on September 1, his arrival in Washington on September 3, and his subsequent meeting with General Rodman. The last entry is made on September 7 as the division prepares to march out of Washington at 10 am.<sup>6</sup>

After an arduous march, the Union Army reached Frederick on September 12, and drove the enemy from the city. The Confederates retreated to South Mountain, where they made a stand, and a bloody battle was fought on September 14. General Rodman's division was fully engaged in the fighting; it was the first time that Lieutenant Ives saw

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<sup>5</sup> Bartlett, *Memoirs of Rhode Island Officers*.

<sup>6</sup> Diary, Rhode Island Historical Society, Ives-Gammell-Safe Papers, Mss. 509, Box 5, Folder 4.

action, and his coolness and courage under enemy fire earned him the respect of his general and fellow officers. In Ives's funeral sermon, the Rev. Henry Waterman relays the following report:

A striking instance of his perfect self-control occurred at the Battle of Smith Mountain. In obedience to an order from his General, he was bringing a regiment into position when a huge shell shrieked past and struck just behind him, in the head of the column killing and wounding some twenty men. He neither quickened his pace, nor turned his head; said a spectator, "I never saw a cooler man."<sup>7</sup>

The Confederates retreated towards Sharpsburg and occupied the heights near the Antietam River. The Union forces pursued and took up position to engage them. General Rodman's division was posted on the extreme left flank of the Union line. The battle began at sunrise on Wednesday, September 17. By one o'clock, General Rodman's forces succeeded in crossing a ford in the stream. At three o'clock, General Burnside was ordered to attack enemy batteries on the heights to the left of the Union line. General Rodman's division charged up the heights and took the enemy guns, but the Confederates counter-attacked and forced the division to retreat to its former position. It was in this charge that both General Rodman and Lieutenant Ives were mortally wounded.

A cannon ball hit Ives in the right thigh, tearing away flesh and exposing bone, and killing his horse underneath him. Although a noncombatant, Ives's English servant, George

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Waterman, text of funeral sermon of October 1, 1962. Rhode Island Historical Society, Ives-Gammell-Safe Papers, Mss. 509, Box 5, Folder 5.

Griffin, rushed forward and assisted in removing him from the battlefield. He was taken first to a nearby house, then on the next day to a hospital tent pitched a short distance from the field. News of his wound was immediately sent to his father, but owing to the distance to the nearest telegraph, and the volume of Union Army communication, the report took two days to reach Providence. His father traveled to the battlefield, accompanied by Major William Goddard and the noted surgeon Doctor L.L. Miller, reaching the tent on the evening of Sunday, September 21. Still hoping that he would recover from his wound, they decided to move him to Hagerstown, some sixteen miles away. Although Hagerstown had been stripped of virtually all supplies and left in a shambles by two succeeding occupying armies, a lady of the town received the wounded officer into her home, and saw that he was made comfortable.

Bartlett says only that the wound “inflicted an injury upon his physical frame too great for nature to repair, and the hope which had been cherished for his recovery was soon extinguished.” We may surmise that infection had set in. Ives was told that he was dying. Bartlett continues:

He received the announcement of his approaching end with Christian calmness and submission to his heavenly Father’s will, and spent the closing hours of his life in exercises of religion and naming gifts of remembrance for his friends and of charity for the public objects which he wished especially to promote.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bartlett, *Lives of Rhode Island Officers*.

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Ives died on September 27, 1862, at the age of twenty-five,<sup>9</sup> having received Holy Communion from a makeshift altar erected at his bedside.<sup>10</sup> His body was brought back to Providence and interred at North Burial Ground; on October 1, exactly a month from the day of his departure from home, his funeral took place at Saint Stephen's Church, where he had been a habitual worshipper and a devout communicant.

Among the public objects of the deathbed charity mentioned by Bartlett was Ives's parish. According to Norman Catir's history of Saint Stephen's, on the day before his death Ives requested his father to offer \$5,000 towards paying off the \$20,000 debt the parish had incurred in the construction of its new church building on George Street—provided that the remaining \$15,000 be raised to pay off the rest of the debt within one year of his death. It was, in effect, a deathbed "challenge grant." In a letter dated October 23, Robert Hale Ives, Sr., conveyed his son's offer to the parish corporation, which in turn voted to accept the gift and begin raising funds to clear the entire debt immediately. By April 5, 1863, the \$15,000 had been raised and the debt was cleared.<sup>11</sup>

Concluding his funeral sermon, the Rev. Henry Waterman summed up the significance of Ives's death from the viewpoint of nineteenth-century Episcopal religious sensibilities which saw self-sacrifice for God and for country as all of a package:

We reckon his name among our country's honored dead. His was a free will offering to her cause, and

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<sup>9</sup> Several sources, including Bartlett, give Ives's age at the time of his death as twenty-six, but if the birth date of April 3, 1837, is correct, he would have been twenty-five.

<sup>10</sup> Waterman, "Communion Address."

<sup>11</sup> Norman J. Catir, Jr., *Saint Stephen's Church in Providence: The History of a New England Tractarian Parish 1839-1964* (Providence, Rhode Island: St. Stephen's Church, 1964), 41-42.

it was the richest, dearest offering a man has to give. We remember him now, not only as the loving Friend, the Son, the Brother, and the Kinsman, but as the Christian Soldier and the unfaltering Patriot; and we inscribe upon his early tomb God's own acceptance of the offering which he made. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his Saints."<sup>12</sup>

The short life and tragic death of Robert Hale Ives, Jr., afford a glimpse into the ideals of a young Rhode Island gentleman of the mid-nineteenth century – his family loyalty, his business values, his religious commitments, his sense of duty, his charitable ministrations. Whatever we make of those ideals a hundred and fifty years on – "the past is a foreign country, they do things differently there" – nonetheless at Saint Stephen's Church we continue to honor his memory and to count him as one of our founders and benefactors as well as a cherished member of our extended parish family.

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<sup>12</sup> Waterman, text of funeral sermon of October 1, 1862.

## Saint Stephen's Church: A Memoir

Hayes H. Rockwell

*An excerpt from privately circulated memoirs*

WHEN I ARRIVED in Providence, Rhode Island in September of 1954, to enroll at Brown University, I was a day early so I stayed for a night in the Biltmore Hotel, then the grandest accommodation in town. My generous father had arranged that. The place was all but dark, lit only by emergency lighting. A terrific August hurricane had torn through the Northeast and flooded the whole of downtown Providence, including the Biltmore's imposing lobby and, I suppose, the basement devices that supply heat and light and air conditioning. They were all on the blink. It was an inauspicious beginning to life in the Northeast.

Moving into freshman housing, an ancient structure called Hope College, finding my way among my new companions, I naturally connected first to the few I actually knew.

One of those was a neighbor from Detroit, Steve Gushee. Steve's religious faith was Anglo-Catholic. He had grown up in a family of Episcopalians who kept to that tradition. He went to Kent School, where the founder was an Episcopal monk and the headmaster a priest. Steve's three brothers preceded him there. The Kent chapel held the lingering aroma of the incense that went with Anglo-Catholic worship. Among many other things the rule of life for Anglo-Catholics meant that you went to church on Sunday, even if you were a freshman undergraduate who had stayed up partying all night. Moreover, you tried to find a church where worship was conducted according to what is called "High Church" practice: incense, genuflections, the main part of the service sung by the priest, and so on. Saint Stephen's was such a place. Sometime quite early in the first term, wanting to be a little like Steve, and having at least something of a church-going background

myself, I went along with him to Saint Stephen's. The church sits in the middle of the Brown campus and has been a redoubt of the Catholic version of the Episcopal Church in America since the middle of the nineteenth century.

The parish had allowed for an Episcopal chaplain and provided for him to conduct worship on Sundays. The college congregation was relegated to a side chapel in the dark Victorian Gothic structure which had been designed by a famous architect called Richard Upjohn who specialized in neo-Gothic churches. The nave seemed to me unusually dark. The atmosphere was redolent of incense from earlier services. While the chapel where the college congregation met was somewhat brighter, the overall effect was of a dim religious light. There was no music at that first service. Its absence contributed to the feeling that what we were about was solemn and serious. The priest was the Episcopal chaplain, Sam Wylie. His warm, gentle, earnest presence helped to offset the chill. But the practice was alien to me: members of the congregation bobbed up and down at certain secret places—secret from me anyway—in acts of genuflection. There was much crossing of oneself among those present. At mysteriously designated points in the service, clouds of incense were released into the chapel and, as the Mass rose to the sacred moments when the bread and the wine were consecrated, a small rack of bells was shaken. For whatever reason, this mysterious undertaking drew me in instead of putting me off. Perhaps it *was* the mystery. My more Protestant experience, in my home congregation and my school chapel, contained very little mystery, emphasizing instead a life of good works and jolly companionship. Worship at Saint Stephen's awakened me to the reality that at the heart of Christian believing is not a rational code but a great Mystery.

The rector of Saint Stephen's was a large imposing priest, always clad in black, always in a clerical collar. I think he thought of the college crowd as a necessary component of his parish, but it is unlikely that ministry to unshaven, sometimes rude undergraduates was his calling. However, Saint Stephen's location, in the midst of the Brown University campus, meant that he could hardly ignore the university's population. He may not have had an inclination to evangelize the college crowd, but he was hospitable to Sam Wylie, who was appointed and paid for by the Bishop of Rhode Island to act as Chaplain to Brown and the nearby Rhode Island School of Design. Sam had an office in the parish house and access to the church's chapel for worship on Sundays. The customs of the parish sometimes confused the students as when Linda, my then Presbyterian girlfriend, was admonished by a parishioner for entering the church without a head covering. Dick Hughes, my college roommate, scooped up a choir cap and dropped it on her head, making her acceptable.

Sam Wylie had a very considerable influence on my life and especially on my decision to go to seminary and on into a life of ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church. I was not the only one. There were others who, under Sam's spell, took themselves off to be ordained. His way of being a priest made a deep impression on many on the Brown campus whether they went on to ordination or not. That way was of someone in whom Christian faith was a serious undertaking, requiring authentic conviction and moral commitments. It was a way that struck deep chords in me such that for the whole of my life his purposeful embodiment of Christian believing has been my standard.

Sam was at ease in the Anglo-Catholic setting, but he never sought to impose it on any of us. He was, simply, a Christian believer who lived and spoke in such a way that we were drawn to him, and beyond that to what he believed.

Brown recognized his value to the community of scholars and enquirers and, although he had been there for only four years, the University awarded him an honorary master's degree when he moved on to his next work.

Saint Stephen's carries on in the tradition it has upheld for a century and a half. We have kept a little in touch with its life. When Linda and I celebrated our fortieth wedding anniversary, in September of 1997, Archbishop Desmond Tutu – who had become a friend some twenty years before – helped us to celebrate by presiding over a Eucharist in that chapel for a congregation of our family and some old friends who had been in our wedding party. In 2012 Saint Stephen's celebrated a signal anniversary of its founding. Bishop Arthur Williams, who was a class ahead of me at Brown, was a son of the parish. He was invited to take part in the parish's birthday celebration. Arthur is African-American and when he faced some racist resistance to his sense of being called to be a priest, back in the 1950s, Saint Stephen's supported him for ordination. That didn't happen until he had graduated and finished a stint in the U.S. Navy, but his gratitude for the support the parish gave him has counted very greatly for the whole of his time in the ministry. We were friends with Arthur and his wife Lynette while Arthur and I served in the Episcopal Church's House of Bishops. Arthur's part in the parish celebration was to preach at a High Mass on a Sunday morning and Linda and I went up to Providence to hear him preach a good sermon and take him to lunch. At the celebratory mass, the Anglo-Catholic mode was very much in place. It never became entirely my way, but it informed my faith and practice. What I sensed in the elaborate ritual, when it was done well, was a seriousness of purpose. "This is about something deeply true," it seemed to convey, "something mysterious but real. The proper response is awe."

*150 Years on George Street*

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**The Bishop Seabury Association (1865–1903):  
Building Episcopal Identity Among  
Brown University Students**

Michael G. Tuck

*Address given at S. Stephen's on March 20, 2011*

THE HISTORY of the Episcopal Church's presence on the Brown University campus is almost as old as Saint Stephen's church building on George Street. Indeed, one of the advantages of moving from Benefit Street was the opportunity to reach out to the small but growing University community. This possibility was not lost on Dr. Henry Waterman, the rector of Saint Stephen's. Within just three years of the completion of the building, he helped to establish a community of Episcopalians—the Bishop Seabury Association—at Brown. Its impact continued to be felt for decades.

In some respects, ministry to college students in the middle of the nineteenth century was not altogether different from today. Then, as now, it was critical to create a community in which students could begin to express their own identities as Episcopalians. Then, as now, college ministry helped identify and recruit future leaders of the Church. However, the environment for this ministry was very different, beginning with the university itself. The students followed a curriculum heavily weighted toward classics, and the total student body would have been no more than about 165 young men.

Beyond these structural differences lay deep cultural differences. The contours of society and religion were significantly different from those of today. To add to the complexity, the cultural landscape was rapidly changing. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, society was becoming more urbanized. The economy was moving away

from being that of an agrarian society towards becoming that of an industrialized society as more and more people were moving off farms into cities. Urbanization was accelerating due to a variety of factors including immigration, improved agricultural technology, and the Civil War. As part of this broader shift, older religious patterns were beginning to lose their appeal, with new patterns of worship emerging.

The most distinctive religious form to occupy this new space was the revival. Ever since their beginnings in the late eighteenth century, revivals were characterized by particular practices such as hymn singing and enthusiastic preaching. But there was a distinctive theology to the revivals as well. The revival movement articulated a highly individualized and personalized religion. To be saved, one needed personally to choose Christ in response to the preached Gospel and to feel his work in one's heart. As a response to this new life—revival—one worked to cultivate true holiness—sometimes called *perfection*—and by good works to build the Kingdom of God here in this life.<sup>1</sup>

This was a new kind of religion for a new kind of country. With its emphasis on the person, not the institution or the community, this individualistic expression of Christianity reflected the culture of the early United States. In keeping with aggressive individualism, these revivals were originally conducted by itinerant preachers.<sup>2</sup> These social and religious changes brought about a crisis among mainstream denominations: their numbers began to decline, so they wanted in on the success enjoyed by the revivalists. Some

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<sup>1</sup> George Thomas, *Revivalism and Cultural Change: Christianity, Nation Building and the Market in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 75.

<sup>2</sup> Diana Butler-Bass [as Diana Butler], *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 10.

were more successful than others. In the nineteenth century, Methodists and Baptists, whose denominations had been formed in the revivals of the earlier period, found it easy to return to their roots. Congregationalists, Unitarians, and one key group of Presbyterians joined in the revivalist trend.<sup>3</sup> However, there was also a strong desire for respectability, both among emergent denominations and among established institutions.<sup>4</sup> A more restrained form of revival developed that was particularly popular among Episcopalians.<sup>5</sup>

One key feature of nineteenth century Evangelicalism was the creation of interdenominational organizations to promote evangelism and sponsor revivals. These included the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society along with various abolition and temperance groups. Prominent Evangelical Episcopalians supported such organizations and advocated participation in them.<sup>6</sup> In particular, there was a strong evangelical wing in the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island.<sup>7</sup> Evangelical bishops like Charles McIlvaine of Ohio actively encouraged cooperation with Protestant denominations in Evangelical associations, and even participated in missions and tent meetings.<sup>8</sup>

Against this sweeping tide of revivalism, a few parties expressed concern about the trend. Some traditional Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians had reasons to be wary of revivals. Anglo-Catholics, for instance, were all too accustomed to Evangelicals' attacks. In large part, the dispute came down to a key theological question: Can the grace of

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<sup>3</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 195–201; Thomas, 176.

<sup>4</sup> Butler-Bass, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 70, 72.

<sup>5</sup> Hatch, *Democratization*, 201–206.

<sup>6</sup> Butler-Bass, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 46–48.

<sup>7</sup> Butler-Bass, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 151.

<sup>8</sup> Butler-Bass, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 43–44.

God act on someone who does not feel it acting on them? The Evangelical party argued no, and the High Church party argued yes. At the time, however, the dispute often played out in proxy conflicts such as the debate over Eucharistic adoration at the 1874 General Convention which centered on whether there was an absolute, intrinsic holiness in the sacramental elements—the Anglo-Catholic position—or whether the holiness was something perceived by the individual—the Evangelical position. Many of the other liturgical and ritual disputes of the time related directly to this larger conflict over the nature of the Sacraments: Eucharist, the ordained ministry, and Baptism in particular.

Despite considerable debate within the Episcopal Church over theology and liturgy, certain factors held the opposing groups together. Evangelical Episcopalians agitated for more liberty in extemporaneous prayer, yet never challenged the primacy of the Prayer Book. Both High Churchmen and Evangelicals considered the presence of bishops essential to the Church's ecclesial identity. However, there was a key difference in how the parties understood the role of bishops. The High Church party argued that bishops were necessary for the *being* of the Church, and the Evangelicals argued that they were necessary for the *well-being* of the Church.

These debates took place in a variety of contexts: at General Convention, in the press, within the seminaries and the academic world, and even in parishes. The Evangelical party held a great deal of institutional power, but it was the emerging Anglo-Catholic wing of the High Church party that was capturing people's imaginations. There was excitement and novelty to the Anglo-Catholic message, with a great deal of intellectual rigor to back it up. This message began to take root among the new generation of Episcopalians, and it had an impact at Brown University.

In 1865, on the Brown campus, Evangelical revival was only just arriving. For many years, its President, the Rev. Francis Wayland, had resisted the movement's enthusiasm and fervor.<sup>9</sup> But gradually revival had become mainstream. The phenomenal success of the Evangelical movement in the earlier part of the century meant that no part of the Protestant landscape was untouched. So when the Rev. Barnas Sears came to Brown in 1855, the language of revivals crept into the devotional life of the University. It became fashionable to talk about perfection: the belief that "the Holy Spirit wants to give a full and abundant life to everyone. It is only the individual's refusal that leads to a mediocre Christian life."<sup>10</sup> Within the thought of the Second Great Awakening, Perfectionism was the logical extension of the emotional conversion experience. For High Church Episcopalians, this was, in Dr. Waterman's words, "simply intolerable." In the Tractarian view, the Holy Spirit imparts grace through the Church. As important as spiritual feelings might be, they are a product of grace, and not its source. Most importantly, the power of the Sacrament does not depend on these feelings. And the idea that you can somehow work towards perfection is misguided at best and heresy at worst. So the Episcopalians decided that they could no longer participate in these prayer services. Dr. Waterman tells the story:

In that year [1865] the meetings for devotional exercises, which had existed among the students for several years, became somewhat disturbed by the introduction of theories belonging to the (so-called) doctrine of Perfection. Those meetings, in their best estate, would never much commend themselves to the taste of a Churchman, conducted

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<sup>9</sup> Hatch, *Democratization*, 101.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas, *Revivalism and Cultural Change*, 74.

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as they usually are, in ways so alien from the history and genius and traditions of our Communion... And when (as was the case three years ago), the members of such a circle would be expected to say Amen to some prayer which embodied Perfectionist ideas, and before separating, to say Amen to another prayer in which those same ideas are condemned, the whole scene became simply intolerable.<sup>11</sup>

The Episcopal students needed an independent liturgical expression of their tradition. The group they founded was called the Bishop Seabury Association, and the highlight of the year was an annual sermon delivered on or around the Feast of the Ascension.<sup>12</sup> In the beginning, they were supported by the Evangelical Bishop of Connecticut, John Williams. He was “their earliest friend and adviser,”<sup>13</sup> and delivered the first of these annual sermons in 1866. His topic was the early history of the Episcopal Church in the United States, focusing on the life and work of Bishop Seabury. Despite the Episcopal students’ rejection of a core Revivalist doctrine—Perfectionism—their first patron was one of the most prominent Evangelical bishops. So, even Bishop Williams understood the desire for a distinct Episcopal

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Waterman, preface to *Sermons Preached before the Bishop Seabury Association of Brown University, Providence, R.I.* (New York: Printed for the Association [American Church Press Co.], 1868), i. A physical copy of the sermons may be found in the John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI. The sermons and all of the prefatory material may also be found online via Project Canterbury at <http://anglicanhistory.org/usa/providence/seabury1868.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Martha Mitchell, *Encyclopedia Brunonia* (Providence, R.I. : Brown University Library, 1993), 460.

<sup>13</sup> George E. Cranston, William Blodget, Galbraith B. Perry, Preface to *Sermons Preached before the Bishop Seabury Association*, New York: Printed for the Association [American Church Press Co.], 1868), v.

devotional organization. His choice of topic indicates that he saw the historic episcopate as one of the defining characteristics of that Episcopal identity. Unfortunately, the text of this address does not survive, so a deeper analysis is not possible.

By the time of the second sermon, delivered in 1867, a marked shift in theological orientation had taken place. Instead of an Evangelical or Moderate Episcopal voice, the Association was treated to a spirited defense of the Anglo-Catholic project by the Rev. Dr. Morgan Dix, Rector of Trinity, Wall Street, and one of the foremost Anglo-Catholic thinkers of the day. His address, entitled *Individualism, Sectarianism, Catholicism*, articulates a particular vision of what the distinctive offering of the Episcopal Church ought to be. He not only rejects any sort of Evangelical doctrine, but attacks the very idea that the Episcopal Church is a denomination. Dix wants to convince the members of the Association that the Episcopal Church is a branch of the Catholic Church. Referring to two schools which he labels "Christian individualism" and "Sectarianism," Dix is emphatic in his goals: "My object is to convince you, if you need to be convinced, that the disciples of the first two schools are not the men whom the Church wants as leaders."<sup>14</sup>

Dix begins by disparaging the non-Episcopal expressions of Evangelicalism, which he terms "Christian Individualism," saying, "It is the theory of those who deem that the whole work of redemption and salvation is reduceable to a transaction between two, and only two, factors: the soul and its Saviour. Great is the mystery of godliness, they admit; yet not so great but that it is completed, and finished, and

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<sup>14</sup> Morgan Dix, "Individualism, Sectarianism, Catholicism" in *Sermons Preached before the Bishop Seabury Association of Brown University, Providence, R.I.* (New York: Printed for the Association [American Church Press Co.], 1868). 3-4.

summed up exhaustively, in the conversion and salvation of any individual sinner.”<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, this notion of individual salvation leads to the destruction of any sort of theology of the Church and, for Dix, the destruction of the Church itself. The Holy Catholic Church is reduced to “a mere concourse of saved units, brought together by a gregarious instinct, or a social appetency, and held loosely in a conglomerate condition, by the feeling of security, or the sense of convenience.” The Church here on earth, from the Evangelical perspective, is ultimately nothing more than a “human system.”

To Dix, this view is so obviously antithetical to the Episcopal Church that he spends little time attacking its theological premise. So few thinkers in the Episcopal Church have really pushed this position strongly that there is little value in focusing on it. In a rhetorical flourish, he throws up his hands, declaring that those who believe this might as well give up everything—including Bishops and the Prayer Book.

Dix makes one interesting observation, claiming that people who have been caught up in this fervor but have fallen away are most vulnerable to loss of faith. “In the quarters in which this theory has been generally held, demoralization has been most rapid, Skepticism and Infidelity have wrought their worst mischief, and Romanism has achieved her greatest success as a repairer of damages.” Thus, in his view, rejection of the more extreme Evangelical position leads to “Skepticism”—Rationalism. Without the witness of the Episcopal Church, the Roman Catholic Church is best positioned to pick up the pieces. Dix implies that only the Episcopal Church can successfully resist the trap of scepticism and rationalism without falling into the abuses of Romanism.

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<sup>15</sup> Dix, “Individualism, Sectarianism, Catholicism”, 4–5.

Finishing with Individualism, Dix moves on to Sectarianism, which, in his view, has made the Church too narrow, with no respect for other branches of Christianity. Sectarianism “at length obscures and eclipses every thing beyond itself, until [the sectarian] comes to think that the truth is there and there only, and that the interests of the Gospel are bound up with the future of that particular denomination.” He sees this dynamic operating in both major theological parties in the Episcopal Church – Evangelical and High Church.

Dix is sympathetic to the reasons the Episcopal Church has developed in this direction. He recalls for his hearers the difficulties in the establishment of the episcopate, and persecution by the Puritans in the northern colonies. After all those battles, it was no wonder that “[t]hey held her up as a model to all: they thought the Prayer Book faultless, the services perfect, the whole system complete and entire, lacking nothing. They called on all men everywhere to become ‘Protestant Episcopalians,’ and wondered when the invitation was declined.” Dix recognizes the significant cost in this kind of exclusive thinking: “It marks us in a special, and sometimes in an offensive, way. We have a great deal of this temper among us; enough to have gained us a hard name among those outside our fold.”<sup>16</sup>

Dix was correct in stating that the Episcopal Church was seen by many as an exclusive club. Its canons forbade ministers without episcopal ordination to preach in its pulpits<sup>17</sup> when there was a great deal of ecumenical exchange in many Protestant denominations. But for Episcopalians, the episcopate provided discipline and order too valuable to

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<sup>16</sup> Dix, “Individualism, Sectarianism, Catholicism”, 8–9.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Mullin, *Episcopal Vision/American Reality: High Church Theology and Social Thought in Evangelical America* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986), 39.

sacrifice. Even those in the Evangelical Party, who eagerly participated in revivals and Evangelical Associations, kept the rule.<sup>18</sup> Ministers of Protestant Churches wanting to become clergy in the Episcopal Church needed to be reordained. Roman Catholic clergy did not. At a time when prejudice against Roman Catholics bordered on outright bigotry, Protestant denominations found this practice insulting.

Dix was challenging Episcopalians to expand their horizons by questioning and re-examining their assumptions, an approach that probably worked well with the undergraduate audience. Dix hoped that as a result of exploring other views within the Catholic fold, "the man loves his own Church not less than before, but more wisely, as a branch of that great tree, a household of that family, as the inheritor of the common tradition, and a sharer in the mystery of the sacramental life."<sup>19</sup>

Dix envisions the Episcopal Church as a branch of the Catholic Church, neither formed by the experiences of its members nor founded to preserve the historical purity of its worship or structures, but maintaining continuity with the whole history of the universal Church. He argues that the Episcopal Church is a branch of the English Catholic Church, which was not founded during the Reformation but long before. Its worship is rooted in Christian antiquity: the "Prayer-book was not composed by Bishop Seabury and Bishop White, nor by English Bishops in the sixteenth century; nor was it a mere collection of forms which struck the fancy of the compilers. It has a very remote origin, and a history of its own—a history apart from which the volume cannot be appreciated, understood, or rightly used."<sup>20</sup> For

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<sup>18</sup> Butler-Bass, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 70–72.

<sup>19</sup> Dix, "Individualism, Sectarianism, Catholicism", 13.

<sup>20</sup> Dix, "Individualism, Sectarianism, Catholicism", 15.

Dix, the order and worship of the Church are unintelligible outside the Catholicity of the Church. The Prayer Book is rightly interpreted only in the context of Catholic Tradition.

Dix concludes with a charge to the students to recognize the Catholic identity of the Episcopal Church, “[u]nder the joint pressure of Skepticism and Infidelity on the one side, and of noisy agitation of religionists on the other.” He concludes with words meant to stir up the youthful idealism of his hearers: “It is better to live and die for a cause like this, although misunderstood and suspected in consequence, than to bask in the sunshine of popularity, while pushing forward objects applauded of men but destined to ultimate defeat.”<sup>21</sup>

The following year, in 1868, the sermon was delivered by the Rev. Dr. Ferdinand Ewer, rector of Christ Church in New York City, who was already beginning to develop a reputation as quite possibly the most passionately fire-breathing spokesman for the Anglo-Catholic cause at that time. In the same year that he addressed the Bishop Seabury Association, he also preached a series of sermons entitled *The Failure of Protestantism*.<sup>22</sup> At a time when many Episcopalians took the “Protestant” part of the name of the Protestant Episcopal Church seriously, this caused a firestorm in the popular and religious press.

Dr. Ewer’s address to the Bishop Seabury Association was entitled the *Logical Impossibility of Any Compromise between the Church and the Sects*. Unlike Dix, who focused on the divisions within the Episcopal Church, Ewer took for granted the correctness of the Anglo-Catholic understanding, and used it to highlight the differences between the Episcopal Church and the other Protestant denominations.

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<sup>21</sup> Dix, “Individualism, Sectarianism, Catholicism”, 27.

<sup>22</sup> E. Clowes Chorley, *Men and Movements in the American Episcopal Church* (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946), 317.

Like Dix, Ewer argues that the Catholic character of the Episcopal Church does not come from its purity or its resemblance to the ancient Church. The Episcopal Church is Catholic because it maintains continuity with the Church of the apostles, and its privileges are maintained because it is a duly constituted national church. Ewer describes the relationship between the English and Roman Churches by means of an analogy of the relationship of Rhode Island with a neighbor like New York: smaller and less powerful, but equal in rights and independence.<sup>23</sup> Ewer was often accused of being a closet Romanist and leading people to Rome, but this sermon makes it clear that, at least at this point in his life, he has little respect for the Roman Catholic Church. He sees Rome as having encroached on the ancient liberties of the British Church beginning with Saint Augustine's mission on behalf of Saint Gregory the Great, and laments that "after a brave struggle on the part of the British Bishops, [Rome] succeeded; and for several centuries the Catholic Church in England, though of right independent, autonomic, was in the same position under Rome that Rhode Island would be, if for a while its large, wealthy and powerful neighbor, New York, should reduce it to dependency, give it its laws, its judges, and other officers."<sup>24</sup> Later in the sermon he refers to the Pope as the "wary old man of the Vatican."<sup>25</sup> In Ewer's view, the English Church restored her independence under Henry VIII, who had no intention of creating a new Church. His break with Rome was a restoration, not a reformation.

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<sup>23</sup> Ferdinand Ewer, "Logical Impossibility of Any Compromise between the Church and the Sects" in *Sermons Preached before the Bishop Seabury Association of Brown University, Providence, R.I.* (New York: Printed for the Association [American Church Press Co.], 1868). 36.

<sup>24</sup> Ewer, "Logical Impossibility," 36.

<sup>25</sup> Ewer, "Logical Impossibility," 59.

Dr. Ewer goes on to highlight theological differences between a Catholic Church and a Protestant denomination, notably in the doctrine of Election and Salvation. Ewer expounds his Catholic understanding of the Church in terms of the relationships among God, Christ, the Church, and the sinner:

The sinner was, by baptism, grafted into the Body Mystical or Church, and thus made one with Christ; and by the Holy Eucharist fed with Him; and being one with the Son, was made one with the Father also. For first, Father and Son are one; second, God and Man are one in Christ; third, Christ and His Church are one; and lastly, the Sinner becomes one with the whole by the uniting element of baptism.<sup>26</sup>

But Protestantism abolished this corporate view of the Church:

Protestantism substituted the process of individual experiencing of religion with the whole revival system; and so sought to bridge the gap between each separate individual and Christ. And when, without the actual sacramental bands, he falls away, they are forced to bring to bear the machinery again for 'a revival of religion in his heart.'"<sup>27</sup>

Ewer concludes by exhorting his audience to an unapologetic profession and advocacy of the Catholic understanding:

Young gentlemen, our duty as loyal children of the Church is plain. We have no need, as we move among the denominations, to apologize for our Fair

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<sup>26</sup> Ewer, "Logical Impossibility," 52.

<sup>27</sup> Ewer, "Logical Impossibility," 53.

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Mother. Too much of this, alas, already! Too much of the obsequious to our inferiors! . . . We are not *almost* like the denominations, and therefore to be tolerated by them in our peculiarities of written prayers, and vested clergy. We are Catholic and fundamentally different. As you go forth then to plant the Church, sound no uncertain trumpet, but let your motto be, I BELIEVE IN ONE HOLY, CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH.<sup>28</sup>

These three speakers were undoubtedly the highlight of the season for the Bishop Seabury Association. There is one key similarity among the three. Each uses an historical argument to claim a uniqueness for the Episcopal Church. Even the Evangelical Bishop Williams focuses on the heritage of Bishop Seabury and the establishment of the Episcopate.

Bishop Williams appears to have been somewhat troubled by the subsequent two preachers. When it came time to publish the sermons, he wanted nothing to do with the project, writing to the publishing committee that his address was based on a previously published article, and much was changed: "It would not, however, add anything to the value of your proposed publication."<sup>29</sup>

Although we do not know how or why Bishop Williams came to be an early patron of the Association, we can see the hand of Dr. Waterman in the choice of Dix and Ewer for the next two sermons. While Dix and Ewer clearly and forcefully promoted an Anglo-Catholic theology of the Church, they generally avoided the kind of language which tended to cause public disputes. Walking a fine line, Dr. Waterman wanted to push the students as far as they would go. He wanted any

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<sup>28</sup> Ewer, "Logical Impossibility," 61–62. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>29</sup> John Williams, preface to *Sermons Preached before the Bishop Seabury Association of Brown University, Providence, R.I.* (New York: Printed for the Association [American Church Press Co.], 1868), vi.

Evangelical students to leave as High Churchmen and he wanted High Churchmen to leave as Anglo-Catholics.

So what was the reaction to Dr. Waterman's program? Twenty-five years later, Eugene King, a former member, recalled the founding of the Bishop Seabury Association in a retrospective published in both *The Providence Journal* and *The S. Stephen*. Most of the students were described as having been "touched by the 'Oxford movement,'" in a diocese not dominated by the High Church party. Dix and Ewer's sermons were like "dropping molten iron into water ... The water hissed, but it became heated."<sup>30</sup> Not everyone was pleased with what they heard, but the words changed the terms of the debate. Quickly, the Association developed an international reputation. King says that they received autographed copies of books from Newman<sup>31</sup> and Pusey. One of these books, a translation of Alfonse Ligouri signed by Orby Shipley, is still in the John Hay Library, the rare books library, at Brown University.<sup>32</sup>

The bishop licensed many of these students as Lay Readers and they would have spent their Sunday mornings leading prayer services in outlying neighborhoods. Within ten years of the Association's founding, its members were involved in starting up no fewer than four new parishes in the Diocese of Rhode Island: Saint Mary's, East Providence; the Church of the Epiphany, South Providence; Saint Paul's,

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<sup>30</sup> E. King, "The Bishop Seabury Association," *Providence Journal*, May 15, 1890.

<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, I was unable to trace the location of any of these books except for the text by Liguori. If King's report is accurate, these books would be quite significant as Newman had become a Roman Catholic in 1845 and an exchange with an American Episcopalian organization would have been very unusual.

<sup>32</sup> Alfonso Maria de'Liguori, *Preparation for Death*. Ed. O. Shipley, London, Rivingtons, 1868. Fly-leaf inscribed: To the Bishop Seabury Association, Brown University, Prov., RI, from the Rev. Orby Shipley.

Providence; and Christ Church, Providence. Over the next few years, the Anglo-Catholic fervor began to fade somewhat in some of these parishes. Some of them became typical Broad Church parishes, while others retained a clear identity as Anglo-Catholic parishes. But King did not see this evangelistic effort as the early Association's deepest impact. He credited the priests who had been formed in its early years as having played a shaping role in the Episcopal Church's liturgical and spiritual development. The things that, in 1865, seemed far too ritualistic, by 1890 had become commonplace.<sup>33</sup>

Eighteen students who belonged to the Seabury Association became priests between 1865 and 1874. Eleven of them went to General Seminary, the High Church seminary of the day, while four attended Philadelphia Divinity School, a low to middle seminary. Some of them were unconvinced by Drs. Dix, Ewer and Waterman and went on to serve Broad Church parishes.<sup>34</sup> However, others became Anglo-Catholics: one became a mission-priest of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist (SSJE, also known as the Cowley Fathers); one went on to become the Dean of Nashotah House, the Anglo-Catholic seminary in Wisconsin; one became the Dean of the Cathedral in the Anglo-Catholic Diocese of Quincy, Illinois, and the associate editor of *The Living Church*; and one became the Bishop of Long Island. Several others served in Anglo-Catholic parishes.

Three of these students lived as celibates in a community whose character was almost monastic.<sup>35</sup> Although the records

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<sup>33</sup> King, "The Bishop Seabury Association."

<sup>34</sup> Records of the careers of former members of the Bishop Seabury Association are taken from the Historical Catalogue of Brown University. Brown University, *The Historical Catalogue of Brown University*, Providence, Brown University, 1905, 278-321.

<sup>35</sup> King, "The Bishop Seabury Association."

are unclear, it appears that these three priests were Frs. Robert Paine (Saint Mary's, East Providence), William Shearman (Saint James, Providence), and Freeborn Coggeshall. Fr. Coggeshall would later become a member of SSJE in Oxford, England.<sup>36</sup>

At time went on, the Bishop Seabury Association lost its enthusiasm along with its close connection to Saint Stephen's. By 1890, it was still the rule that members of the Association receive Communion at Saint Stephen's on the Feast of the Ascension. But college students then were not too dissimilar from college students today. King reports that whether or not they attended the service, all the Episcopal students would dutifully sign their name in the book as members of the Association.<sup>37</sup> By 1903, the Bishop Seabury Association was no longer listed as an organization at Brown.<sup>38</sup>

In 1865, Dr. Waterman had seen a unique opportunity to shape Episcopal identity on the Brown campus through the convergence of three factors: the presence of the new building close to campus; active students who shared an appreciation of the Anglo-Catholic project; and the availability of fiery Anglo-Catholic preachers. All of these factors helped shape a whole generation of Episcopalians in their understanding of the Church. And by helping to form a group of passionate young priests, Waterman significantly advanced the Anglo-Catholic cause in the Diocese of Rhode Island as well as in the wider Episcopal Church.

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<sup>36</sup> According to the Historical Catalogue, these three graduates were all active as priests at parishes in or near Providence in the early 1870s.

<sup>37</sup> King, "The Bishop Seabury Association."

<sup>38</sup> Mitchell, *Encyclopedia Brunonia*, 461.

## GEORGE MCCLELLAN FISKE: RITUALISM AND S. STEPHEN'S

Phoebe Pettingell

*An earlier version of this essay appeared in The S. Stephen, Vol. 15, No. 5 (Saint Peter and Saint Paul Issue, May 2016)*

**T**OO LITTLE HAS BEEN WRITTEN about George McClellan Fiske (1850-1923), the eighth rector of S. Stephen's. Yet he was a brilliant leader of the Ritualist Movement of his day, twice elected bishop in Midwestern dioceses (which he declined) and often offered parishes in larger cities than Providence. Fiske was called here in 1884, and chose to remain at S. Stephen's for 35 years, retiring only in the final year of World War I. At the time of his arrival, he had served several curacies, including one at St. Mark's, Philadelphia, a leading Anglo-Catholic parish. Despite his amiable and humorous pastoral manner, he proved an agent of change at S. Stephen's. During his tenure, the sanctuary was remodeled and the Guild House built. Of equal if not greater importance, he introduced Ritualist worship of the sort for which we are now famous. Although influenced from the beginning by the principles of the Tractarians, S. Stephen's had yet to use much ceremony before Father Fiske. He brought along Eucharistic vestments, ritual choreography, the Western Rite calendar, and such devotions as Stations of the Cross and Vespers of the Blessed Sacrament. Changes to the sanctuary included the painted reredos, showing Christ reigning in glory surrounded by angels, with saints, including "Doctors of the Church," both Eastern and Western. While Dr. Waterman had heard confessions, Fiske installed confessionals. He established one of the first American Wards of The Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament—the Holy Nativity Ward, which still exists today. Fiske started our

parish magazine, *The S. Stephen*, in 1885. For the time it was an innovative way of communicating with the parish, and the first such publication in the Diocese of Rhode Island. Copies in the parish archives in the University of Rhode Island library preserve a record of how much went on in his time as rector.

At the time Fiske became rector, and throughout his tenure, the East Side of Providence was changing. The aftermath of the Civil War had brought growing social problems to urban areas as soldiers, many of whom had enlisted as boys, returned from the battlefield without jobs and often physically or mentally damaged. While the period in our history in which Fiske served is known as the “Gilded Age,” the growing prosperity of some, including many members of S. Stephen’s, did not extend to all classes, and there was no government assistance. Father Fiske (he was the first rector to introduce that title in the parish) organized a variety of ministries for the relief of the poor—especially the black population—and for better education for the working classes, that they might develop skills to lift them out of poverty. He also taught and organized classes in Christian education within the parish, and at its various chapels within the diocese. Realizing that all this work could not be accomplished merely by the clergy, or lay volunteers, he persuaded his good friend, Charles Chapman Grafton, just retiring as rector of Boston’s Church of the Advent, to move the newly founded Sisters of the Holy Nativity here. Their Motherhouse remained in Providence from 1888 until 1906, when Grafton, now Bishop of Fond du Lac, moved them to Wisconsin, but a branch house remained near S. Stephen’s until 1983. In addition to working among the needy, they also strengthened the organization of an Altar Guild, made vestments and linen for the sanctuary, and taught its members how to do so, taught Sunday School and adult

classes, and baked altar bread. At its peak, S. Stephen's counted 1,400 confirmed members, and a Sunday School of 300-some pupils. Without the help of the Sisters, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to run such a large, active parish.

Although Fiske is known to have made self-deprecating remarks about his preaching, fifteen of his sermons were printed, and in their excellence they give an excellent picture of the man. Our eighth rector lived in an age where eulogies at requiems praised the virtues of the deceased in spiritual terms. Fiske was gifted in presenting a vivid portrait of the deceased: not gossipy anecdotal eulogies, but portraits of the person's life in Christ. When he preached on the deaths of bishops—Thomas March Clark, diocesan of Rhode Island, then Presiding Bishop; Isaac Lea Nicholson, diocesan of Milwaukee, and formerly the rector of St. Mark's, Philadelphia, under whom Fiske had served; William Nielson McVickar of Rhode Island; and Charles Chapman Grafton of Fond du Lac, Fiske's fellow leader in the Anglo-Catholic movement—he stressed the qualities they possessed which made them what bishops ought to be: men of holy life who uphold the faith as handed down from the Apostles. "The Valiant Woman: A Sermon Preached at the Requiem Eucharist in S. Stephen's Church... in Memory of Anne Ives Carrington Dwight Ames..." remains in print to this day, and offers a compelling portrait of the life of a woman leader in the Church of that time. His essay, "The Lord's Supper," in *The Church's Ministry of Grace*, a series of lectures sponsored by the Church Club in New York City in 1892, displays his scholarly depth. This was a more rhetorical age than our own, and Fiske wrote and spoke eloquently even by its high standards. Thus, when the Slocum Post # 10, Grand Army of the Republic, held a memorial service in Providence for the recently deceased former General and President, Ulysses S.

Grant, Fiske was chosen to preach the homily. Later, he celebrated a public Requiem Mass for the assassinated Commander in Chief in 1901: "William McKinley, President, Patriot and Martyr." His lyrical eulogy reminds our more skeptical age that, at the time of his death, McKinley was the best-loved figure in American history, and that his years in office were a significant period in American history. These respectful homilies for men who were not Episcopalians testify to Fiske's advanced ecumenical views in an era of fierce denominationalism.

For all his ecumenism, Fiske, in common with many Anglo-Catholics of the period, fought to have the word "Protestant" dropped from the official name of the Episcopal Church. He supported Grafton's proposal that it be renamed "The American Catholic Church." This idea was roundly rejected by the Evangelical party; the term "Protestant" was dropped only in 1964, and it was not removed from the Oath of Conformity priests take at ordination until the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. (Nevertheless, we remain officially incorporated as "The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church.) Today, it is common to refer to Anglicans as "both Protestant and Catholic." However, many, perhaps most, Anglo-Catholics reject the "Protestant" appellation. Fiske certainly did. He believed "Catholic" to be the name of the Christian tradition passed down from the Apostles. He held to the "three branch" model of the Church Catholic: Roman, Orthodox, and Anglican. Again, in common with many Ritualists of his era he argued that Rome was corrupt and less truly Catholic than the other branches because of its authoritarian, centralized governance, along with late doctrinal proclamations such as Papal Infallibility. Later generations of Ritualists produced the leaning known as "Anglo-Papalism:" striving for the reunion of the Western Church. However, in Fiske's era,

Rome used Anglican converts to try to undermine the very notion of Anglo-Catholicism as anything but dressed-up Protestantism, while in both the Church of England and the Episcopal Church, clergy and laity overly sympathetic to Rome were sooner or later apt to “swim the Tiber.”

Though many of the English Ritualists were Monarchists, leading American Anglo-Catholics staunchly believed in democracy. They looked toward the Orthodox Churches, which were nationally grounded, and eager for Anglican allies, particularly in the United States. Fiske invited both Orthodox and “Old Catholic” bishops to preach at Evensongs at S. Stephen’s. The Old Catholic Churches had departed from Rome after the First Vatican Council (1869-1870). Principally established in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and Poland, they have no pope. By the 1920s most came into full communion with the Episcopal Church. By Fiske’s day they had already established close ties with the Ritualists. While not in full communion with Rome, the Vatican nonetheless recognized their orders as valid. On the Orthodox side, Fiske had Bishop Grafton give several lectures at S. Stephen’s directly on returning from an historic visit to Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow in 1903, and our rector hosted a joint Anglican-Orthodox service in 1911. One of his heroes and influences was John Mason Neale, whose translations of Eastern liturgies helped Westerners appreciate their approach to ritual.

Today, when Christians worry about New Age cults and growing secularization, it is easy to assume that previous eras were not troubled by this anxiety. After all, during Fiske’s tenure, S. Stephen’s boasted more members than before or since. By 1900, the number was up to 800 – over twice as many as when he arrived. Furthermore, the parish enjoyed unsurpassed financial prosperity and respect, both in the diocese of Rhode Island and in the state. Yet for many people

at the time, science was replacing religion. In reaction to skepticism about the supernatural, some turned toward various forms of the occult. In a sermon on the Nicene Creed preached before the Diocesan Convention in 1894, Fiske warned his hearers of "Spiritualism, Christian Science, Theosophy, Naturalism, [and] Rationalistic Criticism" – the school of Bible Scholarship which explains away miracles, and treats Jesus as "the good Rabbi" rather than the Second Person of the Trinity. He acknowledged that many devotees of these faiths claimed "truth and goodness" in them, and added, "It may be so. They are nonetheless works of the Devil for all that.... This mixture of good and evil in new and strange forms of Religion, wherein Satan says some true things, is that very Fraud and Craft of our Adversary of which we need specially to beware, and which we must resist most sturdily by Steadfastness in the Faith." C. S. Lewis would make a similar argument in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In common with other Anglo-Catholics, Fiske believed that preaching and intellectual arguments alone were not enough to make faithful Christians. "We are continually urging the pulpit to put forth its preaching capacity," he wrote in an essay on "The Lord's Supper." "Let us utilize the preaching capacity of the Altar." Ritual raises people's awareness of the supernatural mysteries of the sacraments. Its rites both proclaim and demonstrate that the Church is not merely a human organization but divinely ordained, that in the Eucharist we receive Christ in the flesh just as surely and intimately as the Apostles walked and talked with Him in Galilee. The Sacrament was reserved in the tabernacle at S. Stephen's, which was part of the new altar and reredos Fiske had installed. "God speed the day" its rector declared "when in every church the Altar shall be daily used to speak to and to feast with God, where every church shall be an open church, where Jesus may be always found to bless the sick and

dying, and to welcome all who turn aside from the noisy paths of men to seek His Face."

A study of Fiske's career renews appreciation for the role S. Stephen's played in the Anglo-Catholic revival. While Waterman had adopted the Eastward position for the celebration of communion, by the time Fr. Fiske retired, all of the Anglo-Catholic "six points," including Eucharistic vestments, unleavened bread for the Eucharist, water mixed with wine in the chalice, candles and incense were in place. Today, most Episcopalians take for granted that the Sacrament is reserved in their parish, forgetting that the right to revive this was a hard-fought battle. Fortunately, although Ritualism was controversial and opposed by many, the Episcopal Church never jailed or suspended clergy over it, as was done in England—"Such acrimony as is current [there] is unknown to us," Fiske boasted as a longtime deputy to General Convention. During his tenure as rector, Rhode Island was fortunate to have bishops who appreciated what was done at S. Stephen's. Following him, the tradition was too strongly rooted to interfere with. Fiske left a foundation "built upon a rock" for subsequent rectors to develop.

Throughout the Anglican Communion, the reclaiming of the Catholic tradition could truly be called a "Reformation" of the Church. The use of that term was to counter the Protestant notion of reform, which actually eliminated many of the Early Church's ritual practices. While many Anglicans have never become Anglo-Catholics, it is now generally accepted that ritual preaches and teaches. It *shows*, rather than *tells*. True ritual is a given, and should not be manipulated or made up to make pastoral and didactic points. Conforming ourselves to the rites of the Church changes us, helps us believe, brings us closer to what Christ would have us become.

Among the lessons to be learned from the life and work of those Ritualists who have gone before us is that a firm belief in the divine origin of the Church, its rites and creeds and sacraments, helps us to overcome worldly obstacles. Fiske's great strength was an unfailing certainty that if we are doing Christ's work it will prosper, whether we live to see it fulfilled in our lifetimes or must wait for that day when we see God face to face.

**DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH,  
UPBUILDERS OF THE KINGDOM:  
SAINT STEPHEN'S AND RHODE ISLAND EPISCOPAL  
ELECTIONS, 1910-1952**

Lawrence H. Bradner

*Address given at S. Stephen's on March 27, 2011*

SINCE I HAVE a personal connection with each part of this story, it is best that I begin with a relevant disclosure about myself. I am a native of Saint Martin's Church, Providence. My parents prayed in church on Sundays and quietly at home every day; like the three priests in the family, my grandfather and two uncles, my parents had a low-church orientation. The Rev. John Vernon Butler, Jr., a "moderate" Anglo-Catholic, became our Rector in 1942. At the time I was confirmed by the Right Rev. James DeWolf Perry in 1946, I became an acolyte; we learned to genuflect in the presence of the consecrated Sacrament and the reason for doing so. In Confirmation classes we learned the importance of all seven sacraments. Father Butler was not trying to make our parish another Saint Stephen's, but we understood that the two parishes had much in common. The rector took a few of us boys to a Sunday evening Diocesan Acolyte Festival at Saint Stephen's. There was a lot of processing, singing, praying and eating. The Saint Stephen's acolytes had red cassocks and we had black cassocks. One of my young colleagues must have thought red cassocks were cool, and returning from Saint Stephen's in the rector's car asked Fr. Butler if we could get red cassocks. He said "Oh, No!" Sometime before I moved back to Providence ten years ago a great change had happened: Now Saint Stephen's acolytes have black cassocks and we at Saint Martin's have red!

Fr. Butler's successor at Saint Martin's, the Rev. John Seville Higgins, M.A., D.D., arrived in 1948; decades later Dr. Higgins described himself as "a moderate Anglo-Catholic with a strong Evangelical bent." Of course I have had a long journey since those days, but those early experiences had a strong influence on my continuing belief and practice; they also strongly influenced my interpretation of history, my understanding of church and my interest in the process of electing bishops in our diocese.

With the recent election of another Bishop of Rhode Island, looking back on some twentieth century elections might be of interest. As Saint Stephen's Church celebrates the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of its building here on George Street we may well ask how clergy and parishioners of this parish participated in past Rhode Island episcopal elections. My focus will be on two elections in particular: that of 1910, in which James DeWolf Perry, Jr. was elected Bishop of Rhode Island; and that of 1952, in which John Seville Higgins was elected. One of the perennial questions is: in what ways can we speculate about the hand of God, the voice of God, being specifically involved in the church's decisions, and in what happens between decisions?

### **Part One: The 1910 Election**

Let's get right on the Election of 1910, and present the cast of characters. First, there is **The Right Rev. William Neilson McVickar** who set our story in motion by dying in 1910 on June 28th, at age 67. He had been Bishop Coadjutor during his ailing predecessor Bishop Clark's last five years (1898-1903). McVickar carried on a vigorous Episcopal leadership which included attention to missionary expansion of the Church at home and abroad. He spoke very strongly on the issue of public corruption. Muckraker Lincoln Steffens published a story, "Rhode Island, A State For Sale" in *McClure's Magazine* in 1904, extensively explaining the connections between the

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corrupt Republican machine in Rhode Island and the Union Railroad which ran the system of electric street cars in the Greater Providence area. Steffens prominently quoted Bishop McVickar who lamented that many of his own clergy were dependent on corrupt sources of money in their parishes and didn't dare to speak publicly on this public issue; but McVickar could and did. After Bishop McVickar died in June of 1910, the Rev. Dr. George McClellan Fiske, the Rector of Saint Stephen's, said of him, "He was one of the most conspicuous, useful, and influential of our Bishops. His character was saintly."

And now, two minor figures involved in the September 21st, 1910 election. **The Rev. Arthur Leverett Washburn** was in 1910 the Rector of the Church of the Saviour on Benefit Street. That small congregation had seceded from Saint Stephen's around the time Saint Stephen's moved up to its new building here on George Street, and had bought the original Saint Stephen's building on Benefit Street from Saint Stephen's. I knew Arthur Washburn in his old age, as the retired first Rector of Saint Martin's. At the time of the 1910 election Washburn was 33 years old; he was one of two clergy to speak, following the second ballot, in favor of the election of the Rev. James DeWolf Perry, Jr. It appears that Washburn and Perry were already friends. The other clergyman of the Diocese to speak for the election of Mr. Perry following the second ballot was **The Rev. Lester Bradner, Jr., Ph.D.**, who had been Rector of Saint John's, North Main Street, since January, 1902. He was 43 in 1910, and was my grandfather. He died in 1929, five years before I was born.

At the top of an inside page of *The Providence Journal* of September 5th, 1910, is blazoned the headline, "Mentioned in Talk of Succession to Bishop McVickar," over four photos. The largest one, top center is "Rev. George McC. Fiske," Rector of Saint Stephen's; on either side of him are "Rev.

Arthur Aucock," Rector of All Saints Westminster Street, and "Rev. E. S. Rousmaniere," recently Rector of Grace Church; directly under Dr. Fiske is the smaller fourth photo, "Rev. Lester Bradner, Jr.," Rector of Saint John's. The *Journal* writer claimed he had talked with clergy of the city, and "several prominent clergy of the Diocese and some from without have been individually mentioned ..."

It was a good thing for our family, for the Diocese, and for him that grandfather was not elected. He had many gifts that made him justly beloved by parishioners, but he had, I think, neither the personality nor the health needed for Bishop of Rhode Island. Less than two years later he had to resign from Saint John's to get treatment for a "nervous breakdown" which was, I think, depression. In 1906 he had recommended to Bishop McVickar that Saint John's become the cathedral of the Diocese which did happen over twenty years later. In 1906 family correspondence Bradner was considering whether his becoming Dean would be a good thing. I *never* heard he had interest in becoming bishop. As it turned out Dr. Bradner received only one clergy vote in the informal ballot and 3 lay votes; he received the same in the first formal ballot, then his name disappears. His friend, Dr. Rousmaniere, did only slightly better, and the same for Mr. Aucock.

Perhaps the *Journal* writer was too indolent to poll many Episcopalians about who might be nominated and really be elected. Or, speaking more nefariously, I wonder did the writer's informant, knowing of the popularity of Dr. Fiske, want to get some Low Church names like Aucock, Bradner, and Rousmaniere, into the public eye as a way of drawing attention away from the Anglo-Catholic Churchman, Fiske? But that's nothing more than shaky speculation!

It is clear that neither Dr. Bradner nor Mr. Washburn voted for Mr. Perry in the preliminary informal ballot, as there were no clergy votes for Perry at that time; he got two lay

votes in the informal ballot. Perry got no clergy or lay votes in the first formal ballot. It appears at that point, on September 21, 1910, Bradner was not eagerly promoting James DeWolf Perry's election. But I am sure they must have been acquainted. Perry had been Rector of Saint Paul's, New Haven, since 1904; Bradner and Perry were both actively promoting the role of Sunday Schools in the Episcopal Church; Bradner had made a presentation on Sunday Schools in a Conference at Saint Paul's, New Haven, in 1906. Lester Bradner had been ordained some years earlier in Trinity, New Haven, his home parish.

**Rathbone Gardner**, Senior Warden of Grace Church Providence *may* have wanted to prevent the election of an Anglo-Catholic Bishop of Rhode Island, but I'm not sure that he was *primarily* leading a "Stop Fiske!" campaign. Rathbone Gardner was a staunch Republican lawyer and businessman, but a reformist Republican who criticized the corrupt Republican dominance of the General Assembly. Just a little more digression: Gardner was in the Lincoln Party, a coalition of the Democratic Party of Rhode Island and reformist Republicans who, in 1906 and 1907, campaigned for an alternative candidate for election to the United States Senate. That candidate was another staunch Republican, well-known Civil War veteran, and venerable Saint Stephen's member, Col. Robert Hale Ives Goddard. I assume Dr. Fiske supported Goddard; with his own anti-corruption views, I am sure Bishop McVickar did. But in those days, U. S. Senators were still elected by the General Assembly; unhappily this time the reform campaign failed. As we shall see, it was Rathbone Gardner who nominated James DeWolf Perry, Jr.

Now come the two major candidates in the 1910 election for Bishop of Rhode Island:

**The Rev. Dr. George McClellan Fiske**, Rector of Saint Stephen's Church, had grown up in eastern Connecticut. Born

in Stafford Springs, he was brought up in Warehouse Point on the Connecticut River. He was class valedictorian when graduated from Trinity College, Hartford; later, he graduated from the Berkeley Divinity School in New Haven, in 1874. He served in two significant parishes, one in Philadelphia and one in Poughkeepsie, before coming to Saint Stephen's at age 34 in 1884.

The delightful thing about the 1910 election was that the two chief candidates, Dr. Fiske and Mr. Perry were of such worthy character that either of them would have adorned the Rhode Island Episcopate.

In the first formal ballot of the September 21, 1910 election, Dr. Fiske received nineteen of the sixty-one clergy votes; in the second ballot, twenty-one, in the third, twenty-three; and in the fourth ballot twenty-six. In these four ballots he received more clergy votes than any other person nominated even when Perry got a large laity vote in the fourth ballot.

Dr. Fiske might well have been called "a priest's priest." His character appealed beyond church-party boundaries; clearly there were not twenty-six Anglo-Catholic clergy in the Diocese in 1910! Beginning in 1901 and for the rest of his ministry, Dr. Fiske was President of the Diocesan Standing Committee; Judge John H. Stiness of Saint Stephen's was Secretary of the committee for a few years. In 1882, Fiske had been elected Bishop of Fond du Lac in Wisconsin; in 1899 he was invited to become Rector of the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin in New York City, one of the premier Anglo-Catholic parishes in the country; in 1904, in one ballot he was elected Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield, Illinois. But he declined all these honors to remain at Saint Stephen's.

After Bishop Thomas March Clark died in 1903, Dr. Fiske presided and preached at a parish Requiem for the Bishop at Saint Stephen's. Even though Fiske did not meet Clark until Fiske was elected Rector of Saint Stephen's during Clark's

episcopate, Fiske, from his earliest childhood in Connecticut, had known Clark's name and character. Thomas Clark, then Rector of Christ Church, Hartford, had visited the Fiske family's home and was often mentioned in the family. Dr. Fiske's sermon reveals Fiske's own affection and generosity of spirit; a depth and breadth of understanding about what it means to be a priest and bishop. Perhaps those many clergy of Rhode Island, who like Bishop Clark were of a different churchmanship than Dr. Fiske's, voted for him because they, too, had known his generosity of spirit.

The Rev. Dudley Tyng, Ph.D., states in his history of our diocese that in this election Dr. Fiske never received more than a quarter of the votes of the lay delegates to the Convention. That is misleading; for the first two ballots no one received more lay votes than Fiske; in the second ballot he received 48 out of the 170 lay votes. In the third ballot, after significant speeches had been made to advance James DeWolf Perry's nomination, Perry received 81 lay votes but Fiske held on to 46 lay votes; which meant, as I see it, that a lot of other candidates had fallen by the wayside with their votes going to Perry, but Dr. Fiske held on to a loyal group of lay persons. And we should note that in that third ballot, Perry got only 18 clergy votes while Fiske advanced to 23 clergy votes. After the fourth ballot when Fiske had 26 clergy votes, Perry began to move ahead in both the lay and clergy orders. Finally by the seventh ballot Mr. Perry exceeded the requisite number in both the clergy and lay orders, and was elected the Seventh Bishop of Rhode Island.

In that final ballot, the Rector of Saint Stephen's still held on to 19 clergy votes and 30 lay votes. In the best tradition of Episcopalian graciousness, George McClellan Fiske moved, and the Convention voted, that the election of the Rev. James DeWolf Perry, Jr., be declared unanimous.

Mr. Perry had not considered himself “in the running” for this election and was not expecting to be nominated. Edith Weir Perry, after her husband, Bishop Perry, died, recounted that when Perry received the phone call informing him of his election, he seemed to “crumple,” turned white, and said, “It has come to us.”

What happened after the third ballot? Rathbone Gardner, the Senior Warden of Grace Church, spoke again. There is some discrepancy between the account in *The Providence Journal* on the following day, September 22, 1910, and the account of the election in the Special Convention Journal of the Diocese of Rhode Island regarding when and how often Rathbone Gardner spoke on behalf of James DeWolf Perry.

The important thing from the *Providence Journal* story is that in one of those speeches Gardner read a letter from Bishop David H. Greer of New York about Mr. Perry. The Journal writer says that in the letter of Greer, a former rector of Grace Church Providence, “the qualifications of Rev. Mr. Perry were spoken of in words of highest commendation.” The *Journal* writer added that the letter “made an impression” on the convention members.

So, it is clear that Rathbone Gardner arrived at the Special Convention already prepared to promote Perry’s candidacy. After the final speech Gardner made for Perry following the third ballot, Perry made significant gains.

Now we turn to the successful candidate himself, **James DeWolf Perry, Jr.** What kind of person was he, what kind of Episcopalian, and why did he get elected?

Perry was born in 1871 in Germantown, Pennsylvania. An official photo of the thirty-nine-year-old Perry at the time of his election showed the very handsome face of a man born to lead. Although the writing and substance of his sermons and speeches was profound, he was not considered a great speaker. As his age increased his photos revealed the still very

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attractive face of a wise and loving man who could inspire by his very presence. That is the way I felt about him, when I, at age twelve, first met the Bishop in his old age.

Dr. Dudley Tyng wrote, many years ago, the only full-length history of our Diocese. As a person and as a pastor, Tyng was known as a good and kind man, but his antipathy toward the Oxford Movement, the development of ritual, and the whole Anglo-Catholic position was in his book so blatant that there was nothing underhanded about it. Whether his leaving out relevant facts was underhanded is not so clear. His prejudices about black Episcopalians are a more serious matter.

At his best, Tyng's integrity is such as to acknowledge what a great and widely loved priest Dr. Fiske was. Tyng clearly has affection for Bishop Perry personally and admires his ministry in the Episcopate. Tyng regales his readers with the story of how Perry, while a student at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge in the 1890s, led a protest against the use of colored stoles in Chapel. But, apparently not wanting to acknowledge that Bishop Perry was basically anything but a Low-church Liberal at the time of his election, Tyng blames Perry's developing Anglo-Catholic leanings on Dr. Fiske's influence following Perry's consecration. I have never felt comfortable about this. Perry wasn't even "running" in the election; it came as a complete surprise to him. It just seemed to me that this Catholic-minded development could not have happened over night.

Recently I found some help in a draft of an unpublished biography of Bishop Perry researched soon after his death; the biography relies strongly on information provided by the Bishop's widow, Edith Weir Perry. I quote the manuscript which refers to Bishop Brewster of Connecticut:

[I]n 1908, the Order of the Holy Cross, at Bishop Brewster's invitation, held a mission of some two

months in New Haven, spending ten days in each parish. Father Sill and Father Anderson were at Saint Paul's where Jim Perry was the rector, and their solid Catholic teaching proved perfectly acceptable to narrow old Saint Paul's. It was fundamental not ritual and ceremonial. [Perry's] Talks with Father Sill after the evening services were over, opened new vistas of thought and of worship, new depths and new heights.

Why was James DeWolf Perry, Jr., elected? It may have been *partly* simplistic assumptions about churchmanship. Rathbone Gardner, who pushed Perry's election so hard was a long-time Grace Church, Providence, member. Following the 1852 death of Bishop John P. K. Henshaw, who had served simultaneously as Rector of Grace Church, the clergy of that parish had a strong Low and Broad Church orientation which, I'm sure, influenced Gardner.

However, even more than churchmanship, it was the influence of Rhode Island itself and the influence of Grace Church as a parish, which I think tipped the election from one good man, Fiske, to the other good man, Perry.

Bishop Perry's father, James DeWolf Perry, Sr., grew up in Bristol and was descended from that aristocratic line of DeWolfs and Perrys that included Commodore Matthew Perry and Oliver Hazard Perry. James DeWolf Perry Sr. had served as curate at Grace Church, Providence, many years before; he had also served for a few years as Rector of Saint Paul's, Pawtucket. James DeWolf Perry, Jr., had, while at Saint Paul's, New Haven, received calls to serve as rector from both Christ Church, Providence, and indeed from Grace Church; because of his concern for his work in New Haven, he rejected the rectorships of both of those Providence parishes.

Now, picking up on a lead from Fr. Catir, I just point out that Dr. Fiske was not a Rhode Islander, and appears to come from a non-aristocratic Connecticut background.

Soon after the election, a woman confronted Dr. Fiske on the street; I'm using Fr. Catir's version of the story. She said, "Dr. Fiske, you must realize the Holy Spirit was leading." However intended, her comment seems unkind. Again, quoting directly from Fr. Catir's history, "'Holy Spirit nothing,' he unhesitatingly replied. 'It was Rathbone Gardner and his oratory.'" A spontaneous response from the Saint Stephen's Rector at a vulnerable moment! In telling this vignette, Dudley Tyng seems to emphasize the churchmanship conflict. Fiske may well have come to accept the whole thing more philosophically.

My own interpretation is that Dr. Fiske and Bishop Perry were both good and gracious men. From Bishop Perry's widow's testimony they both already had real common ground between them. It's not hard to believe they became good friends. Fiske retired from Saint Stephen's because of health concerns at age 68 in 1918, and died in 1923. Perry, consecrated Bishop of Rhode Island in 1911, retired in 1946 at age 74 and died the next year.

In the issue of *The S. Stephen*, the newsletter of the parish that came out following the September 21, 1910, election a brief article without its own title, gives us *our title* and states:

At the special Session of the Diocesan Convention held at Saint John's Church, Providence, September 21, the Rev. James DeWolf Perry, Jr., Rector of Saint Paul's Church, New Haven, Conn., was elected Bishop of Rhode Island. The Bishop-elect is a cousin of Mr. Andrew R. Perry of our parish. May he Prove a Defender of the Faith, and a real upbuilder of the Kingdom of God.

## **Part Two: The 1952 Election**

With Bishop Perry's retirement in 1946 came the first election of a Diocesan Bishop for Rhode Island since 1910. Three Rhode Island priests in their mid-forties promoted the candidacy of another priest in his mid-forties, a moderate Anglo-Catholic from Baltimore, believing he would bring fresh energy and strong community involvement to the Rhode Island Episcopate. This outsider was no match for Suffragan Bishop Granville Gaylord Bennett, who was elected diocesan in one ballot. Though Bennett was 64 when he was elected, his popularity and long faithful ministry here won the day.

In May of 1952, at our Diocesan Convention, Bishop Granville Gaylord Bennett requested a Special Convention for the election of a Bishop Coadjutor, who would succeed him when he retired. The Convention assented and set November 18 as the date for the convention. The intervening months would be exciting ones for the Diocese

At some point a group of senior clergy meeting with the Rev. John Seville Higgins, M.A., D.D., Rector of Saint Martin's, Providence, in his office encouraged his candidacy. Dr. Higgins had been at Saint Martin's since the summer of 1948. In his memoirs written decades later, John Higgins used a fascinating circumlocution. I must add that this remarkable man, whom I knew well, sometimes used circumlocutions even to his own disadvantage—that is, avoiding giving himself explicit credit for significant accomplishments. But regarding the 1952 run-up to the election he seems to dodge speaking explicitly about a very interesting question. He doesn't actually say "we did some intense campaigning in 1952," but those of us who were around at the time can remember the excitement. What the retired John Seville Higgins wrote was:

We had been in Rhode Island just over four years,  
when Bishop Bennett asked for a coadjutor bishop.

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This raised some uncomfortable questions since, early on, it was evident that my name would be amongst those to be nominated. Today, candidates in episcopal elections openly press their claims and involve themselves in electioneering, just like regular politicians; but in former days, this was not the approved procedure. During the months preceding the election I did my best to keep out of personal involvement, and when the special convention met at the Cathedral of Saint John in Providence, on 18 November, 1952, I gained the clergy vote on the second ballot, and the lay vote on the fourth.

Clergy colleagues already serving here in 1952 remember John Higgins very actively campaigning for that election. At age eighteen I had some idea of it, too.

At least part of the intensity of Dr. Higgins's campaigning certainly resulted from intense opposition by some clergy who did not want him to get the election. Some of those clergy met by special invitation at Saint Stephen's Church, Providence, on the evening of October 24, 1952.

The headlines in a *Providence Journal* story by Robert D. Whitaker, the next morning read, "Episcopal Parley Reported Called To 'Stop Higgins'; Clergymen Refuse to Make Comment After Session on Coadjutor."

Whitaker quoted some of the clergy who left the meeting early, disturbed that not all the clergy of the Diocese had been invited. The conveners of the meeting at Saint Stephen's were the Venerable Anthony R. Parshley, Archdeacon of the Diocese, the Rev. Clarence H. Horner, Rector of Grace Church, Providence, and the Rev. Warren R. Ward, Rector of Saint Stephen's.

At that point in its history, Grace Church could be called the premier low church of the Diocese, and its rector, Dr.

Horner, the premier low churchman of the Diocese. Anthony Parshley, one of the great priests of our Diocese, was a former rector of Saint Michael's, Bristol, and the energetic co-founder of the Episcopal Conference Center. But he was indeed and enigmatic person, sometimes feisty; I would call him a Yankee catholic. His ritual was austere, but he genuflected during the prayer of consecration in the Eucharist, and he instituted daily Eucharist as a foundation for all the summer camps and conferences at Pascoag. Fr. Ward was, I would say, a somewhat reserved, unassuming, devoted pastor and spiritual leader of Saint Stephen's, and a strong Anglo-Catholic.

Some years ago I asked Fr. Catir, who knew Fr. Ward much better than I did, why Fr. Ward would have joined with these two other priests, especially Dr. Horner, to lead opposition to a person whose liturgical practice was very much in the High Church tradition and whose theology was very much in keeping with Anglo-Catholic thought, more so than any previous Bishop of Rhode Island.

After some thought, Norman answered, something like, "I suppose because Fr. Ward saw John Higgins as a 'comer.'" After Fr. Catir explained his use of that word, "comer," I am still digesting it. But I think he meant that Higgins was really a newcomer, perhaps a young lion, promoting himself.

Of course, John Seville Higgins *was*, relatively speaking, a newcomer in 1952. He had arrived at Saint Martin's in 1948, after serving ten years as Rector of Gethsemane, Minneapolis. (By local standards, having been in Rhode Island only four years, he was definitely a newcomer!) He had started as a curate at the strongly Anglo-Catholic parish, Saint Luke's, Evanston, in Illinois. He was a native of England; as an American, he was a mid-westerner. In whatever John Higgins did, he made his presence strongly felt.

Within a month or so after his arrival at Saint Martin's in 1948 he started regular Saturday advertisements in the *Providence Journal* and the *Evening Bulletin*. The first of these announced: "Saint Martin's, the Episcopal Church on the East Side."

He must have gotten some phone calls; after that it was different. Sometimes it said, "Saint Martin's Episcopal Church on the East Side." To be fair: as a newcomer to Providence he may have thought the "East Side" was synonymous with the Wayland Square area. But he continued to use a somewhat populist advertising style. Dr. Higgins wanted to reach people, whatever it took. During the year or so before the November 1952 election, Dr. Higgins's name and work were often in the news. For several weeks it was front page headlines about his sworn testimony regarding a difficult divorce case involving a prominent family in the parish. Another time it was about his efforts to bring conservative minded Episcopalians and the Rhode Island Council of Churches into some kind of theological accord that would make it possible for our Diocese to participate in the Council.

And then there was John Higgins's initiative in establishing Episcopal Charities of Rhode Island. Although he spoke modestly about it in his memoirs, Charities was *his* idea, and he moved it along by gathering others to believe in the idea and to work on it. One of the believers was Bishop Bennett, who endorsed the proposal in the 1951 Diocesan Convention. The Convention approved a campaign to begin in early 1952. A rumor surfaced that at least one rector of a large parish thought Higgins was advancing the Charities idea and the Charities campaign *for the purpose of getting elected bishop*. Possibly other rectors had a similar view.

The Rev. Deacon Paul Pickens, the author of the great history of the first fifty years of Episcopal Charities, pointed

out that all but three parishes presented small offerings to that first, 1952, Charities campaign. Paul Pickens accepted my suggestion that the mindset in the "Stop Higgins" movement may have been one factor influencing that low level of participation. Actually, there is documentary evidence showing that the founding of Episcopal Charities of Rhode Island derived from a long-standing concern of Higgins about social issues which he had actively pursued several years before 1952 as a member of the Episcopal Church's National Council. I recall it was at one of the Council meetings that he got the idea of doing Episcopal Charities here in Rhode Island.

And whatever we might guess about Canon Parshley's reason for co-leading the "Stop Higgins" movement, he did not compromise his integrity as editor of the *Rhode Island Churchman*: in the issue that came out just before the Special Electing Convention, he published a photo of Dr. Higgins with some new, tall, ornate candlesticks standing next to our Saint Martin's font.

A number of Rhode Island clergy joined the battle for this 1952 election: the Rev. Canon Arthur Roebuck, Rector of Saint Paul's, Pawtucket, the Rev. Anthony R. Parshley, Archdeacon, the Rev. Dr. John B. Lyte, Rector of All Saints', Providence, and the Rev. Canon James R. MacColl, Rector of Trinity, Newport, all became candidates. Of these men, three were older than the forty-eight year old Higgins: Parshley, Lyte, and Roebuck; their aggregate total of *years served* in Rhode Island was sixty two years. Parshley, the oldest, at sixty, had served in Rhode Island since 1929.

But in just four years, John Seville Higgins, the Englishmen from the Midwest of the United States had been shaking things up. His opponents may have feared he would upset their comfort even more as bishop. Moreover some may have attributed his activism to bold self-promotion rather

than seeing him in the tradition of notable clergy of London and New York, and, indeed, of our own Bishop McVickar.

About fifteen years ago, two senior priests told me of an encounter between Dr. Higgins and James MacColl, Rector of Trinity Church, Newport, during the campaign, and what MacColl reported to them at the time that Higgins did and said to him. Higgins telephoned MacColl and asked MacColl to meet him at the "island end" of the Mount Hope Bridge. MacColl told Hebert Bolles and Peter Chase at the time that Higgins wanted MacColl to drop out of the race. They told me the words Higgins used with MacColl. To check this out, I wrote to James MacColl, then long retired, and, without feeding the quote I'd heard to him, asked him what John Higgins had said to him. He replied, in a letter to me, "There is no historical value in my giving you any direct quotes of his remarks." MacColl also said, "It was very clear to me that he wanted to win the election."

Dr. Higgins's words, as reported to me by Canon Chase and Father Bolles from MacColl's encounter with the Rector of Saint Martin's were, "I'm going to be the next Bishop of Rhode Island." In a recent conversation John Laird Higgins, the son of Dr. and Mrs. Higgins, informed me that his father came home on the day of the 1952 encounter with MacColl and immediately informed John's mother, Marion Laird Higgins, that MacColl *asked him* to drop out of the election! What wonderful questions these fragments of data leave us with. Dr. Higgins is long deceased, and Canon MacColl died before I took the time to correspond with him again. Perhaps the recollections of both men, though incomplete, presented part of what really happened. These stories certainly indicate the real excitement around this election.

What stands out most uncontrovertibly from MacColl's letter to me are these words: "There is no doubt about a 'Stop Higgins' effort by Tony Parshley, Warren Ward, and Jack

Horner. . . . In my judgment the opposition never really got organized on a person who could win. They knew they were against Higgins but not whom they were for."

It was an intense time. There is no doubt John Seville Higgins wanted to be elected Bishop of Rhode Island. Was that ambition? Yes. But is it not also ambition when a young man in those days told his rector or bishop that he'd like to prepare to become a priest? I say "in those days" because ordination to the priesthood then was usually the doorway to a lifelong career. Or is it not possibly ambition when a deacon or priest in a small parish becomes active on diocesan committees and projects and along the way becomes noticed by lay leaders and clergy of more substantial parishes? Or is it not ambition of a kind when parish leaders inform prospective candidates for rector that their parish is on the edge of becoming one of the great parishes of the Diocese? Is ambition a bad thing when a person has worked diligently "in the trenches" of the front lines of the Church's ministry, has a sense of purpose and vision for the Church's future, and hopes to have a active role in that future? True vocation may be mediated through complex combinations of known motivations—including ambition.

The several Rhode Island "Stop Higgins" candidates gained *some* support in the first two ballots of the Special Convention on November 18, 1952. But the two chief contenders were Dr. Higgins and real outsider, Charles W. Lowry, Rector of All Saints, Bethesda, Maryland, a noted theology professor. Like Higgins, Lowry had extensive national and international experience in his education and ministry. Higgins was serving on the National Council and had been a General Convention Deputy both from Minnesota and Rhode Island.

The voting in the fourth ballot was close: Lowry, 36 clerical and 126 lay votes; John Seville Higgins received 44 Clerical

votes and 129 lay votes and was duly chosen the Ninth Bishop of Rhode Island. Tyng notes that the 1952 election was the first time the Diocese elected one of its own priests. But really Higgins, here only four years, was an outsider: a new voice and a new energy, and a new vision. When I consider that both of these two chief contenders were virtually outsiders and men of wide experience, I am now years later making my own interpretation: Rhode Island Episcopalians now were ready for new blood. The kind of new blood those three priests had sought by nominating an outsider in 1946. Perhaps the negativity of the "Stop Higgins" effort pushed reasonable convention delegates further away from the mostly older men who had tried to keep Higgins out. It was great privilege for me, at Dr. Higgins's invitation, to attend his Consecration at the Cathedral of Saint John on February 4, 1953.

After the fourth ballot in that 1952 Special Convention, Archdeacon Parshley, with traditional Episcopalian graciousness, moved that the election of John Higgins be made unanimous. And so it was. After Bishop Higgins became Diocesan in 1955, he appointed Canon Parshley Diocesan Director of Youth, an appointment of which he was justifiably proud, given the breadth and depth of Parshley's work at the Episcopal Conference Center.

In 1964, when Bishop Higgins came back to Saint Martin's, Providence, to install the Rev. Halsey Howe as Rector of his old parish, Canon Parshley, having been Howe's home parish Rector at Saint Michael's, Bristol, was the preacher. Parshley was in rare form that day. While pointing out that the Bishop who was about to install Halsey Howe as Rector was a former rector of the parish, Parshley digressed and said, "Many people don't realize Bishop Higgins is a very compassionate man!" He was dead right in two ways: Higgins was at heart a compassionate person, but his *style* sometimes prevented

people from recognizing the compassion of his purposes. At other times, when he had a humorous or witty intention, he might speak, perhaps in self mockery, in such a gruff manner that people didn't get it.

Bishop Higgins retired in 1972. After an eight year post-retirement sojourn in Wickford, Bishop Higgins and his wife, Marion Laird Higgins, returned to Providence; Saint Stephen's became their parish. The Requiem celebrations of the Eucharist for both Bishop and Mrs. Higgins were at Saint Stephen's; and they are still commemorated there annually in the prayers for the departed on their year's mind.

At the time of his retirement, John Higgins received many letters of appreciation from prominent people. One in particular came from that former co-leader of the "Stop Higgins!" group, the retired Rector of Saint Stephen's, Warren R. Ward:

June 1, 1972.

Dear Bishop Higgins:

May I take this opportunity to express to you my profound gratitude for your outstanding leadership as Bishop of Rhode Island. Your administrative skill and patience brought life back to a tired Diocese. Your love of souls and especially your genuine concern for the priests and people of your Diocese will be difficult to replace. Only a Bishop of prayer and consecration to Our Lord and His Church could leave such a lasting mark, not only in Rhode Island, but throughout His Church.

Alice and I are most grateful to you for all that you have done for us.

Alice joins me in wishing you and Marion a very happy and peaceful retirement.

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Affectionately yours,

[signed] Warren

P. S. Hope we will see you soon.

**Postscript**

When I gave the lecture on March 27, 2011, my narrative was so long there was little time for discussion at the end. One significant comment was from a listener who was surprised, and perhaps even shocked, that there could be such intense behavior and controversy in church elections. It is likely my manner of delivery added a bit of sensationalism to events involving people I knew very well. In my present revision for publication I have attempted to discriminate soberly in carefully citing all the evidence I have brought to the stories I have told. My extended documentation and expanded version of the lecture may be found in the Saint Stephen's archives.

Nevertheless, the stories remain exciting, and even dramatic. We are here remembering fellow Christians who cared profoundly about what they were doing; the rich variety in each man's character was evident among those who were "running" for office and those who weren't. The beautiful thing about this story is the way in which very many of the participants got beyond the intensity of the moment, in most cases, got beyond acrimony, and went on to work respectfully and diligently with those with whom they had been at variance. Less dramatically, we might say, James DeWolf Perry got beyond his initial dismay about his unexpected election and served as a man of authority, compassion, courage, and wisdom.

The current rector of Saint Stephen's, the Rev. John Alexander, offered the following written comment on my presentation:

To me, one of the really interesting subtexts of this story is the contrast between the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century clergymen who declined episcopal elections (Fiske) or accepted them with great reluctance, in fear and trembling (Perry), and those who by the mid-twentieth century were actively campaigning for them (Higgins). My guess is that the three leaders of the "Stop Higgins" movement shared the earlier mindset despite their differences in churchmanship; and that Higgins's campaigning seemed to them shameless self-promotion. Moreover, the 1952 election seems a sort of halfway house between the earlier worldview and the contemporary setup that positively *requires* the candidates to campaign for election.

I am very grateful to Father Alexander for this perspective and for his invitation to participate in this series.

### **Notes, Bibliography, Conversations, and Other Sources**

I must acknowledge the valued resource I have found in the excellent book, *Saint Stephen's Church in Providence, The History of a New England Tractarian Parish 1839–1964* by Norman Joseph Catir, Jr., published by the parish in 1964. About ten years ago Fr. Catir and I had a four hour long conversation about some of the history we had both studied and some of the history we had both lived through. Although there are some slight differences in the way he and I interpret some of the issues in our story, his research and his ideas have been a great help to me. And Norman and Zulie have become good friends.

*The Episcopal Bishops of Rhode Island, 1790–1980* by John Seville Higgins (privately printed, no date) contains chapters on each Rhode Island bishop from Samuel Seabury to George N.

*150 Years on George Street*

Hunt, including the writers narrative about himself and his episcopate. Available at the Diocesan House 275 North Main Street and at Special Collections of the University of Rhode Island Library at Kingston.

*Rhode Island Episcopalians, 1635–1953, and Supplement, The Years 1952 to 1962* by Dudley Tyng, Ph.D. The opinions of the author are seriously slanted, as observed in the text of the present paper. However it is a valuable source of information which “could have been much larger” the author says, “but for the enormous cost of present day publication”.

“From Corner Lot to City Block: The Story of the Cathedral of Saint John, Providence” pamphlet by John Seville Higgins, Ninth Bishop of Rhode Island; privately printed, no date. Traces the development of the idea and the reality of Saint John’s Church becoming the Cathedral of the Diocese and the development of the Cathedral Block.

*A History of Grace Church in Providence, Rhode Island, 1829–1929* by Henry Barrett Huntington, *Together with an Inventory of Memorials and Funds* compiled by John Hutchins Cady; privately printed, Providence, 1931.

*The Bishop James DeWolf Perry Papers, 1835–1961* Manuscript Group #29 in the Special Collections of the University of Rhode Island Library, Kingston. Contains correspondence about rectorships Perry turned down before being elected Bishop of Rhode Island; contains the unpublished biography of Bishop Perry “Portrait” by the Rev. Canon Allen Evans.

Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island. Manuscript Group 41 and 41.1 in the Special Collections of the University of Rhode Island. Library, Kingston. Includes material from Bishop Perry and significant material from Bishop Higgins.

“One Man’s Journey” by John Seville Higgins; an unpublished memoir by the Bishop, 3 July, 1984; in the Archives of the Diocese of Rhode Island, cited above.

Convention Journals of the Diocese of Rhode Island for the Special Conventions held for electing bishops in 1910, 1946, and 1952.

*Providence Journal* news stories about the episcopal elections of 1910, 1946 and 1952: issues of September 5, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, & 30, 1910; issues of November 16, 19, & 20, 1946; issues of October 24, 25, November 18, 19, & 24, 1952.

The Rhode Island Collection at the Providence Public Library Main Branch has an extensive “card catalogue” file on *Providence Journal* and *Evening Bulletin* citations for many Rhode Island persons and subjects, including a good file on Rathbone Gardner.

Conversations with John Laird Higgins about his father, Bishop Higgins, and about the 1952 election helped my preparation.

The June 17, 2012 election of William Nicholas Knisely was the first time since 1946 that the Diocese of Rhode Island elected a bishop in one ballot.

In a telephone conversation Peter Bennett, son of Bishop Granville Gaylord Bennett, spoke with me about his father and Bishop Higgins whom he knew well.

# RENDERING UNTO CAESAR: A CIVIL WAR SERMON OF HENRY WATERMAN

John D. Alexander

*Address given at S. Stephen's on April 10, 2011*

CONSTRUCTION of the present church building of Saint Stephen's, Providence, overlapped the beginning of the American Civil War. Within six months of the laying of the cornerstone on September 21, 1860, the southern states had seceded and formed the Confederacy; by the consecration of the completed church on February 27, 1862, several major battles had been fought.

Against this turbulent background, parish life in the new building got off to an active start. In his history of the parish, Fr. Catir writes of a significant sermon preached by the rector, Henry Waterman, in the last year of the war:

During the period immediately following the construction of the George Street church, Saint Stephen's parish and its scholarly rector, Dr. Waterman, began to make a deeper impress upon the community than they had formerly exerted. On November 27, 1864, Dr. Waterman preached upon the subject of a Christian's duty to his government. Undoubtedly the Civil War had inspired his choice of topic. So enthusiastically was this sermon received that the leading men of Providence wrote the vestry requesting publication of the discourse.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Norman J. Catir, Jr., *Saint Stephen's Church in Providence: The History of a New England Tractarian Parish 1839-1964* (Providence, RI: Saint Stephen's Church, 1964), 42.

The text of the sermon is available in the John Hay Library at Brown University.<sup>2</sup> On reading it for the first time in the Spring of 2011, I became intrigued: partly because it addresses issues central to my own academic research in Christian social ethics; partly because the more I investigated its context in nineteenth-century Episcopal Church history, the more I came to appreciate the genius of its author. In this essay, then, I offer some background and commentary on Henry Waterman's sermon of November 27, 1864, "The Things that are Caesar's."

# I.

Henry Waterman holds the unique distinction of having served Saint Stephen's twice: as the third rector, from 1841 to 1845; and again as the fifth rector, from 1850 to 1874.<sup>3</sup> A native of Rhode Island, Waterman was born in 1813 and graduated from Brown University in 1831. He began theological studies in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the fledgling seminary just started by John Henry Hopkins and George Washington Doane, two leading High Church clergy of the time. After only one year, however, the seminary closed in 1832 when Hopkins was elected bishop of the newly-formed diocese of Vermont;<sup>4</sup> and Waterman finished his theological studies at the General Theological Seminary in New York. He subsequently served as rector of Saint James's Church in

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's: A Discourse Preached in St. Stephen's Church, Providence by Rev. Henry Waterman, DD. Rector* (no publisher, no date, archives of the John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI).

<sup>3</sup> Except where otherwise noted, my account of the early history of S. Stephen's and the life of Henry Waterman follows Catir, *Saint Stephen's Church in Providence*, 8–42.

<sup>4</sup> William W. Manross, *History of the American Episcopal Church* (New York: Morehouse, 1935), 242; E. Clowes Chorley, *Men and Movements in the American Episcopal Church* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1950), 116–117.

Woonsocket from 1835 until 1841, when he received the call to be rector of Saint Stephen's Church on Benefit Street in Providence.

Saint Stephen's was a new congregation, having been formally organized as a parish just two years previously, in 1839. The first Rector, Francis Vinton, stayed only a year, long enough to lay the foundation stone of the new church building at Benefit and Transit Streets. After leaving in 1840 to become rector of Trinity Church in Newport, Vinton went on to a distinguished career as Professor of Ecclesiastical Polity and Canon Law at the General Theological Seminary in New York. The second rector, George Leeds, arrived in 1840 in time to see the completion of the Benefit Street church; and during his equally short tenure, Saint Stephen's appears to have taken its first steps in an Anglo-Catholic direction. In his address to the 1841 diocesan convention, the Evangelical bishop Alexander Viets Griswold denounced Leeds's practice of reading the prayers sideways to the people, facing the altar, as countenancing what he called "the abominable popish doctrine of Transubstantiation." Whether discouraged by the bishop's criticism or for other reasons, Leeds resigned as rector in 1841, and eventually ended up in the High Church Diocese of Maryland serving as the rector of Grace Church in Baltimore—one of the great Anglo-Catholic bastions of the East Coast.

In September of 1841, Henry Waterman arrived as the third rector of Saint Stephen's at the age of twenty-eight. His principal achievement in the following four years was retiring the debt that the parish had incurred in building the Benefit Street Church. Then, in 1845, Waterman resigned to become rector of Christ Church, in Andover, Massachusetts. When his successor, James H. Eames, resigned after five years in 1850, the vestry extended a call to Waterman to return as rector once again, with the explicit affirmation of its intention to

construct a new and larger church in a more central location. Perhaps attracted by this challenge, Waterman returned to Saint Stephen's, and served as rector another twenty-seven years, until his retirement in 1874.

From the time of Waterman's return, ten years were to pass before the laying of the cornerstone of the new church building on George Street in 1860. Sometime during this period – that is, the 1850s – Saint Stephen's became one of the few racially integrated Episcopal parishes in the United States, when the African-American parish of Christ Church, Providence, disbanded and a number of its members transferred in. The new church building, designed by Gothic Revival architect Richard Upjohn, was under construction almost a year and a half. Bishop Thomas March Clark of Rhode Island presided at its consecration on February 20, 1862, during a swirling snowstorm. Visiting from New York were two notable guests: Francis Vinton, the first rector; and John Henry Hopkins, Jr., son of Bishop John Henry Hopkins of Vermont, with whom Waterman had studied briefly in Cambridge thirty-one years before. John Henry Hopkins, Jr., is known today principally as the author of the Epiphany hymn "We three kings of Orient are," as well as the composer of the tune *Grand Isle*, which accompanies the All Saints' children's hymn "I sing a song of the saints of God." Both his father, Bishop Hopkins of Vermont, and Francis Vinton, appear again in our story.

Later in 1862, on September 17, a youthful parishioner and vestry member of Saint Stephen's, Robert Hale Ives, Jr., was mortally wounded at the Battle of Antietam in Maryland. Before he died on September 27, Ives bequeathed \$5,000 towards the \$20,000 debt the parish had incurred in constructing its new building, with the proviso that the remaining \$15,000 be raised within one year of his death. Moved by this deathbed sacrifice, the parish raised the

necessary funds by April of the following year. Robert Hale Ives Jr. is memorialized in the stained glass window on the north wall, nearest the west end of the church. And two years later, Waterman dedicated his sermon of November 27, 1864, to Ives's memory.

It would seem that Waterman had every reason to preach a sermon fully supporting the Federal cause in the Civil War. At least one member of his congregation, and probably more, had died in the fighting so far. Moreover, the Civil War was being fought not only to preserve the Union, but also to put an end to slavery; and Dr. Waterman then presided over one of the few racially integrated parishes in the Episcopal Church. At the same time, however, certain contrary influences would have deterred him from making any pronouncement on the nation's fortunes whatsoever. In 1854, for example, he had preached at the funeral of Thomas Wilson Dorr—the instigator of the famous episode in Rhode Island history known as the Dorr Rebellion of 1841–42. Yet that funeral sermon makes no mention of Dorr's political career, instead focusing exclusively on his devout piety and faithful religious observance as a communicant of the Episcopal Church.<sup>5</sup> Politics was off limits in the pulpit. To understand why, we need to broaden our scope, and look at attitudes during this period concerning the Church's proper role in social issues.

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Waterman, *The Late Thomas Wilson Dorr: Remarks Made by Rev. Henry Waterman at the Funeral of Thomas Wilson Dorr, December 30, 1854* (no publisher, no date, archives of the John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI).

## II.

In the nineteenth century, two informally organized ecclesiastical parties competed for influence in the Episcopal Church: Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics. They emerged as distinct parties early in the century and remained so well into the twentieth.

While the Evangelicals were, by and large, loyal to the Prayer Book and polity of the Episcopal Church, they emphasized preaching and adult conversions. Also known as the "Low Church" party, they focused on what the Episcopal Church held in common with Protestant denominations such as the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Methodists; they were open to interdenominational cooperation by means of such vehicles as Bible Societies, social reform movements, and even revivals.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, American Anglo-Catholicism went through at least three distinctly identifiable stages in the nineteenth century. The first stage is often referred to as "old-fashioned High Churchmanship," exemplified by such figures as John Henry Hobart, Bishop of New York from 1816 to 1830. In direct opposition to the Evangelicals, the High Church party emphasized those features that set the Episcopal Church apart from the Protestant denominations, particularly its fixed liturgy and bishops in apostolic succession. Where the Evangelicals emphasized preaching and conversion, the High Churchmen emphasized the Prayer Book and the sacraments.

The second stage was Tractarianism, which originated in the Oxford Movement in England in the 1830s, and became increasingly influential in the Episcopal Church from the 1840s on. It is difficult to summarize in a few words how Tractarianism both continued and went beyond the older High Church tradition; but suffice it to say that where the High Churchmen were upholders of the Anglican *status quo*,

the Tractarians began to introduce new ideas and practices—such as private confession and religious orders—retrieved from the past or borrowed from contemporary Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox sources. Henry Waterman was clearly a Tractarian.

And the third stage was Ritualism, which, in the years following the Civil War, began to promote many of the external features of worship that we associate with Anglo-Catholicism today: vestments, incense, altar crosses, candles, daily celebrations of the Mass, Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, invocations of the Saints, prayers for the dead, and so forth. George McClellan Fiske, rector of Saint Stephen's from 1884 to 1919, was a leading representative of the Ritualist movement.

By mid-century, also, a new movement began to emerge, known as the Broad Church. It never really became a church party because it represented more a temper, or a frame of mind, than an explicit theological system or agenda. The Broad Church movement comprised a diverse range of individuals who sought in various ways to move beyond what they saw as the rigidly narrow orthodoxies of both High Church and Low Church, especially in such areas as openness to new scientific discoveries and new developments in biblical and historical criticism. Thomas March Clark, Bishop of Rhode Island from 1854 to 1903, who consecrated our present church in 1862, was an Evangelical who gradually became known as a Broad Churchman in his later years.<sup>6</sup>

Such were the main contours of the nineteenth-century Episcopal ecclesiastical landscape. Early in the century, however, the consensus among *both* the Evangelical and High Church parties was that the Church should not involve itself in politics. In his book *Rhode Island Episcopalians*, Dudley Tyng

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<sup>6</sup> Chorley, *Men and Movements*, 299, 311, 394.

writes that the early Bishops of Rhode Island, Alexander Viets Griswold and John P.K. Henshaw, “both stout Evangelicals, felt it their duty to prepare [people] by conversion to Jesus Christ for life in the world to come. To make a better world here and now was not in their purview . . . Griswold abjured anything that seemed in the least to be ‘politics’.”<sup>7</sup> And Robert Bruce Mullin shows in his book *Episcopal Vision, American Reality* that High Church bishops such as John Henry Hobart of New York were, if anything, even more uncompromising on this issue.<sup>8</sup> Hobart regarded the Church as a divine society founded by Jesus Christ that existed above the secular and political orders. Governments, kingdoms, empires, and even constitutional democracies such as the United States all belong to this world and are destined to pass away, while the Church alone is eternal. To maintain its unity as a divine society with citizenship in heaven, the Church must not allow temporal political disagreements to divide its members on earth. This approach sometimes got Hobart into trouble. For example, when Governor De Witt Clinton died suddenly in 1828, the City Council of New York passed a resolution requesting all clergy to read the text of a specially-composed eulogy from the pulpit. In a letter to the mayor, Hobart explained his refusal to allow his clergy to comply; to read the eulogy could be seen as endorsing Clinton’s political principles, and this could alienate his opponents. The Church’s responsibility, Hobart concluded, was to remain above all such political divisions. Given Clinton’s great

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<sup>7</sup> Dudley Tyng, *Rhode Island Episcopalians 1635–1953* (Providence, RI: Little Rhody Press, 1954), 40.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Bruce Mullin, *Episcopal Vision, American Reality: High Church Theology and Social Thought in Evangelical America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 88–90.

popularity, however, Hobart's refusal attracted widespread condemnation.<sup>9</sup>

As the nineteenth century progressed, however, some Evangelical Episcopalians, particularly in the north, became more open to direct participation in explicitly political movements for social reform, particularly in the areas of temperance and the abolition of slavery.<sup>10</sup> Many Low Churchmen shared with members of Protestant denominations a millennial vision of America as a shining city on a hill—a society called to fulfill God's purposes in the world and be a beacon to the nations.<sup>11</sup> But social evils such as public drunkenness and slavery stood in the way of America's realization of its divine vocation. In England, Anglican Evangelicals such as William Wilberforce had been instrumental in securing the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire in 1807, and their example was influential among their American cousins. Before he became Bishop of Ohio in 1832, the Evangelical leader Charles McIlvaine met Wilberforce on a visit to England in 1830.<sup>12</sup> This millennial vision was, however, anathema to the High Church party, which regarded the Church alone as God's chosen instrument of salvation, and viewed with hostility any suggestion that America as a nation might have a divinely appointed role in God's plan for the world.<sup>13</sup>

Among the major Christian denominations in mid-nineteenth-century America, the Episcopal Church became conspicuous in its refusal to take any public stand on slavery.

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<sup>9</sup> Mullin, *Episcopal Vision, American Reality*, 90.

<sup>10</sup> Mullin, *Episcopal Vision, American Reality*, 78–79.

<sup>11</sup> Mullin, *Episcopal Vision, American Reality*, 85.

<sup>12</sup> Diana Butler-Bass, *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 148–149.

<sup>13</sup> Mullin, *Episcopal Vision, American Reality*, 87–88.

This refusal was based partly on the concern to maintain the unity of the denomination. Between 1845 and 1861, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians all split into northern and southern denominations over the issue.<sup>14</sup> The Episcopal refusal to take a stand also proceeded from the conviction that the Church must be above politics. A *de facto* alliance thus emerged between southern Evangelicals who supported slavery, such as Bishop William Meade of Virginia, and northern High Churchmen who opposed abolitionism—which effectively blocked the Episcopal Church from making any public pronouncement against slavery. Southerners of other denominations visiting or living in the north often attended Episcopal parishes where they knew that they would not have to listen to abolitionist sermons.<sup>15</sup>

Even though the High Church clergy thought that the Church should stay out of politics when speaking from the pulpit or passing official resolutions, they were not above expressing themselves as individuals in print—and some of their opinions do not make for appetizing reading. One High Church leader, Samuel Seabury of New York, grandson of the first bishop of Connecticut, wrote a book defending American slavery as late as 1861, just before the Civil War broke out.<sup>16</sup> And Bishop John Henry Hopkins of Vermont, whom we've already met, published not one but four books between 1851 and 1864 defending slavery on biblical and patristic grounds. His basic argument seems to have been that since neither Scripture nor the early Church Fathers condemn slavery, we have no grounds for condemning it either—a conclusion that

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<sup>14</sup> James Thayer Addison, *The Episcopal Church in the United States 1789–1931* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1951), 191–192.

<sup>15</sup> Mullin, *Episcopal Vision, American Reality*, 200.

<sup>16</sup> Addison, *The Episcopal Church*, 194.

perhaps shows up some of the weaknesses of pre-Tractarian High Church theological method.<sup>17</sup>

The attitudes of the Tractarians on these questions have not to my knowledge received serious study. Even though their Evangelical opponents attacked them by linking the “spiritual bondage of Romanism” with the physical bondage of slavery,<sup>18</sup> we do have indications that some of the younger Tractarians were more apt than their older High Church colleagues to oppose slavery and, later, to side publicly with the Federal Union in the Civil War. For example, the young Tractarian Charles Chapman Grafton, future Bishop of Fond du Lac, was an abolitionist who hesitated to pursue his priestly vocation while completing his law degree at Harvard in 1853 because he thought that as a lawyer he might be able to help end slavery.<sup>19</sup> During the Civil War, Grafton’s bishop, the Tractarian-leaning William R. Whittingham of Maryland, made himself unpopular in his Southern-sympathizing diocese by issuing a series of pro-Union pastoral letters “couched in very trenchant language . . . on the sin and wickedness of rebellion.”<sup>20</sup> As Curate of Saint Paul’s Church in Baltimore, Grafton was obliged to read these letters to his congregation, with the result that he was passed over when the position of Rector became open. The New York “Evangelical Catholic” leader William Augustus Muhlenberg was a committed abolitionist.<sup>21</sup> One of Muhlenberg’s curates, George Hendric Houghton—who unlike Muhlenberg *was* a full-blown Tractarian—founded the Church of the

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<sup>17</sup> Mullin, *Episcopal Vision, American Reality*, 206–210.

<sup>18</sup> Butler-Bass, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 148–149.

<sup>19</sup> Charles C. Grafton, *A Journey Godward of a Servant of Jesus Christ* (Milwaukee, WI: Young Churchman, 1910), 29.

<sup>20</sup> Grafton, *Journey Godward*, 35.

<sup>21</sup> Anne Ayres, *The Life and Work of William Augustus Muhlenberg, Doctor in Divinity*, Fifth Edition (New York: Thomas Whitaker, 1894), 333–334.

Transfiguration, New York, in 1848 and there harbored runaway slaves in the basement, making it a stop on the Underground Railroad. During the New York City Draft Riots of 1863, Houghton brandished a processional cross to fend off a mob of Irish immigrants seeking to attack blacks who had taken refuge in the church.<sup>22</sup> These scattered bits of evidence may reflect a greater openness on the part of the Tractarians to the idea that Christian doctrine develops through history; and this openness may in turn have allowed them to move beyond older High Church attitudes condoning slavery on the basis of a static reading of Scripture and patristic tradition.

The outbreak of the American Civil War in the early months of 1861 forced the Episcopal Church to reconsider its traditional posture of staying aloof from politics. The long-averted schism finally became inevitable on account of the Anglican principle of national churches. The southern dioceses decided that since they lived in states that had seceded from the Federal Union, they must also secede from the Episcopal Church. So they proceeded to withdraw and form their own Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America, which by early 1862 had formally adopted its own Prayer Book, Constitution, and Canons.<sup>23</sup>

This schism of the southern dioceses created a problem for the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, which met in New York in October of 1862. And the deputy in charge of seating and other such arrangements for the Convention was none other than Francis Vinton, who had served as Saint Stephen's first rector in 1839-40, and who had also just

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<sup>22</sup> Zulette M. Catir, *A Parish Guide to The Church of the Transfiguration: The Little Church Around the Corner* (New York: The Church of the Transfiguration, 1996), 10.

<sup>23</sup> Addison, *The Episcopal Church*, 195-196.

attended the consecration of the new Saint Stephen's Church building in February of 1862. Vinton devised the plan of treating the missing southern bishops and deputies as absent on account of insurmountable obstacles to travel. The convention provided seating for them; and every day the names of the missing bishops and delegations were called on the roll. In this way, the Episcopal Church both refused to recognize the schism of the southern dioceses and also made it clear that they were welcome to rejoin the General Convention as soon as circumstances permitted.<sup>24</sup> Most historians of the period agree that it was a brilliant diplomatic move that helped pave the way for the speedy reunion of the two churches after the end of the War in 1865. By contrast, some of the other north-south denominational schisms persisted well into the twentieth century, with one or two remaining even today.

The question remained of what the Episcopal Church was going to say about the War itself. Here the General Convention was divided. A number of bishops and deputies, including many Evangelicals, favored a strong statement unequivocally condemning the southern rebellion and supporting the war policy of the Federal Government. But the older generation of High Churchmen opposed any such statement. During the Civil War, political opinion in the north was never unanimous in support of President Lincoln and the Republican administration. The opposition Democratic Party was divided between War Democrats who supported the war, and Peace Democrats, also known as Copperheads, who favored a unilateral cessation of hostilities by the North to be followed by negotiations with the South. Opposition to the war in the North occasionally turned violent, most notably in the New York City Draft Riots in the summer of 1863. So, the

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<sup>24</sup> Addison, *The Episcopal Church*, 198–199; William W. Manross, *History of the American Episcopal Church* (New York: Morehouse, 1935), 291.

High Churchmen felt that any statement would amount to taking sides with the Republicans against the Democrats—which in their view would constitute an unacceptable intrusion of the Church into politics.

Such a view did not sit so well with many of the younger clergy and laity, who felt that in a time of national crisis some display of patriotism was called for. For example, after the outbreak of the war, George Templeton Strong, a vestry member at Trinity Church, Wall Street, in New York, saw to it that an American flag was flown from the church spire—a mixing of sacred and secular symbols that would have been unheard of in previous decades and certainly anathema to Trinity's sometime rector Bishop Hobart.<sup>25</sup> It is likely that as a leading Tractarian, Trinity's current rector Morgan Dix had already moved beyond the Hobartian High Church position on this issue.

Yielding somewhat to this new mood at the end of two weeks of tortuous debate, the General Convention passed a series of mild resolutions supporting the Federal Union, deploring—but not condemning—the secession of the Southern States, and expressing hopes and prayers for peace and reconciliation. The Bishops issued a somewhat stronger Pastoral Letter drafted by Charles McIlvaine of Ohio. Our friend John Henry Hopkins of Vermont, the senior bishop present, so vehemently objected that he refused to take his seat when the Letter was read to the House.<sup>26</sup> His son John Henry Hopkins, Jr. later wrote that the adoption of this Pastoral Letter resulted from political pressure put on the Bishops by two Episcopalians in President Lincoln's cabinet—William Seward and Salmon P. Chase—a charge that Bishop McIlvaine denied.<sup>27</sup> In any case, with the 1862 General

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<sup>25</sup> Mullin, *Episcopal Vision, American Reality*, 202, 209.

<sup>26</sup> Mullin, *Episcopal Vision, American Reality*, 202–204.

<sup>27</sup> Manross, *History of the American Episcopal Church*, 292.

Convention the Episcopal Church began to move, however feebly, beyond its earlier determination to avoid taking any public stands that might be seen as political. The last word must surely go to the young Phillips Brooks, future bishop of Massachusetts, who summed up his view of the Convention when he wrote soon afterwards: "Its shilly-shallying was disgraceful. It was ludicrous, if not sad, to see those old gentlemen sitting there for fourteen days, trying to make out whether there was a war going on or not, and whether if there was it was safe for them to say so."<sup>28</sup>

### III.

Two years later, on the evening of Sunday, November 27, 1864, Henry Waterman ascended the pulpit to deliver a sermon entitled "The Things that are Caesar's." He was fifty-one years old, and in the fifteenth year of his second rectorate of Saint Stephen's.

The sermon begins with an extended meditation on the Gospel for the Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity, Matthew 22:15–22, in which a delegation of Herodians and Pharisees tries to entrap Jesus by asking whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. This question, Waterman observes, "had a precipice on either side of it, and they felt a malicious confidence that down one or the other he must inevitably fall."<sup>29</sup> If he replied that the tax should be paid, he would be denounced as a renegade and traitor to his people; if he replied that it should not be paid, he would be reported to the Romans for fomenting sedition and rebellion. Perhaps at some level Waterman felt himself to be in a similar dilemma as he embarked upon this sermon. Say too much, and he may well be accused of overstepping the bounds of the pulpit and meddling in politics. Say too little, and he may well be

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Mullin, *Episcopal Vision, American Reality*, 205.

<sup>29</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 9.

accused of lacking patriotism, failing to honor the war dead, and ignoring the crisis facing the nation.

Either way, the Lord's answer points the way forward. "Render, therefore, unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). "These," Waterman comments, "are marvelous words, and . . . an instruction for all time. For God cannot die, nor as long as there shall remain a people on the face of the earth, will Caesar ever die."<sup>30</sup>

His topic, then, will be the duties of the Christian citizen. "What do we owe to our country and to its constituted authorities?" he asks. "What are the 'things of Caesar' which Christ tells us to 'render unto Caesar'?"<sup>31</sup> He then confronts head on the question of whether such a topic intrudes into the forbidden realm of politics. Since Scripture says much about a Christian's civic obligations, it follows that the pulpit is obligated to expound them. Few preachers attempt to fulfill this duty because it is very difficult. But, Waterman says, when he saw the Gospel appointed for the Sunday, "a voice seemed to whisper in my ear, *There is your subject for that Sunday; speak a Christian word on that day, touching the neglected claims of Caesar, the government and magistracy of your native land.*"<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, he continues, the obligations he intends to address are not merely political, but intrinsically and profoundly religious. "What is it, then," he asks, "that we owe to Caesar?"<sup>33</sup>

The first Christian obligation to the civil authority is *obedience*. Moreover, such obedience must be rendered as a religious duty, and not simply out of expedience or necessity. Here Waterman quotes Romans 13:1: "Let every soul be

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<sup>30</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 13.

subject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God: whosoever resisteth, therefore, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation.”<sup>34</sup> Obedience, he continues, is an obligation of conscience rather than an imperative of self-interest. The Christian faith gives the grounds for such obedience by teaching that the civil authority is of divine institution. “Caesar is not an accident of this world, nor a contrivance of this world’s wisdom, but the direct provision and gift of God himself . . . a wrong committed against Caesar is a wrong committed against the Almighty sovereign of the universe.”<sup>35</sup> Submission to the civil authority is therefore an act of obedience to God, while resistance to the civil authority is a sin against God.

These assertions plunge Waterman into the deep water of classical Christian political theory. Against the religious theory of government, he observes, there is another “which regards all earthly magistracy as . . . the invention of men.”<sup>36</sup> Without mentioning John Locke or Thomas Jefferson by name, he describes the Enlightenment version of the social contract by which a number of individuals enter into an agreement with one another to “clothe a selected few with sufficient authority” to maintain some kind of polity.<sup>37</sup> But, he says, if government is nothing more than a mutual contract, a bargain among equals, then the duty of obedience is fatally compromised. People will obey only as long as they believe that it remains in their interest to do so.

Against such eighteenth-century Enlightenment conceptions of the social contract, Waterman proceeds to speak in language that virtually drips with nineteenth-

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<sup>34</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar’s*, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar’s*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar’s*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar’s*, 14.

century Romantic ideas of the state. Society is not a mere aggregate of individuals, held together by external bonds, but a living organism, with its own secret processes of life and development. Waterman may be influenced here by the early nineteenth century English poet, critic, philosopher, and political theorist Samuel Taylor Coleridge.<sup>38</sup> One clue is that at this point he quotes lines from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* that also appear on the title page of Coleridge's 1830 treatise *On the Constitution of the Church and State*.<sup>39</sup>

There is a mystery in the soul of state  
Which hath an operation more divine  
Than breath or pen can give expressure to.<sup>40</sup>

Waterman's point is that this mysterious quality of the body politic reflects the stamp of divine authority. Christians who recognize this authority will see their duty to Caesar as part of their duty to God. They will obey the laws of government not because they have examined them and found them reasonable and wise—for that is to obey no higher authority than one's private opinions—but rather out of obedience to God himself.

The inevitable question, then, is what the exceptions are to this duty of obedience. "What if Caesar should abuse the prerogatives of his high station?" Waterman asks. "What if he should trample on the majesty of that higher law that was meant to bind thrones and cottages alike? What if he should gratuitously invade the birthrights of humanity, that are prior

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<sup>38</sup> On Coleridge's political thought, see David P. Calleo, *Coleridge and the Idea of the Modern State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State, According to the Idea of Each; with Aids Toward a Right Judgment on the Late Catholic Bill* (London: Hurst, Chance, and Co., 1830). Coleridge alters the third line to read: "Than our mere chroniclers dare meddle with."

<sup>40</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 15.

and paramount to all human enactment?"<sup>41</sup> By framing the question in this way, of course, Waterman has already answered it. Indeed there must be exceptions. One weakness of this part of the sermon is that while he strongly asserts *that* God has instituted the civil authority, he doesn't ever quite say *how* God has done so. In his theological training in the 1830s, however, Waterman would undoubtedly have been required to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the writings of the sixteenth century Anglican divine Richard Hooker. And in Book I, Chapter 10, of *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Hooker sets out a classical Christian account of the origins of civil government, as grounded in natural law.<sup>42</sup> According to this traditional understanding, God does not normally institute governments by supernaturally revealing himself to a group of people and directly appointing a ruler. The anointing of David to be king over Israel (I Samuel 16:1–13) is the exception rather than the rule. Instead, God institutes civil authority by building the need for it into human nature itself. So, when human beings act according to their nature as social and political animals by setting up states and governments, they are simply obeying the law that God has written into creation. And this same natural law also supplies the moral limits to governmental authority.

So, Waterman acknowledges, when the claims of Caesar come into conflict with the claims of God, the latter must take precedence. The early Christians knew where their duty lay when pagan emperors demanded participation in idolatrous worship. Sometimes even revolution may be a duty: "There may arise critical emergencies in the body politic," Waterman says, "when the endurance of a people has ceased to be a

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<sup>41</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Volume 1 (Ellicott City, MD: Via Media, 1994), 239–253.

virtue and government can be purified only by violence."<sup>43</sup> But such exceptions are few and far between. Resistance and revolution are justified only in the very last resort, "under the pressure of a terrible, inexorable necessity."<sup>44</sup> And lest there be any doubt, Waterman immediately makes clear his conviction that the secession of the southern states does not fall into this category. "Our country," he continues, "is now writing, in letters of blood, the fearful calamities that proceed from a revolutionary, wicked disobedience to the national will, constitutionally expressed."<sup>45</sup>

Christians must therefore be careful about the alleged claims of conscience. In doubtful cases, Waterman says, the benefit of the doubt must always go to the government. Whenever we are tempted to think that circumstances require us to refuse obedience to Caesar, we must remember that "the plea of conscience has, oftentimes, a wonderful elasticity. It has been used for some scandalous offenses against the peace and welfare of the state."<sup>46</sup> So, the first Christian duty to Caesar is obedience.

A second duty is what Waterman describes as "a respectful treatment both in speech and behavior" — or simply *respect*. Here he points out that while government officials are often less than perfect, they are nonetheless entitled to honor on account of their office. They represent God's dominion and authority upon earth, but not necessarily his holiness. "They are lawful governors, though they may be unworthy men."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 21. There is possibly an analogy here with Article XXVI of the *Articles of Religion*, "Of the Unworthiness of the Ministers, which hinders not the effect of the Sacraments."

At the time of the sermon, President Lincoln had just been re-elected to a second term, soon to be cut short by assassination. The rhetoric of political debate was particularly savage at this time. Lincoln himself was the object of vicious personal ridicule and insult, even from within his own party. Against this background, Waterman pleads for civility in political discourse—qualities that many of us may view as particularly wanting today as well. He adds that such mutual respect need not impede the right of free discussion in a democracy. But political disagreements should be expressed temperately and respectfully. “Whatever may be the character of the magistrate,” he concludes, “it should be remembered that the magistracy is an institution of heaven; and woe be to that land, whose people forget that it is an honorable and reverend thing.”<sup>48</sup>

A third Christian duty to Caesar is the *payment of taxes*; or, as Waterman puts it, “furnishing an honest proportion of the supplies demanded by the state, while executing its high function.”<sup>49</sup> Here Waterman cites Paul’s words in Romans 13:7: “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom.”<sup>50</sup> Interestingly enough, during the Civil War the United States Government instituted the first federal income tax in 1862 to finance the Union war effort.<sup>51</sup> Waterman’s remarks make clear that cheating on taxes was not unknown even then; and he deplores the double-standard of those who are scrupulously honest in their personal business dealings with other

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<sup>48</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar’s*, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar’s*, 26.

<sup>50</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar’s*, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Initially, a 3% tax was imposed on incomes between \$600 and \$10,000, and a 5% tax on incomes higher than that. In 1864, however, this was changed to a 5% tax on incomes between \$600 and \$5,000, a 7.5% tax on incomes from \$5,000 to \$10,000, and a 10% tax on everything higher.

individuals or companies, and yet devise various stratagems to evade or circumvent their financial obligations to the government. Our obedience to Caesar remains incomplete, he concludes, so long as any of our dues to Caesar remain unpaid.

Last but not least, a fourth Christian duty to the civil authority is *prayer*. Here he quotes Paul's First Letter to Timothy, 2:1-2: "I exhort, first of all ... that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for—kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."<sup>52</sup> Waterman stresses the importance of the example those in authority set for the moral tone of the whole society. Yet our leaders are human, and they are surrounded on all sides by temptations. "They need," he says, "a peculiar blessing; a nation's prayers are the channel through which it comes."<sup>53</sup> The public prayers said by the clergy in church for the President and governing authorities need to be supplemented by the personal prayers of all Christian people. "The nation can only secure such a blessing on its knees."<sup>54</sup> Quoting Coleridge's assertion in *Table Talk* that "the American union has no center, and it is impossible now to make one,"<sup>55</sup> Waterman declares that the war, now almost at its end, indeed promises to establish a new center for American politics in the form of a strengthened Federal Government; but such a center can only be sustained by prayer.<sup>56</sup> "In other words," he says, "there must be a religious element in the civil and political, no less than the domestic and social relations, of

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<sup>52</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 31.

<sup>53</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 34.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Complete Works*, Volume 6 (New York: Harper, 1884), 417.

<sup>56</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 34.

a people, or else such relations are doomed to endless fluctuation, and then to ruin."<sup>57</sup> The promise of national unity, purchased at such great cost in a terrible war, will be realized only insofar as "the scattered millions of this land"<sup>58</sup> unite in rendering not only unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but also unto God the things that are God's.<sup>59</sup>

#### IV.

The sermon's great genius is that Waterman moves in it beyond the old High Church taboo on speaking from the pulpit on political matters, yet in a way that remains completely anchored in Scripture and Tradition. Church members are called to let their religion inform their politics by rendering obedience to lawfully constituted authority, paying their taxes, and conducting their political life in a spirit of Christian civility. Conversely, they are called to let their politics inform their religion by bringing the nation and its leaders into their prayers. He thus bridges the gulf between religion and politics from both directions, while respecting the proper autonomy of each in its own sphere. Throughout, he avoids getting caught up in any apocalyptic crusade of the forces of light against darkness. He spells out the Christian's obligations to Caesar methodically and systematically; yet

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<sup>57</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 34.

<sup>58</sup> Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 34.

<sup>59</sup> In this way, Waterman concludes, the American republic will begin to fulfill Milton's ideal of a commonwealth: "one huge Christian personage,—one mighty growth and stature of an honest man, as big and compact in virtue as in body" (Waterman, *The Things that are Caesar's*, 35). While Waterman might be misread here as slipping in Evangelical millennial imagery at the last minute, in the quotation Milton is actually arguing along Aristotelian lines that, like a human body, the body politic is healthiest when all its parts work together harmoniously in pursuit of the same ends ("Of Reformation in England," Book Two, 1641, in *The Prose Works of John Milton*, Volume I, Philadelphia: J.W. Moore, 1859, 17). The analogy thus reinforces Waterman's vision of the state's organic character.

Caesar always remains Caesar and is never allowed to become God. There is no suggestion that the United States is God's chosen nation, or that fulfillment of these obligations will inaugurate God's kingdom on earth.

One troubling aspect of the sermon is that Waterman nowhere mentions the evil of slavery. However, given the expressed views of some of his contemporaries, including his teacher the Bishop of Vermont, perhaps it's as well that he doesn't say anything, lest what he has to say turn out to be embarrassing or even scandalous to us today. Or, on the other hand, maybe he is at heart an ardent abolitionist but feels he is going as far as he dares in this already remarkable sermon. That is a question for further research. Nonetheless, the sermon stands as a wonderful essay in the pastoral task of helping one's parishioners relate their duties as Christians to their duties as citizens—a task that remains just as relevant today as it was in 1864.

**BETHLEHEM IN PROVIDENCE:  
THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY NATIVITY  
AT SAINT STEPHEN’S**

Phoebe Pettingell

*Address given at S. Stephen’s on April 3, 2011*

**W**HEN I FIRST BECAME an associate of the Sisters of the Holy Nativity on the Feast of the Visitation in 1978, their convent in Fond du Lac—then the Motherhouse—had a verse from a hymn framed and hanging on the wall of one room. It read,

But every church is Bethlehem  
Where Mass is said at morn—  
And all who receive His Body adored  
Are far more dear to our Blessed Lord  
Than the town where He was born.

Bethlehem was the focus of the Sisterhood.<sup>1</sup> From 1888 until 1905, the Sisters’ particular Bethlehem was Saint Stephen’s Church in Providence. Even after they joined their founder in the wilds of northern Wisconsin, from three to seven Sisters continued to be stationed in Rhode Island to serve in our parish, advancing the Church’s mission in cooperation with our rectors, until 1982. Their work was always in keeping with the focus of their Order: “the hidden life of Christ in His earthly ministry.” In the words of the Rule, “[Christ] laid aside His Majesty, took the form of a servant, was subject to

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<sup>1</sup> Their original Constitution and Rule (1889) begins: “Called by Divine Providence, in the midst of much suffering to the rest and devotion of Bethlehem, the Sisters of the Holy Nativity, drawn by the love of Jesus, into the charity, humility, spirit of prayer, and missionary spirit of His interior life, receive their Constitution and Rule as the gift of their dear Lord and Spouse.” *Constitution and Rule of the Sisters of the Holy Nativity* (Fond du Lac: P.B. Haber, 1905), 1

His parents in Nazareth, and toiled for thirty-three years in obscurity and loneliness. The glory of His Divine Nature was hidden from the Manger to the Cross: and now He hides Himself in the Blessed Sacrament." In imitating our Lord, the Sisters had vowed themselves to giving up their own wills in the service of others; identifying with the poor and outcast; and abstaining from any desire for recognition of their efforts. Yet they were also inspired in all they did by the joy of that moment at Christ's nativity where shepherds and angels hovered over the newborn baby in adoration for God born among us, to take on our human nature so that we might take on His divine one. The influence of the Order's presence over almost a century helped shape the spiritual life of this parish, its mission and outreach.

#### I.

In common with many remarkable movements in the Church, the Sisterhood of the Holy Nativity was born out of turmoil, misunderstanding and disagreement. After the dissolution of the monasteries, starting in 1536, Anglicanism had no religious orders until 1845, when a desire for their restoration sprang up, almost simultaneously throughout several provinces of the Communion. By the end of the 1880s, at least fifty-three monastic establishments had been started in the Church of England, three in Africa, and twenty-two in the Episcopal Church. Of these, the Sisterhood of the Holy Nativity emerged from a conflict between British and American Church culture and polity. The order's founder, the fourth rector of Boston's Church of the Advent—one of the early outposts of Anglo-Catholicism in the Low Church Diocese of Massachusetts—was Charles Chapman Grafton, one of the remarkable figures of Episcopal Church history, and a great Anglo-Catholic pioneer, whose presence can still be discerned in the history of Saint Stephen's.

Born in 1834, Grafton he had been raised by his distinguished family to be a lawyer, and perhaps a politician. His privileged upbringing gave him a strong aesthetic love of the beautiful; and in later life as a bishop he drew on his family fortune to send several talented young women to study art in Rome. Although he shone at Harvard Law School, he came under the influence of the Tractarian Movement while attending the Church of the Advent, and was increasingly drawn towards the priesthood. Ordained by the High Church Bishop of Maryland, William R. Whittingham, he remained in that diocese for a decade, serving for a brief time as chaplain to an order of nursing deaconesses. As Curate of Saint Paul's Church, Baltimore, during the Civil War years, he was effectively in charge of the parish during the Rector's prolonged illness, and was obliged to read the Bishop's pro-Union Pastoral Letters to his Confederate-sympathizing congregation. The tension between his parishioners' views and his own Abolitionist principles anticipated future conflicts in his ministry involving tangles of complex and sometimes opposed loyalties. Unsurprisingly, he was passed over when the position of Rector became vacant in 1865.

Feeling more and more drawn to found a men's religious order, Grafton went to England in 1865 on Bishop Whittingham's advice to study the monastic communities already in existence there. His sojourn in England was prolonged when, in 1866, he became one of the co-founders of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist (SSJE), or Cowley Fathers, together with Richard Meux Benson and Samuel Wilberforce O'Neill. Intending to found a "modern" order that could respond to the pressing needs of their Church and society, the Cowleys eschewed what they regarded as the romantic antiquarianism of several previous attempts at male religious communities where, for example, monks wore

conspicuous medieval habits. Instead, the Cowleys went about in plain cassocks so as not to call attention to themselves. During the five years that he remained in England, Grafton became closely acquainted with the life and work of several of the prominent women's religious orders, including the Society of Saint Margaret (SSM) founded in 1855 by John Mason Neale. His experience in such Anglo-Catholic slum parishes as Saint Peter's, London Docks—conducting preaching missions, and working together with the Sisterhoods to establish schools, orphanages, and rescue houses for “fallen women”—so shaped Grafton that for the rest of his life he practiced holy poverty, giving away any money he received.

In 1870, the Church of the Advent in Boston wanted to call some Cowley Fathers to take charge of the parish. The Bishop of Massachusetts, suspicious of this proposed incursion of foreign priest-monks into his diocese, initially obstructed the plan. But by 1872 a compromise was worked out clearing the way for Grafton's election as Rector, and the licensing of English Fathers to assist him.

In Boston, Grafton reconnected with the erstwhile Superior of the deaconesses he had known in Baltimore, and possibly earlier in his native city. Adeline Blanchard Tyler was a Boston widow who had trained at Kaiserwerth in Germany where the deaconess movement had been revived. She had eventually returned to Boston, ultimately to take charge of the newly-founded Boston Children's Hospital. But in 1871, diagnosed with cancer, she implored Grafton to persuade some of the Sisters of Saint Margaret to come and take over, so that this work might continue. Immediately, Sister Teresa, who had trained as a nurse at the Children's Hospital in London's Great Ormonde Street, transferred to Boston to reorganize the infirmary and start a training school for nurses. In 1873, two more Sisters joined her, Grafton

accompanying them on the voyage from England. This small community attracted American vocations, and before her death in 1875, Mrs. Tyler became an Associate. Grafton served as their chaplain.

Episcopal bishops were increasingly suspicious of this influx of religious orders—especially since so many of these nuns and monks were subject to Superiors back in England. Grafton soon found that his position involved conflicts between his obligations to his Bishop and his vows of obedience to his Religious Superior, Father Richard Meux Benson. Inevitably, tensions built up between the Cowley house in Oxford and its American members. From the beginning, the Society had difficulties attracting or retaining American vocations. Grafton had always believed that American religious houses ought to be autonomous. Benson had never drawn up a promised constitution for the order, but instead insisted on running it on his authority alone. The conflict came to a head in 1882, when Grafton tried to dismiss one of his English assistants, only to have his orders countermanded by Benson. Grafton tried to persuade the English Cowleys that they really couldn't run a parish outside their province; Americans resented the notion of "a foreign power" controlling their institutions. Benson disagreed, and tried to deprive him of his position as rector, stirring up dissension so that the Advent's congregation divided and took sides between the English and American SSJE clergy. Grafton writes in his memoir, *A Journey Godward*, that this conflict of loyalties brought on the worst crisis of his life. At length, he felt compelled to resign his membership in SSJE. At this time, the Church of the Advent had been located on Bowdoin Street, while a new, larger church building (the current church) was under construction on Brimmer Street. An agreement was finally reached by which the parish split in two, the English Fathers remaining at the old church which

they renamed Saint John the Evangelist, and Grafton and his supporters moving to the new Church of the Advent.

## II.

As soon as they heard of their chaplain's resignation from Cowley, the Sisters of Saint Margaret met in chapter and the English Sisters, who outnumbered the newer American members, requested Grafton's resignation as their chaplain. Sister Catherine Louise, an historian of the American branch of SSM, writes:

There were sixteen Sisters in the Chapter at this time, and two of them immediately withdrew from Saint Margaret's. A third followed them a few days later, and the three formed a new Community under Father Grafton. Seven of the fourteen Novices dropped off, one by one, during the following week to join the new Community."<sup>2</sup>

The members who left Saint Margaret's were all Americans. They promptly elected one of their number as Superior—Mother Ruth Margaret Vose, who was, like Grafton, an old Bostonian. One of her uncles was president of Harvard, while her brother Henry was a judge on the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Already fifty-six when she made her life profession to the Sisters of Saint Margaret, she found herself, only a year later, becoming Mother Foundress of The Sisterhood of the Holy Nativity. Our own Doctor Fiske described her as "keen in intelligence, wide in reading, and a sterling character,"<sup>3</sup> while Grafton observed that she looked at things from the Divine side, recognizing the God-given in everyone and in all situations. Interestingly, for a time her cousin served as a minister at Providence's Beneficent Church. She was

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<sup>2</sup> Sister Catherine Louise, SSM, *The House of My Pilgrimage: History of the American House of the Society of St. Margaret* (privately printed, 1981)

<sup>3</sup> *The S. Stephen* #7, June 1910

considered a remarkable enough person to warrant an obituary in *The New York Times* when she died in 1910.

Mother Ruth Margaret and Grafton together composed the first Rule of the Order, the main focus of which remains enshrined in the Associate's Rule to this day. As an Order devoted to identification with "the interior life of Our Lord," who suffered humanity's brokenness throughout his earthly ministry, and witnessed division among those he came to save, the Sisterhood of the Holy Nativity began in turmoil and heartbreak from a once-united family. It took many years for the wounds among the various parties to heal. The official history of the Church of the Advent, published in 1944, does not mention the work of the Sisterhood of the Holy Nativity there, nor the departure of the Sisters of Saint Margaret to the Bowdoin Street parish for the remainder of the time Grafton served as rector. Yet ultimately the scars faded. Both Sisterhoods flourished and expanded, as did the work of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist in Boston. In time, both SSJE and Saint Margaret's accepted the wisdom of making the American religious houses autonomous. As for Grafton, though he never again belonged to a religious order, he continued to consider himself bound to his vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. All his life, he dreamed of founding another monastic community for men, always considering that his true vocation was to promote the Religious Life in the Episcopal Church.

An ardent believer in American democracy, Grafton held that "the popular self-government of the monastery laid the foundation of the European democracy."<sup>4</sup> Religious orders elected their own superiors for a term, and could call for their resignation if their leadership violated the Rule. He considered this particularly true of Sisterhoods because,

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Chapman Grafton, *A Journey Godward* (Milwaukee, The Young Churchman Co, 1910), 87.

“being essentially laic in their origin, [they] have always preserved the privilege of self-government,”<sup>5</sup> unlike male orders where many of the monks were priests and thus subject, in varying degrees, to the bishop and other ecclesiastical authorities. Grafton writes, “Universal suffrage and the privilege of the ballot existed from very early times in conventual houses. The principle of triennial elections was introduced about the thirteenth century.”<sup>6</sup> Just as he abhorred pew rents—The Advent had entirely free seating—he also disapproved of dividing monastic communities into “Choir Sisters”—those from upper and middle class families—and “lay sisters” who were generally servants, seamstresses and the like. With few exceptions, these early orders, both in the United States and England had made such social distinctions. They were “active,” rather than contemplative—running hospitals, schools, orphanages and “penitentiaries” (not prisons, but places to turn one’s life around) for women who had worked as prostitutes and now wanted to learn skills that would allow them to live respectably. In his autobiography, Grafton describes how what he had learned from the mistakes of previous Sisterhoods shaped the mission of SHN:

It is obvious that the sisterhood that is given to education must have different rules and order from a sisterhood that is given to nursing. So, too, if the sisterhood tends to the contemplative side of life, it cannot be engaged in the work of hospitals, orphanages, or penitentiaries. It seemed to me in England that this principle was overlooked. When, therefore, I was called by divine providence to found a community, I limited the scope of its work.

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Chapman Grafton, *Vocation or The Call of the Divine Master to a Sister's Life* (New York, E. & J.B. Young, 1886), 78

<sup>6</sup> Grafton, *Vocation*, 79.

We needed, I believed, in our Church, a community in which there would be large room for the cultivation of the spiritual life, and which would especially be given to aid the parochial clergy, and have as a chief object the winning of souls. So in the community of the Holy Nativity, a society was begun whose constitution does not allow of the sisters taking charge of institutions... The sisters were to give themselves especially to the cultivation of the interior life; they were to keep up as far as possible a perpetual intercession before the Blessed Sacrament. They were to cultivate, especially, charity amongst themselves, humility, and a missionary spirit, or zeal for souls... They were to be given especially to communion with the inner life of our Lord."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the Sisters of the Holy Nativity became missionaries not in foreign lands, but at home in the parish community. They were organized to assist parish clergy teach both children and adults, make visits to parishioners, train altar guilds, but, above all, model the Christian life of humility, selflessness and loving service to individuals so that those touched with their presence might be encouraged to ask for the grace to become more Christlike. As with the Cowley Fathers, their original habits were not remarkably distinguishable from ordinary female streetwear of the late nineteenth century. They wore a black gown and girdle, without a scapular. The "coif" resembled a Victorian bonnet, and was covered by a veil. In addition to the vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, each newly professed member of the order made

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<sup>7</sup> Grafton, *A Journey Godward*, 103–104.

an additional promise to live in charity with the community.<sup>8</sup> As anyone who has spent much time in one will know, this is the hardest vow to keep—to restrain feelings of annoyance and impatience with people one must encounter throughout the day, every day.

Through the missionary efforts of his new Sisterhood among the poor of all races, half the adult baptisms in the Boston area Episcopal churches from 1884–1887 took place at the Church of the Advent. The lifestyle in their houses was designed to reflect their complete identification with the needy. The Rule states:

The daughters of the Society, being betrothed to their Lord, cast their lot with His. They are spouses of the Poor Man, and share His privations. His poverty becomes, in consequence of their union with Him, a real condition of their lives.<sup>9</sup>

Ministry to African-American populations became a particular need in the years following the Civil War, especially in large cities. What with a shortage of black clergy and the fact that few members of most of these congregations could afford to make them self-supporting, many were doomed to failure, or, at best, the necessity of living off the crumbs from a wealthier congregation's table. Anglo-Catholics of Grafton's school felt that just as church seating should be free, parish membership should include all sorts and conditions, and be racially integrated. Everyone must be made welcome.

Obviously, some people living in the world might wish to share some of the Sisterhood's vocation and mission without being able to give up so much. Lay women (as well as clergy)

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<sup>8</sup> "Other Beloved I Have... Meet The Sisters of the Holy Nativity", an unpublished paper by The Sisters of Saint Agnes.

<sup>9</sup> *Constitutions and Rule*

*150 Years on George Street*

were permitted to become “associates of the Sisterhood.” Some were wealthy benefactors, such as Grafton’s own sister, Mrs. Minot, and their financial support made the establishment of the Sisterhood possible. Many others were working women. All associates, to this day, wear a small silver Jerusalem cross with the word “Bethlehem” inscribed in Hebrew. We are advised to be buried with it as a sign of our union with the Order. Associates live by a modified rule which does not take vows, but helps attune our spiritual and daily lives with those of the Sisters. We follow the Order’s emphasis on “the interior life of our Lord,” and serve our parishes, with a particular emphasis on encouraging, praying for, and assisting the clergy, while practicing charity in thought, word and deed. In addition, we help support the Order with donations. Especially in the years of greatest expansion of the Order’s work, Associates assisted in various projects with their labor and their intercessions. An early associate, Margaret Peabody, helped the Sisters found a lending library which continued to operate through the 1980s, and furthered the education of many of us. Long retreats were held for associates that they might progress in their goal of coming nearer “the hidden life of Christ.”

## III.

One of Grafton’s friends, the Reverend Doctor George McClellan Fiske, was called to be rector of Saint Stephen’s in 1884. Almost immediately he began petitioning his friend to let the new sisterhood establish a house in Providence. Already, the order had grown to the point that several Sisters had established houses in Baltimore, Illinois and Kansas. The Bishop of Milwaukee requested some of them, while the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin in New York wanted two to come help in the mission work of that parish. When, in 1888, Grafton resigned the Advent to devote more time to promoting the religious life in the Episcopal Church, he

accepted Doctor Fiske's suggestion, and moved with the Sisters to Rhode Island to assist Saint Stephen's. A motherhouse was found for the Sisters. Their first "real convent was provided by an Associate: a fine old family mansion"<sup>10</sup> at 385 Benefit Street, near the old church—now the Baker Street Playhouse. The order immediately set to work at Saint Stephen's on George Street. The presence of the Sisters, as well as Grafton's, soon began to supply the parish with new energy and resources.

That summer, the small Diocese of Fond du Lac in northeastern Wisconsin elected Doctor Fiske as their second bishop. After much prayer, he declined the call, but persuaded his supporters there to consider his friend, Father Grafton, who had also been on the ballot. In the second election, Grafton won.

In 1889, Grafton departed for his consecration in his new diocese, leaving the majority of The Sisters of the Holy Nativity to work under the direction of Doctor Fiske at Saint Stephen's. The Providence nuns trained women of the parish to make exquisitely embroidered vestments and linens, equipping the altar guild with the requisite skills to maintain Catholic ceremonial. The Sisters' own vestments were soon in demand at other Anglo-Catholic parishes across the country. They also made wafer altar bread—a ministry they continued until sometime in the 1980s. This was a labor of love, requiring perfect timing, or otherwise the hosts would scorch and be ruined. In summers, laboring over a red hot stove made it a truly purgatorial work of penance. Each host was beautifully embossed with some symbol of Christ: I vividly remember an exquisite Lamb of God. Symbolic art has always been a feature of the order. Each Sister used to wear an ebony cross on which was inlaid a silver Latin cross intertwined

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<sup>10</sup> From "The Diary of the Sisterhood of the Holy Nativity".

with an “S”—representing the serpent in the wilderness Moses cast in bronze and lifted up so that the Children of Israel would be healed from snakebite in the desert (Numbers 21:9). Jesus uses this image to show how he will conquer death, so that we, too, might be saved (John 3:14–15). A crucifix would still have been too provocative for street wear at this time. Artistic decoration of churches—“the Beauty of Holiness”—has always been important to this order, as it was to their founder. The Providence area Associates were more than generous in financially supporting the ongoing beautification of the George Street church.

By helping design educational programs to help children and adults better understand the faith, the Sisterhood aided Doctor Fiske in realizing what were known as the “Six points” of Anglo-Catholicism:

1. Altar lights (i.e., candles)
2. Eucharistic vestments
3. Wafer bread (rather than slices or rounds of soft bread)
4. The mixed chalice (water and wine, rather than wine alone),
5. East-facing celebrations (the priest facing the altar, rather than positioned sideways as was then the custom).
6. The use of incense

By 1894, Saint Stephen’s was among the rare places in the Episcopal Church to have all six.<sup>11</sup> Doctor Fiske and the Sisters established another Anglo-Catholic marker through the presence of a devotional society imported from England—the Holy Nativity Ward of the Confraternity of the Blessed

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<sup>11</sup> Norman Joseph Catir, Jr. *Saint Stephen’s Church in Providence: The History of a New England Tractarian Parish 1839–1964* (Providence, Saint Stephen’s Church, 1964), 77.

Sacrament (CBS). Grafton had brought the CBS back from England in 1867. The choice of Saint Stephen's ward name was an obvious tribute to the Sisters. Though fallen dormant several times, it has been revived over and over again, so that it is currently active once more. Another Catholic marker graced the convent. Because the Mother Foundress's failing health often prevented her from attending the daily Eucharist, Bishop Grafton permitted reservation of the Blessed Sacrament at the Providence convent—perhaps the first Anglican religious house to do so in North America.

There were many mission efforts. Despite the rule's admonition against running schools, hospitals and other institutions, Sisters Katherine and Faith spent two years working in a Providence orphanage until Grafton decided the strenuous work was taking a toll on their health. Many requests to found schools had to be turned down. In 1891, the Sisters held a service in a barn in Thornton, Rhode Island. This was the beginning of a new parish for mill workers there, the Church of the Holy Nativity, which, in its early years operated as a mission of Saint Stephen's. At this period, the parish contributed \$10,783.21 to missions and charities, while spending only \$9,912.66 for its own budget.

The presence of the Sisters in Providence encouraged religious vocations. Father Catir notes that in 1895, a member of Saint Stephen's, Nathaniel Wheaton, was admitted as a novice into the Order of the Holy Cross. Two years later, Miss Agnes Lydia Gifford joined the Sisters,<sup>12</sup> while many women of the parish continued to become Associates. By 1892, Sister Katharine Edith was professed; a mere two years later, she became "Assistant Superior," taking some of the weight off the shoulders of the increasingly ill Mother Foundress.

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<sup>12</sup> Catir, *Saint Stephen's Church*, 79.

The Sisterhood has always encouraged a variety of talents, the better to aid their vocation of parish and community ministry. It was soon discovered that in addition to her capable administrative gifts, Sister Katharine Edith wrote well. She published works for Sunday School children, and even edited some of Grafton's books. Her inspiration led to a tradition among the Sisters, who were well-known for their Sunday School curriculum. I encountered these fine catechetical materials when I worked as a Sunday School superintendent in the late 1970s.

#### IV.

*The Living Church* of April 23, 1904, announced that "arrangements have been completed by which the Mother House of the Sisters of the Nativity [*sic*] is to be removed from Providence, R. I., to Fond du Lac, and the transfer will be consummated at an early day."<sup>13</sup> Several Sisters had been present in Fond du Lac since 1890, working among the Oneida Indians and helping at the Cathedral. These Wisconsin Sisters could see that Grafton's own ceaseless work was wearing him down, and they wished to provide a home where they could look after him. They were already ensconced in a house several blocks from the cathedral. Extensions were added so that the entire Sisterhood might be in residence from time to time, while the front of the house provided a suite of rooms for the bishop on the first floor, and a beautifully carved chapel on the second.

By a two-thirds majority, the Chapter of the Order ultimately voted to relocate to the Motherhouse from Providence to Wisconsin. No doubt many of those whose work had centered at Saint Stephen's and its chapels found leaving Providence difficult. However, part of the Rule states:

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<sup>13</sup> *The Living Church*, April 23, 2004, 879.

Have no choice about place or work. Jesus, our Spouse, meets us everywhere. Be willing patiently to “tarry at Jerusalem,” or go as a Missionary to any part of the earth. God left Heaven for Calvary.<sup>14</sup>

When they departed for Fond du Lac, on June 5, 1905, local Associates filled their private train car for the journey with fruits and flowers, while the community’s doctor provided them with medical supplies to last for years. To the relief of our congregation, it was agreed that two nuns would remain behind in Providence to continue the work here. By this time, the order had established missions at two other local parishes: the Church of the Messiah and Saint Paul’s; along with Saint Mary’s, East Providence, as well as the abovementioned congregation in Thornton.<sup>15</sup> The Associates raised money for a new convent at 63 John Street. However, Doctor Fiske envisioned an even larger dwelling in closer proximity to the church. By 1907, 117–119 George Street was purchased for the Sisters, and in 1908, “Mother Katharine Edith,” now Vice Superior, came out from Fond du Lac to preside over this move, and the dedication of the new house. Unfortunately, just then, the bank that held the money failed. Fortunately, Saint Stephen’s men’s group, the Saint Andrew’s Guild, together with the Associates were able to make up most of the loss. A layman from Newport provided the remainder.<sup>16</sup> This new home was, for a time, described as a “House of Rest for Ladies”: it served women who needed light nursing while convalescing from illness, as well as visiting Associates who needed a place to stay. The house also provided the Order with space to operate their lending library.

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<sup>14</sup> *Constitutions and Rule*

<sup>15</sup> Catir, *Saint Stephen’s Church*, 94.

<sup>16</sup> *The S. Stephen*, #8, August 1907.

With the Sisters now living across the street from Saint Stephen's, mission work proceeded apace. The parish annals of 1908 recorded ninety-one guild meetings, 145 instructions and lectures, and 145 parochial calls—all greatly assisted by the Sisters, who were particularly diligent in their labors among racial minorities in the Providence area. They made their visits in pairs, in imitation of the Apostles. Among their various accomplishments were a Bible class and guild for factory girls at Olneyville, and purchasing children's shoes and collecting clothes for out-of-work families in tenements. When an Associate provided them with a summer cottage at Tiverton, Rhode Island, they found it made a wonderful retreat house. They were also able to offer poor city children a week or two by the sea.

Back in Providence, the Sisters there continued to thrive and enrich our parish. As the entire Order grew, our local house was able to maintain between four to seven sisters in residence. Several future Mother Superiors honed their leadership skills at Saint Stephen's. Until his own health began to fail, Bishop Grafton continued to visit frequently, ministering to those who continued to assist at Saint Stephen's. He also preached and offered programs at this parish. For instance, after his 1903 trip to Moscow, our congregation was the first to hear about his ecumenical experiences there on his return, and he brought the Sisters some presents from Orthodox nuns in Russia. An Associate, Mrs. Lyman Klapp, had donated Saint Stephen's magnificent painted reredos as a memorial to her distinguished husband. She also provided some or all of the money for the carved oak reredos at Saint Paul's Cathedral in Fond du Lac. Her gift may explain why half the carvings on the latter represent the Proto-Martyr. Just as the Sisterhood gave so much to our parish, in turn, our parishioners contributed generously to the work of the bishop and the order in his frontier diocese.

## V.

On May 28, 1910, Mother Foundress Ruth Margaret died in Fond du Lac after many years of failing health. Father Fiske held a requiem mass for her at Saint Stephen's on May 31, and hung her portrait in the Great Hall of the Guild House. Bishop Grafton too had long spells of sickness, brought on by exhaustion and also the progression of his diabetes. The death of Mother Ruth Margaret affected him profoundly. They had been close friends and colleagues throughout much of his ministry. After a six-month decline, he entered the greater life on August 30, 1912. At the memorial Mass in Providence, Doctor Fiske recalled his many visits to the parish as a bishop, and illustrated the spirit which had animated all his work. In one anecdote, he told the story of a priest who had come to our rectory during one of Grafton's visits, complaining of his grievances against his parishioners. "Finally, turning to the Bishop, he said; 'Now, Bishop, what can one do with a people like that?' With warmth and energy, the Bishop replied, '*Love them, love them.*'"<sup>17</sup> Doctor Fiske adds that despite many persecutions, "He was a forgiving spirit. He bore no malice nor hatred in his heart. Love was the power with which he waged the battle of life."<sup>18</sup>

This spirit of Christian love demonstrated through evangelism and missionary activity was reflected in the order he founded. Their mission has ever been to befriend and hearten those least regarded by society. Among the "guests" at the Convent of the Holy Nativity in Fond du Lac, I often met homeless wanderers, and for years an intellectually challenged young woman lived and worked to the best of her ability with the Sisters. Though she had taken no vows, she

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<sup>17</sup> "A Sermon Preached at Saint Stephen's Church, Providence, by the Rector, the Rev. George McClellan Fiske, D.D., *Bishop Grafton* (privately printed, 1913), 29.

<sup>18</sup> Fiske sermon, *Grafton*, 29.

was nevertheless treated as a member of the community family. I vividly recall one of her birthday parties, which was celebrated with great festivity and gladness. The Sisters love hosting parties for others. Grafton once described this as the “joyful unaffectedness of their living and ministrations...the Godgiven grace of nature *not repressed but transformed* by religion.”<sup>19</sup>

In the following years they expanded their work from the Providence area and Wisconsin to Newport; Portland, Maine; Baltimore; Philadelphia; New York City; Kingston, New York; Bay Shore, Long Island; Los Angeles; and Santa Barbara. By 1922, the Sisterhood was the largest Anglican order in the United States. It found new ways of serving through the Great Depression and two World Wars – through prayer, through service to those in greatest need, in teaching the Faith and in assisting the work of Anglo-Catholic parishes.

In 1946, the land on which the Sisters’ George Street house stood was cleared to build Brown’s Wriston Quadrangle. They then removed to Cabot Street, and eventually to 134 Power Street. The parish supported the Sisters there in residence. However, the money allotted to them had not increased since before World War II, despite the significant proportion of work they accomplished for the congregation . Understandably, the Providence Sisters were having a hard time making ends meet,<sup>20</sup> and this pittance reduced them to a starker poverty than their vows required. Father Catir’s history mentions that Fr. Thompson finally increased their support to \$900. When Father Ward became rector in 1949, he further raised their support from the parish to \$2,500 a year

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<sup>19</sup> From an unpublished manuscript at Bethlehem by the Lake, Ripon, WI.

<sup>20</sup> Catir, *Saint Stephen’s* , 161.

so that they could confine their efforts entirely to Saint Stephen's.

The memorable Sister Veronica was in charge of the Providence house during these years. By the late 1960s, Sister Boniface, a feisty German refugee, took over. Brown and Pembroke students of that era fondly remember being welcomed to lavish teas—many subsequently became associates, and some priests. A short time later, Sister Boniface was recalled to Fond du Lac for a Chapter meeting, the previous Mother Superior having died suddenly, and found herself the new Superior. I first met her in the mid-1970s. For many years thereafter, she was a source of counsel, spiritual refreshment, strength, and much cleansing humor to me and many others.

Even after the Motherhouse moved to Fond du Lac, the Providence house remained the next largest center of the Sisters' work for sixty years. Then, in the late 1960s, the Order purchased a beautiful retreat center in Santa Barbara, California, overlooking the Pacific. Gradually, the center of gravity switched to the West Coast. The majority of new vocations and associates tended to be Californians as Saint Mary's Retreat House turned into the training ground for Novices. Still, the Providence House hung on until the early 1980s. In addition to their work at Saint Stephen's and with the Campus Ministry at Brown, the Sisters became closely involved with the Church of the Epiphany. But by then, in common with many religious orders, their numbers began to dwindle. Liturgical forms, experiments with the habit they wore, together with changes in the Church and society caused tension within all Anglican monastic communities, and not a few Roman Catholic ones as well. Vocations kept coming, but even life-professed sisters were prone to leave suddenly. This, combined with increases in the cost of living, forced the leadership to start closing branch houses. In 1983, a falling out

between the Sisters and the Rector, Father Connor, ended their association with Saint Stephen's, and convinced the Reverend Mother it was time to end their work in Providence—one hundred years after the Order was first founded. In 2008, when the Holy Cross monastery in Santa Barbara burned to the ground during a drought, the sisters leased Saint Mary's Retreat House to their brother order. At the time of writing, most of the remaining Sisters live at another of their former summer cottages, Bethlehem by the Lake in Ripon, Wisconsin. Their future is uncertain. On a visit I paid there in the summer of 2011, they poured out reminiscences, and eagerly asked questions about life in Providence and at Saint Stephen's, which remains very much in their thoughts and prayers.

It is too little known that the Anglo-Catholic movement has been a force for social reform from the 1840s through the Civil Rights movement and into the present day. In our tradition, it has never been enough to sit back and ignore those who are unfortunate, or to merely dispense anonymous charity out of our spare change without getting our own hands dirty. Saint Stephen's continues to exemplify what the Sisters helped bring about here. The New Year's Dinner and the work of the Epiphany Soup Kitchen are only the latest manifestation of a commitment to welcome all comers as Christ himself. But, thanks to the Anglo-Catholic movement, we likewise witness to encountering Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament; in understanding that Prayer is the greatest work any of us can do; and that the health of the Church calls us to devote ourselves more and more to it as Christ's Body on earth. We have been blessed in this parish through our formation by Bishop Grafton and the Sisters of the Holy Nativity, who taught us (in a paraphrase of Grafton's words) to pray that "*the Glory of God may be the chief end of our lives, the Will of God be the law of our conduct, the Love of God be the motive*

of our actions, and [Christ's] Life be the model and mold of our own." In the good bishop's words, "Press on the Kingdom."

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