

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Southern White Clergyman, the Freed People, and the Nineteenth-Century Episcopal Church

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Abstract

Reared in antebellum South Carolina, Peter Fayssoux Stevens was a typical white southerner until Reconstruction. He came of age in the 1840s and 1850s and fought for the Southern Confederacy during the Civil War. Before his military service commenced in 1861, he was ordained a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church (PEC) of North America. After Appomattox, as Black communicants deserted white Protestant churches in droves, Stevens believed that they might return to the PEC if they could choose their leaders and decide fundamental questions affecting their parishes. When white church leaders refused to follow Stevens's recommendations, he left the PEC and joined the Reformed Episcopal Church (REC). He spent more than four decades after the war ministering to Black communicants. Although Stevens was not a champion of civil rights, his career provides a compelling case study of a white clergyman who evolved from a traditional southerner and zealous Confederate soldier to an advocate for Black communicants in the church.

Keywords: American Civil War; Black communicants; Confederate States of America (CSA); Protestant Episcopal Church of North America; Reformed Episcopal Church; Reconstruction; segregation; South Carolina; Peter Fayssoux Stevens

The Reverend Peter Fayssoux Stevens, a white clergyman from South Carolina, devoted much of his life and career to nurturing the spiritual well-being of Black South Carolinians following the American Civil War. Yet his early life did not suggest an affinity with people of color. He came of age in the Protestant Episcopal Church (PEC) of North America during the 1840s and 1850s and attended the Military College of South Carolina, (the Citadel). As superintendent of the Citadel in January 1861, he led a corps of cadets in firing on a ship, the *Star of the West*, dispatched by the Buchanan administration to resupply Union troops stationed at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. This action is often viewed as the first shot

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fired in the Civil War. Later that year, the Protestant Episcopal Church of South Carolina ordained Stevens as a priest. After Union troops arrived in the state, Stevens enlisted in the Confederate States Army. He resigned his commission in 1862 and served as a rector in churches near Charleston.¹

Stevens was upset with the church's decision to usher Blacks into the church without affording them the authority to choose their own leaders. He petitioned for a change. Repeatedly rebuffed, he left the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1875 and joined the Reformed Episcopal Church (REC), becoming a Bishop in 1879. He worked with Black parishioners in the South Carolina Low Country for more than four decades, until shortly before his death in 1910. Stevens was vitally interested in education, which led to his appointment as school commissioner of Charleston County in 1878. In 1890, he briefly served as a professor of mathematics at all-Black Claflin College in Orangeburg. Stevens helped to create the Bishop Cummins Training School for Blacks who were intent on becoming leaders in the Reformed Episcopal Church.²

Background and Early Life

Peter Fayssoux Stevens was born on June 22, 1830, on his father's sugarcane plantation near Tallahassee, Florida, an area widely considered to be a frontier at the time. Young Peter – called Fayssoux or sometimes Pete – only vaguely remembered his father, Clement William Stevens. Originally a resident of Jamaica, Clement Stevens resided in Charleston before shipping out to sea, where he reputedly fought pirates. In 1819, he married Sarah Johnston (sometimes spelled Johnstone) Fayssoux, the daughter of a renowned medical doctor, Peter Fayssoux, who served as chief physician for the southern department in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. Clement Stevens moved his wife and family to Florida to raise cane as well as children on a sugarcane plantation he called, for unknown reasons, 'Chapofó'. As Peter F. Stevens recalled, the plantation was located 'exactly midway between Tallahassee and Monticello'. Nine children followed in rapid succession: Clement (1821), Helen (1822), Henry (1824), Anne (1826), James (1827), Martha (1829), Peter (1830), Barnard (1832) and Mary (1834).³

A Seminole Indian uprising terrorized whites living near Tallahassee when Fayssoux was 5 years old. Fearing future attacks, Clement Stevens sent his wife and his children to Pendleton, a small town in Upstate South Carolina, to live near Anne Fayssoux, Sarah's sister. Anne's husband, Barnard E. Bee Sr, was a prominent South Carolina attorney and politician who later settled in the Republic of Texas. Commenting on Clement

¹Gary L. Baker, *Cadets in Gray: The Story of the Cadets of the South Carolina Military Academy and the Cadet Rangers in the Civil War* (Columbia, SC: Palmetto Bookworks, 1989), pp. 12-13, 23-24, 27, 36. See also Peter Fayssoux Stevens, 'Autobiography', unpublished manuscript, n.d., handwritten copy, DuPre-Moseley Family Collection, the Kennedy Room of Local History and Genealogy, Spartanburg County Public Libraries, Spartanburg, South Carolina, especially pp. 93-94.

²Marion Stevens Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', unpublished manuscript, December 1979, typescript copy, Citadel Archives, pp. 17-20; 'Colored Ministers Will Act at Rev. P.F. Stevens Burial; Body of Leader in Reformed Episcopal Church, Who Died Sunday, Will Sleep in Magnolia', *The State* [Columbia, South Carolina], January 11, 1910, n.p.

³Stevens, 'Autobiography', pp. 1, 11. See also Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', p. 3; Hurley E. Badders, *Remembering South Carolina's Old Pendleton District* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2006), pp. 78, 80.

Stevens's decision to stay in Florida without his family, Peter Stevens wrote that 'We never saw him again.' The elder Stevens died in Florida in 1836.⁴

Sarah Stevens, now a widow, settled permanently in Pendleton so that she could rear her children close to their relatives. Although Anne and her family moved to Texas, many other kinfolks lived in Upstate South Carolina. Fayssoux grew up surrounded by aunts, uncles and cousins. He attended St. Paul's Episcopal Church and learned to love the church and its traditions.⁵

Accepted into the Military College of South Carolina, also known as the Citadel, when he was 15 years old, Fayssoux was thrilled to experience the big city of Charleston. He trained to become an engineer as well as a soldier. The young man was invigorated by his time at the Citadel. 'Those were great days', he reminisced toward the end of his life.⁶

The South Carolina legislature established the Citadel, officially known as the South Carolina Military Academy, in 1842 in reaction to a slave revolt planned by a formerly enslaved man, Denmark Vesey, in 1822. The school initially included the Arsenal Academy in Columbia and the Citadel Academy in Charleston. The goal was to train young men to defend the state against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Quelling slave rebellions was a special focus.⁷

The first class of 1843 enrolled only 20 cadets, but the numbers grew each year. Peter Fayssoux Stevens arrived on January 1, 1846, and graduated with honors in November 1849. Although he was among the youngest students, Stevens led his class from the beginning of his enrollment. During his second year, he became a sergeant major, the first cadet to hold that distinction. Within six months of his promotion, he was appointed assistant instructor of mathematics. By the time he graduated from the Citadel on November 20, 1849, the school had 55 students enrolled. Stevens ranked first in his class.⁸

⁴In his autobiography, Stevens only briefly commented on the financial condition of his family after he, his mother and siblings left Florida. (He never mentioned the number of enslaved persons laboring at Chapofo before their departure.) Stevens observed that 'Col. James Gadsden [a family friend] became the Executor of my father's estate and the guardian of us all. Whether he was in Florida or in Charleston I do not know, but he certainly was a friend to the widow and the fatherless. At first his remittances to Mother were larger but after the first two or three years they amounted to about \$300 a year. Mother lived within the narrow income teaching us all to hate debt and giving us an education nevertheless.' Stevens, 'Autobiography', p. 26. Earlier in his autobiography, Stevens included a passing reference to 'Old Maurice the colored driver', but he did not mention other enslaved persons. Stevens, 'Autobiography', p. 23. The implication was that the enslaved persons who labored at Chapofo were sold to provide funds for the estate. Other than Maurice, the family apparently did not own enslaved persons in Pendleton. Nonetheless, Stevens and his family were well acquainted with slavery, and were not averse to the institution during the antebellum years. See also Badders, *Remembering*, pp. 79, 82; Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', pp. 3-4.

⁵Stevens, 'Autobiography', pp. 21-22, 37-38. See also Badders, *Remembering*, pp. 81-82.

⁶Stevens, 'Autobiography', p. 39. See also Badders, *Remembering*, p. 85; Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', p. 4.

⁷See, for example, Baker, *Cadets in Gray*, p. 1; John Peyre Thomas, *The History of the South Carolina Military Academy, with Appendices* (Charleston, SC: Walker, Evans & Cogswell Co., 1893), pp. 12-34. On Denmark Vesey, see, for example, David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey: The Buried Story of America's Largest Slave Rebellion and the Man Who Led It* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), pp. 115, 149; Michael P. Johnson, 'Denmark Vesey and his Co-Conspirators', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 58.4 (October 2001), pp. 915-76.

⁸*Official Register of the Officers and Cadets at the South Carolina Military Academies*, The Citadel Archives & Museum, <https://citadeldigitalarchives.omeka.net/items/show/3>, 1849. See also Stevens, 'Autobiography', pp. 58, 62; Thomas, *History*, pp. 34-64.

In keeping with his education, Stevens served as an engineer on the Newberry and Laurens Railroad in Upstate South Carolina upon graduation. A railroad construction frenzy commenced in the United States during the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s, and soon locomotives replaced canal travel as Americans' transportation of choice. Stevens worked on the railroad company's construction of the Yorkville line.⁹

Despite the opportunities afforded him by railroad work, Stevens was unhappy. He sought to return to teaching. In January 1852, he was elected first lieutenant and professor of mathematics at the Arsenal Academy in Columbia. The following year, he transferred to the Citadel in Charleston to teach mathematics and astronomy. He was 23 years old.¹⁰

In 1855, Stevens married Mary Singletary Capers, the youngest daughter of Methodist Bishop William Capers of Columbia.¹¹ The union lasted almost four decades, and it was a happy one. The Stevenses eventually produced nine children, four of whom survived to adulthood. The twin girls Helen (whom the family called Nell) and Annie both suffered from cholera. In Stevens's words, 'Little Annie succumbed to its power' while Helen survived. It was not uncommon in the nineteenth century for children to die of diseases that were eradicated in a later era. A family member later speculated that the other children may have suffered from diphtheria.¹²

Stevens decided that his life's ambition was to become the first Citadel graduate to serve as superintendent – a position later called 'president' – of the institution. Even as he strove for that distinction, he 'felt himself called to the ministry of the Gospel'. Stevens studied Scripture while he continued his work at the Citadel.¹³

His conversion occurred at a propitious time. As Stevens recalled in his old age, 'About this time a great revival of religion took place in Charleston.' Many young men felt that God had called them to the ministry. While he attended a church service with a friend, Stevens's call came during the service.

Old Dr. Manly, a Baptist minister, addressed us. In [the midst of] his discourse, he pointed to me and said, 'Young man you are called to preach the gospel and you must not resist the spirit of God.' I was then a professing Christian and a member of the Church. My pastor, Mr. Shanklin, had more than once pressed the subject of the ministry upon me, but I had rejected it. I felt now that this was God's call and that if I resisted it, he would take his spirit from me. And then and there, I surrendered myself to God.¹⁴

Despite his conversion, Steven could not abandon his old life. 'I made my determination known to my pastor the Rev. Mr. Denison, who had succeeded Mr.

⁹Stevens, 'Autobiography', pp. 62-63.

¹⁰Thomas, *History*, pp. 66, 67.

¹¹Stevens, 'Autobiography', pp. 65-67; See also Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', pp. 4-5. Mary's brother, Ellison Capers, later became a brigadier general in the Confederate Army as well as a college professor and Episcopal Bishop of South Carolina from 1894 until his death in 1908. Colonel O.J. Bond, *The Story of the Citadel* (Richmond, VA: Garrett and Massie, 1936), pp. 52-53.

¹²The quote is found in Stevens, 'Autobiography', p. 67. See also pp. 68-69. Stevens's family life is recounted in Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', pp. 3-5.

¹³The quote is found in Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', p. 5.

¹⁴Stevens, 'Autobiography', pp. 68-69.

Shanklin at St. Peter's, and began immediately my studies, [though] I did not resign my position in the Academy, for I had no other means of support for my family.¹⁵

Even as he studied for the ministry, Stevens steadily rose through the ranks at the Citadel, earning a promotion to captain and becoming a professor of belles-lettres, ethics, and French in 1856. By 1858, Stevens oversaw the Department of Mathematics and Astronomy. He achieved his goal in 1859, when he became the Citadel superintendent at age 29. A board of visitors' resolution on September 8 of that year unanimously appointed Stevens the Citadel superintendent and promoted him to the rank of major.¹⁶

Stevens's promotion came as war clouds appeared on the horizon. After decades of angry threats and escalating tensions, the people of the North and South were ready to take up arms. Secession, and perhaps civil war, seemed imminent. Political leaders in South Carolina believed that they were in an untenable position. Only one remedy was available. The state formally seceded from the Union on December 20, 1860, prompting a prominent anti-secessionist lawyer, James L. Petigree, to quip, 'South Carolina is too small for a republic and too large for an insane asylum.'¹⁷

Matters had been building throughout 1860, especially after the Republican candidate, Abraham Lincoln, captured the presidency in November. That same month, Major Robert Anderson of the United States Army assumed command of Union forces in and around Charleston. To forestall an expected attack, on December 26, 1860 Anderson moved his small garrison force from Fort Moultrie, a fortress on Sullivan's Island across the harbor from Charleston, to Fort Sumter, a sea fort constructed on an artificial island in the harbor. He raised the Stars and Stripes above the fort, clearly indicating that Sumter remained federal property even as South Carolinians insisted that all federal installations belonged to the state.¹⁸

When the United States government dispatched a ship, the *Star of the West*, to resupply Fort Sumter, Major Stevens led a corps of Citadel Cadets to fire on the ship from nearby Morris Island. The *Star of the West* turned around in the harbor and departed. For this act, Stevens is remembered as the man who ordered the first shots to be fired in the Civil War.¹⁹

The Civil War

He remained on duty, eventually commanding the Stevens Iron Brigade when the garrison at Fort Sumter surrendered in April 1861. As commander of the Palmetto Guards and other volunteers, he directed the batteries on Cummings Point, on the

¹⁵Stevens, 'Autobiography', p. 69.

¹⁶Stevens, 'Autobiography', p. 70. See also Badders, *Remembering*, pp. 90-91; Thomas, *History*, pp. 85, 86, 92-93, 98, 99, 100; Baker, *Cadets in Gray*, p. 5.

¹⁷Petigree is quoted in many sources. See, for example, Douglas R. Egerton, *Year of Meteors: Stephen Douglas, Abraham Lincoln, and the Election that Brought on the Civil War* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), p. 230. See also Charles H. Lesser, *Relic of the Lost Cause: The Story of South Carolina's Ordinance of Secession* (2nd edn; Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), p. 3.

¹⁸The story of Major Anderson's decision to move from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter is discussed in many sources. See, for example, David Detzer, *Allegiance: Fort Sumter, Charleston, and the Beginning of the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), pp. 55-64.

¹⁹Baker, *Cadets in Gray*, pp. 12-13, 23-24, 27, 36; Bond, *The Story of the Citadel*, pp. 49-52; Detzer, *Allegiance*, pp. 55-64, 100-101, 148; Stevens, 'Autobiography', pp. 93-94.

northeastern edge of Morris Island, during the firing. Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard, the southern leader who led the Fort Sumter bombardment, later issued orders 'To Major Stevens, of the Military Academy, in charge of the Cummings Point batteries. I feel much indebted for his valuable and scientific assistance, and the efficient batteries under his immediate charge.'²⁰

During the summer of 1861, as the newly established Confederate States of America (CSA) scrambled to field an army, the Citadel contributed to the war effort by testing ordnance. In June, Major Stevens and his brother-in-law, Colonel Ellison Capers, tested a 24-pound smooth-bore cannon, which had been rifled to improve accuracy. After transporting the gun on the South Carolina railroad near Summerville, they fired 100 shots before the gun burst.²¹

Later that summer, Stevens believed that his services in the military were no longer required. After achieving his ambition to serve as the superintendent of the Citadel, he felt called to the Episcopal ministry. Like many southerners, he still hoped that a war with the North would be short. Accordingly, he resigned as superintendent on August 8, 1861, and traveled to Columbia to be ordained as a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church. Afterward, he took charge of the Black Oak Parish in Pinopolis as well as Mt. Pleasant parishes near Charleston.²²

The Board of Visitors for the Citadel reluctantly accepted the superintendent's resignation. At its August 1861 meeting, the board adopted a resolution acknowledging that it 'cannot sever the relation which has so long existed between them [the Board of Visitors] and Major Stevens, without bearing testimony to the marked ability and fidelity with which he had discharged his duties while connected with the Institution'. Offering their best wishes, the Citadel officers believed that Stevens would never again don a military uniform.²³

He believed it as well, but events soon changed his mind. Several months after the fall of Fort Sumter, the Federal Army attacked sites along the coast of the newly created CSA. In November 1861, the Federals launched one of the earliest amphibious operations of the war against Port Royal, South Carolina. After Port Royal fell, Reverend Stevens faced a difficult choice. Although he was a man of God, he believed that he owed a duty to the Southern Confederacy to resist the invaders who had arrived in the South Carolina Low Country. 'I had hardly begun my ministerial work when Port Royal fell and the United States troops invaded [South Carolina] from that point', he later wrote. 'I had been educated a beneficiary or State Cadet. My duty, I felt, was to defend my State or rather help to do so.'²⁴

The month after he was ordained, Stevens offered his services to Governor Pickens, who immediately accepted. The governor commissioned the former Citadel superintendent a colonel in the Confederate States Army on November 21, 1861, directing Stevens to organize a mixed command of infantry, cavalry, and

²⁰Beauregard's order is quoted in Bond, *The Story of the Citadel*, p. 52. See also Baker, *Cadets in Gray*, p. 36.

²¹Bond, *The Story of the Citadel*, p. 52.

²²Stevens, 'Autobiography', p. 100. See also Badders, *Remembering*, p. 97; Baker, *Cadets in Gray*, p. 41; Thomas, *History*, p. 259.

²³The resolution is quoted in Baker, *Cadets in Gray*, p. 41. See also Thomas, *History*, pp. 110, 111.

²⁴Stevens, 'Autobiography', p. 101. See also Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', pp. 6-7. For more on Port Royal, see, for example, James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), pp. 370-71.

artillery. Colonel Stevens asked the governor's wife, Lucy Holcombe Pickens, if he could name his unit in her honor, the Holcombe Legion. Rumor had it that she had financed part of the operation with her personal funds. She readily assented to his request. The unit's motto was 'It is for the brave to die, but not to surrender.'²⁵

The Holcombe Legion initially camped on the Ashley River to protect rail lines coming into Charleston. The unit saw little action during the fall and winter of 1861–62, although the men occasionally skirmished with Union gunboats. In the summer of 1862, the legion was dispatched to Virginia. There the men participated in some of the bloodiest fighting in the Eastern Theater during 1862, including the First Battle of Rappahannock Station (sometimes called Waterloo Bridge, White Sulphur Springs, Lee Springs or Freeman's Ford), the Second Battle of Manassas (Bull Run), the Battle of Boonsboro Gap (South Mountain), and the Battle of Sharpsburg (Antietam).²⁶

Stevens was wounded twice in 1862, at Second Manassas and Sharpsburg. As Mary Stevens recounted in a letter she wrote to a brother-in-law, 'At Manassas a spent ball hit him in the stomach, knocking him off the pommel of his saddle and tearing through his overcoat which had been folded in front of his saddle.' In addition, 'a fragment of shell hit him on the knee, another scored his back'. Yet Colonel Stevens refused to leave the field. Less than three weeks later, the colonel 'was wounded in he left arm but did not leave his command; a grapeshot struck his shoulder but it was not broken'. According to Mary's account, her husband was a hero by leaping 'into the enemy's gun position and turning the gun against them'.²⁷

When the army retired to winter quarters, Colonel Stevens considered his reasons for fighting. He had joined the army to repel northern invaders in South Carolina. Now that he was serving in Virginia, he resigned his commission – refusing a promotion to brigadier general – and returned to South Carolina. 'My purpose, or rather, reason for resigning was this: I was a Minister of the Gospel, but educated in the Military Academy of the State', Stevens wrote in a letter almost 40 years later. 'I felt that when the state was invaded it was my duty to defend her and therefore volunteered when Port Royal fell and it looked as if South Carolina was to be immediately overrun. Had my command been kept in the state I should never have resigned but being ordered to Virginia and having finished the campaign against Maryland, when we were ordered into winter quarters, I resigned and returned to my Parish.'²⁸

²⁵Georganne B. Burton and Orville Vernon Burton, 'Lucy Holcombe Pickens, Southern Writer', *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 103.4 (October 2002), pp. 296, 309. See also Badders, *Remembering*, pp. 108–109; Baker, *Cadets in Gray*, p. 41; Bond, *Story of the Citadel*, p. 52; C. Eugene Scruggs, *Tramping with the Legion: A Carolina Rebel's Story* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2006), p. 87; Stevens, 'Autobiography', pp. 101–102.

²⁶Ralph E. Luker, 'The Crucible of Civil War and Reconstruction in the Experience of William Porcher Dubose', *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 83.1 (January 1982), p. 53; Stevens, 'Autobiography', pp. 102–103. See also Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command* (New York: Scribner, 1998 [1940]), pp. 83–84; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 341; Scruggs, *Tramping with the Legion*, pp. 116–17.

²⁷Mary Stevens is quoted in Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', p. 7. See also Baker, *Cadets in Gray*, pp. 41–42; Bond, *Story of the Citadel*, p. 52; Scruggs, *Tramping with the Legion*, p. 146; Luker, 'The Crucible', pp. 54–56; Stevens, 'Autobiography', pp. 103–106.

²⁸Peter Fayssoux Stevens to Nell [the family's name for Stevens's daughter, Helen Capers DuPre], April 14, 1902, Correspondence 1902 file, DuPre-Moseley Family Collection, the Kennedy Room of Local History and Genealogy, Spartanburg County Public Libraries, Spartanburg, South Carolina.

He became the rector at churches in the St. John's/Berkeley area near Charleston, which included several large slave plantations. Years later, an eyewitness recalled seeing Reverend Stevens, when 'he was always entertained at the various plantations and was always welcomed most warmly'. Stevens 'ministered not only to the masters in his congregation but to their large bodies of slaves', demonstrating that the reverend believed that ministerial duties extended to anyone, regardless of skin color.²⁹

The South Carolina Episcopal Church through the Civil War

Stevens's decision to minister to enslaved persons was not unprecedented. The Protestant Episcopal Church had a long history in South Carolina, and the church's relationship with the institution of slavery was complex. Well before the American Revolution, the Church of England, the forerunner of the Episcopal Church, had developed alongside the institution of slavery. South Carolina enacted its first slave code in 1696 defining slaves as chattels. A decade later, the Church of England became the official church of the colony, a legal designation that remained in effect for more than seven decades.³⁰

With the creation of a new state constitution in 1778, the Church of England was disestablished as the state religion. Remnants of the church eventually became the Episcopal Church of the United States. Inside South Carolina, the church was organized as the Diocese of South Carolina. Representatives of the diocese elected Robert Smith the first Bishop of South Carolina in 1795.³¹

During the antebellum era, the church avoided the strife and division that plagued other Protestant denominations. Indeed, it was the only major denomination that did not split along the north/south axis in prewar America. The relative unity owed much to the origins and characteristics of the institution, especially its adherence to common forms of worship and the general homogeneity of Episcopal parishes. The denomination attracted affluent, upper-class Americans, many of whom were well educated and active in the higher echelons of business and government. Their wealth was especially obvious in the southern states, where many plantation owners were Episcopalians. One scholar estimated that in the antebellum period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, two-thirds of planters who owned 100 or more slaves in the South Carolina low country identified with the Episcopal Church.³²

²⁹The quotes are found in Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', p. 8. See also Scroggs, *Tramping with the Legion*, p. 147; Baker, *Cadets in Gray*, p. 42.

³⁰Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 68, 96.

³¹Albert Sidney Thomas, *A Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina, 1820-1957* (Columbia, SC: R.L. Bryan Company, 1957), p. 12.

³²Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 165-66. See also Mark Mohler, 'The Episcopal Church and National Reconciliation, 1865', *Political Science Quarterly* 41.4 (December 1926), p. 568; William Kaufman Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders in the Mid-Nineteenth Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), pp. 2-3, 53-54; Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 129-31. Because figures on religious affiliation are not always exact, the numbers should be used with caution.

Whereas ministers in other denominations sometimes brought their views on heated political subjects, including slavery, into the pulpit on Sunday, most (although not all) Episcopal ministers preferred to ignore slavery, at least publicly. Church leaders emphasized the timelessness of their religion and the purity of Scripture. Wallowing in the politics of the day ignited passions and accomplished little to benefit the church, especially because some Episcopalians, including bishops, owned slaves while other communicants opposed the peculiar institution. Any discussion of slavery was bound to expose deep fissures within a parish.³³

The Protestant Episcopal Church of antebellum South Carolina was filled with paradoxes. While most church leaders ignored slavery from the pulpit, the South Carolina church actively recruited Black members. Many Episcopalians believed, in the words of Acts 17.26, that God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of earth'. The passage suggested that all people were God's creatures and equal in His eyes. Accordingly, church doctrine dictated that everyone should receive the Gospel, regardless of skin color. As Bishop Christopher Gadsden of South Carolina put it, 'the rich and the poor in the house of God meet together'.³⁴

In the antebellum South, the church's position on ministering to the Black race appeared to contravene the region's strict laws and customs on slavery. Church leaders had to tread carefully. Episcopalians published catechisms for use in teaching Blacks the word of God, but a state law forbade anyone to teach enslaved persons to read. How could Black South Carolinians, free and enslaved, use a catechism or read the Bible if they were illiterate? The tension between keeping enslaved persons ignorant and in bondage while simultaneously teaching them religious values of the Christian church initially appeared to be a problem, but the answer came in bifurcating religious and legal duties. A 1712 law enacted by the South Carolina colonial legislature, 'An act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes and slaves', allowed slaves to be baptized in the church, but professions of Christian faith would not affect a slave owner's property rights in enslaved persons.³⁵

Moreover, church leaders carefully distinguished between allowing religious instruction for slaves and promoting social equality of the races or hinting at emancipation. The former would be permitted, but the latter was to be avoided at all

³³See, for example, T. Felder Dorn, *Challenges on the Emmaus Road: Episcopal Bishops Confront Slavery, Civil War, and Emancipation* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), pp. 87-88. Scholars have debated the reasons why many Episcopalians did not engage on the slavery issue, with some commentators arguing that it was a matter of the denomination's ideology - 'the church was meant to be in this world, but not of it' - while others have contended that it was simply a pragmatic concern. The church was still recovering from reverses dating back to the American Revolution. Stirring up the slavery issue, especially when so many of the planter elite attended the Protestant Episcopal Church in the South, was a recipe for strife and division. See, for example, Thomas Strange, 'Alexander Crummell and the Anti-Slavery Dilemma of the Episcopal Church', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 70.4 (October 2019), pp. 768-70.

³⁴Bishop Gadsden is quoted in Dorn, *Challenges on the Emmaus Road*, p. 33. See also Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr., *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), pp. 7-8.

³⁵Frederick Dalcho, *An Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina: 1670-1820* (New York: Arno Press, 1970 [1820]), pp. 94-95; Edgar, *South Carolina*, p. 293. See also Luther P. Jackson, 'Religious Instruction of Negroes, 1830-1860, with Special Reference to South Carolina', *The Journal of Negro History* 15.1 (January 1930), pp. 75, 82.

costs. In 1835, Bishop Nathaniel Bowen wrote a pastoral letter that walked this fine line. 'The religious instruction of our slave population is one of deep and vital interest', the letter stated. 'Forming as we do, a large majority of the slave holders in the low country, we . . . are bound to inquire into the duty and means of affording such instruction to our slaves, as we shall make them wise unto salvation.'³⁶

During the antebellum years, white southern Episcopalians recruited Blacks – some free Blacks and some slaves – into their churches in impressive numbers. In some South Carolina Episcopal churches, the number of Black communicants approached the number of whites. Between 1840 and 1850, white communicants in the South Carolina Episcopal Church increased from 1936 to 2965 while Black communicants grew from 973 to 2247. In 1856, 628 of the 873 persons confirmed in the church were Black. In 1860, 2960 of the 6126 communicants were Black.³⁷

It was common practice to find whites and Blacks worshipping together, but they were not stuffed into the same pews breaking bread and sharing fellowship. Whites rented their pews with a financial contribution to the church while Blacks occupied the galleries or were shuffled off to adjoining rooms. Blacks and whites also approached the communion rail separately. No one confused mixed worship services with social equality.³⁸

Owing to the presence of many slaveowners in Episcopal parishes, the church refused to embrace abolitionism. Yet the mission to minister to Blacks created confusion. Should Blacks be welcomed into white churches, or should they form their own separate churches? Even the efficacy of proselytization was open to debate in some quarters. Did teaching enslaved people the values of the church undermine the social order or ensure that enslaved men and women knew their place and stayed there peacefully?³⁹

The paradoxes of the Protestant Episcopal Church allowed individual clergymen a measure of freedom to decide how they addressed slavery. Although the institutional church was divided, individual ministers expressed their preferences in sermons and writings. Most ministers chose not to discuss the issue. A few, such as the Reverend Thomas Pyne of New York, openly promoted abolitionism. In a sermon on Thanksgiving Day in 1835, Pyne urged Americans to 'liberate the slave.' Adopting a decidedly contrary position, in 1832 Thomas R. Dew, a professor at the College of William & Mary, confessed that 'slavery is against the spirit of Christianity', but he denied that 'there is anything in the Old or New Testament,

³⁶The pastoral letter is quoted in Dorn, *Challenges on the Emmaus Road*, p. 32. See also Edgar, *South Carolina*, p. 293.

³⁷The figures are reported in two sources: J. Carleton Hayden, 'After the War: The Mission and Growth of the Episcopal Church Among Blacks in the South, 1865–1877', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 42.4 (December 1973), pp. 403–404; Thomas, *A Historical Account*, p. 47. Their numbers match with one exception. Hayden reported the increase in white communicants from 1936 to 2965 between 1840 and 1850 while Thomas reported the increase from 1936 to 2659.

³⁸Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, pp. 7–9; Thomas, *A Historical Account*, p. 33. See also J. Carleton Hayden, 'Conversion and Control: Dilemma of Episcopalians in Providing for the Religious Instructions of Slaves, Charleston, South Carolina, 1845–1860', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 40.2 (June 1971), p. 147. On the pew rental system in the antebellum Protestant Episcopal Church, see, for example, Jennifer Snow, 'The Altar and the Rail: "Catholicity" and African American Inclusion in the 19th Century Episcopal Church', *Religions* 12.224 (March 2021), p. 5.

³⁹Edgar, *South Carolina*, pp. 294–95; Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, pp. 7–9.

which would go to show that slavery, when once introduced, ought at all events to be abrogated, or that the master commits any offence in holding slaves'.⁴⁰

To some extent, the outbreak of war clarified the paradoxes. The Protestant Episcopal Church split by necessity into two separate entities during the war. In the northern states, the church continued its prewar structure and operations, holding conventions but noting the absence of southern dioceses without delving into the reasons for their exclusion. In the South, church leaders formed a separate Confederate Episcopal church. Some Episcopal leaders were enthusiastic supporters of the Confederacy while other Episcopalians were reluctant to accept the national disunion.⁴¹

On June 19, 1861 – four months after southern delegates met in Montgomery, Alabama, to form a provisional government known as the Confederate States of America, and two months after the firing on Fort Sumter that precipitated the war – the Diocese of South Carolina met at Trinity Episcopal Church in Abbeville for its annual convention. Not surprisingly, the war was the paramount concern. Bishop Thomas Davis acknowledged that 'Our brothers and our children are in the field. Our youths with whom hitherto we have only sported have sprung up into armed men.' The church could not ignore the hostilities. Lines had to be drawn and sides taken.⁴²

Two weeks later, on July 3, 1861, Davis led a group of South Carolinians to a preliminary meeting of the Confederate Episcopal Church in Montgomery, Alabama, to discuss a path forward. In October of that same year, the attendees assembled at a convention held in Columbia, South Carolina, and developed governing documents for the Episcopal Church of the Confederate States of America. The Diocese of South Carolina adopted the new church's constitution, canons, and prayer book, which closely resembled those of the parent Episcopal Church.⁴³

The Confederate Episcopal Church operated during four long years of war. At war's end, some Episcopalians questioned whether the northern and southern churches should remain bifurcated. Leaders and communicants anxious to heal the wounds of divisiveness drowned out the discordant voices. Bishop John Henry Hopkins of Vermont wrote to all southern bishops urging them to attend the general convention in Philadelphia in October 1865. He vowed to extend a warm and friendly hand of fellowship to all who participated. Many southerners took him

⁴⁰The quotes are found in Strange, 'Alexander Crummell and the Anti-Slavery Dilemma of the Episcopal Church', pp. 773-74. Pyne's language was too intemperate and his message too blunt for his own good. Leaders removed him from his church.

⁴¹Robert E.L. Bearden Jr., 'The Episcopal Church in the Confederate States', *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 4.4 (Winter 1945), pp. 269-75; Ronald James Caldwell, *A History of the Episcopal Church Schism in South Carolina* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), pp. 15-16.

⁴²Bishop Davis is quoted in Edgar Legare Pennington, 'The Organization of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 17.4 (December 1948), p. 313. See also Raymond W. Albright, *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 252, 254; Caldwell, *A History*, p. 16.

⁴³Albright, *A History*, p. 252; Caldwell, *A History*, p. 16; Pennington, 'Organization of the Protestant Episcopal Church', pp. 314-23; Walter B. Posey, 'The Protestant Episcopal Church: An American Adaptation', *The Journal of Southern History* 25.1 (February 1959), p. 29; Harry T. Shanks, 'The Reunion of the Episcopal Church, 1865', *Church History* 9.2 (June 1940), p. 120; Mohler, 'The Episcopal Church and National Reconciliation, 1865', pp. 571-72; Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, pp. 9-10.

up on the offer, although Bishop Davis of South Carolina waited until the diocesan convention in February 1866 to participate.⁴⁴

After flirting with the creation of a permanent Episcopal Church of the South, Bishop Davis pledged to reconcile with the parent church to prevent a schism between northern and southern dioceses. 'Let us rise to our new responsibility, not sluggishly, reluctantly or opposingly, but with clear judgments, the spirit of alacrity, and Christian confidence', he remarked. 'I advise the immediate return of the diocese into union with the Church of the United States.'⁴⁵

Even as the northern and southern Episcopal churches reconciled, the race issue threatened to create an enduring rift. Ministering to slaves before and during the war had been controversial in some camps, despite church leaders' repeated petitions to do so. Nonetheless, many good reasons existed to keep enslaved persons inside the religious fold – with suitable accommodations made to segregate Black and white communicants, of course. After the war, white Episcopalians wondered what role the free people would play in the revitalized Episcopal Church. After all, controlling enslaved persons and preventing insurrections were moot points following emancipation.⁴⁶

Reverend Stevens and his Postbellum Ministry

With the collapse of the CSA in April 1865, Peter Fayssoux Stevens, like so many Episcopalians – and so many southerners, for that matter – found himself at a crossroads. The ideals and institutions of the Southern Confederacy, most notably slavery, were gone. Stevens had to forge a new path forward in his life and work. He must minister to his parish in the postbellum South, and he must decide whether his ministry would extend to the freed people.⁴⁷

He faced a daunting task. Approximately 90 percent of Blacks left the Episcopal Church of South Carolina in 1865. From a high of almost 3000 members 5 years earlier, by the end of 1865 the South Carolina Protestant Episcopal Church found only 300 Blacks in two Charleston churches, Cavalry and St. Marks, as well as a few additional communicants in rural missions.⁴⁸

⁴⁴Caldwell, *A History*, p. 16; Mohler, 'The Episcopal Church', pp. 575-79, 585-86; Shanks, 'The Reunion', p. 121. For more details on the reconciliation, see, for example, Albright, *A History*, pp. 253-55.

⁴⁵Bishop Davis is quoted in Caldwell, *A History*, p. 16. See also Mohler, 'The Episcopal Church', pp. 576-77; Shanks, 'The Reunion', pp. 126-27, 139; Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, pp. 10-11; Gaines M. Foster, 'Bishop Cheshire and Black Participation in the Episcopal Church: The Limitations of Religious Paternalism', *The North Carolina Historical Review* 54.1 (January 1977), pp. 49-50.

⁴⁶Caldwell, *A History*, pp. 16-17; Mohler, 'The Episcopal Church', pp. 588-89; Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, pp. 8-9; Thomas, *A Historical Account*, p. 68.

⁴⁷Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', p. 10.

⁴⁸Caldwell, *A History*, pp. 16-17. See also George Freeman Bragg, D.D., *The Episcopal Church and the Black Man* (Baltimore, MD: Self-published, 1918); George Freeman Bragg, D.D., *History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church* (Baltimore, MD: Church Advocate Press, 1922), p. 128; Herbert Geer McCarriar Jr., 'A History of the Missionary Jurisdiction of the South of the Reformed Episcopal Church 1874-1970', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 41.2 (June 1972), pp. 197-220; Thomas, *A Historical Account*, p. 385; John Gary Eichelberger Jr., 'Caught in an "Evil Infection": Postbellum Conflict in the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina over the Role of African Americans in the Life of the Church' (master's thesis, University of the South, 2020), p. 28.

It was little wonder that freed people fled the Protestant Episcopal Church at war's end. It had been the church of their slave masters. Even after the death of slavery, Black folks faced seemingly insuperable obstacles in their quest for a better life. Many formerly enslaved peoples were illiterate, owned no property, and encountered withering racial prejudice. They exercised little control over their lives. The one area they could control was their spiritual lives.⁴⁹

Stevens believed that he must minister to the freed people. As the author of a family history later concluded, 'In the years following the war, Peter Fayssoux Stevens felt a great urgency to help the colored people, particularly the children, get a basic education in secular matters as well as in the Christian Gospel.' Stevens believed that Blacks would be inclined to stay within the Protestant Episcopal Church – or return to the fold, if they had already left – if they could 'become ministers of the Gospel to their own people'. Moreover, Stevens 'encouraged the colored people to organize their own congregations, to be ready to receive their own ministers'.⁵⁰

Stevens was convinced that the Protestant Episcopal Church of South Carolina – before, during, and after the war – had made promises to the Black folks and those promises had not been kept. 'At the Convention in 1866 (I think) by a unanimous vote of that Convention the Church extended the right hand to the colored people inviting them to form congregations and present suitable persons for the ministry', he explained in an 1875 letter. 'Thus encouraged by the Church and sustained by the Bishop I returned to my work and for the first time proposed organization to these people. The result, as you know, was in time the formation of respectable congregations and two postulants pursuing their studies for the ministry'.⁵¹

Stevens struggled to change the church's position during these years. While he was the rector of Trinity Church in Pinopolis, he established two 'colored' chapels, Nazareth, and Emmanuel, to assist Black communicants. In 1868, he began training two former slaves, Frank C. Ferguson, and Lawrence Dawson, for the ministry. Stevens paid for Ferguson's education at St. Augustine's College from his own pocket.⁵²

Stevens labored to establish five South Carolina parishes during the late 1860s. His work did not go unnoticed. Bishop Davis marveled at the man's indefatigability, commenting that Stevens worked 'with a self-denial, devotion and zeal which all beyond all praise of man'. When he could not secure a horse or other means of transportation, Stevens refused to yield, 'sometimes keeping his appointments on foot'.⁵³

In 1870, Stevens resigned from his position as rector of the Trinity and Black Oak churches in Pinopolis to reopen St. Stephen's Church, a Black church in Summerville. It was to no avail. Stevens became convinced, as did his Black congregants, that the future for Blacks in the Protestant Episcopal Church of South Carolina was bleak.⁵⁴

Bishop William B.W. Howe, who succeeded Bishop Davis in 1871, was sympathetic to Stevens's view, but he faced constraints of his own, especially among the laity. When the mostly Black St. Mark's Church applied for full membership in

⁴⁹Allen C. Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom: The Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 219-20.

⁵⁰Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', pp. 10-11.

⁵¹Stevens is quoted in Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', p. 12.

⁵²Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom*, p. 221; McCarriar, 'A History', pp. 200-201.

⁵³Bishop Davis is quoted in Thomas, *A Historical Account*, p. 448.

⁵⁴Thomas, *A Historical Account*, p. 404.

the Diocese of South Carolina, the request was denied because of 'that distinction between the races of men which God has been pleased to ordain'. Bishop Howe objected to the denial, but he was overruled.⁵⁵

Two prominent laymen in the Protestant Episcopal Church of Charleston, the father-son duo of Edward McCrady Sr. (1802–92) and Edward McCrady Jr. (1833–1903), reflected the views of many white supremacists in the Palmetto State. They saw Blacks as inherently inferior to whites, and any association with inferior peoples in religious life would degrade everyone. McCrady Sr. wrote that the 'Black man with his kinky hair and the impenetrable veil which conceals his emotions' would contaminate whites, especially if miscegenation occurred. Both McCradys were lawyers and state legislators during their lengthy public careers as well as active lay leaders in the South Carolina Episcopal Church. They represented their congregations in the diocesan convention for decades. Edward McCrady Jr. was a Confederate major general during the war.⁵⁶

To counter the argument that all races deserved spiritual guidance, the McCradys and many white laymen believed that Blacks did not possess the capacity for full church membership. Their intellectual development, or lack thereof, prevented them from understanding Scripture or mastering church rituals. These white lay leaders were unsatisfied to leave questions of church governance to Black folks, who had shown themselves incapable of self-rule during 'Black Reconstruction' in the early 1870s. This debate consumed the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina for almost 15 years beginning in 1876 before church leaders established separate churches based on race. Blacks could join the church, but like so much in American life, they would have to be satisfied to practice their religion on the proper side of the color line.⁵⁷

The debate about the proper place for Blacks in the Episcopal Church occurred as southern states were 'redeemed' in the 1870s; that is, white southerners assumed positions of power in state and local governments as federal troops withdrew from the former states of the Confederacy. Jim Crow laws kept freed people politically powerless by requiring strict segregation. The laws supported the white regime, with threats of violence always lurking in the background. Black folks could not live near whites, attend the same schools, ride in the same railroad cars, eat in the same restaurants or use the same public restrooms.⁵⁸

Many whites were content to allow segregation in society to carry over to segregation in Protestant churches. Even if freed people were allowed to join white

⁵⁵The quote is found in Thomas, *A Historical Account*, p. 89. See also Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom*, p. 220.

⁵⁶The quote is found in Lyon G. Tyler, 'Drawing the Color Line in the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina, 1876–1890: The Role of Edward McCrady, Father and Son', *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 91.2 (April 1990), p. 108.

⁵⁷Tyler, 'Drawing the Color Line', pp. 107–24. See also David M. Reimers, 'Negro Bishops and Diocesan Segregation in the Protestant Episcopal Church: 1870–1954', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 31.3 (September 1962), p. 232.

⁵⁸The literature on this point is voluminous. See, for example, Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (15th anniversary edn; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 434; Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998), p. 233; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), pp. 104–106; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim* (2nd edn; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 54–58.

churches as adjuncts, they must not become leaders. A well-known Presbyterian theologian from Virginia, Robert Lewis Dabney, spoke for many white clergymen when he observed in 1868 that Blacks should not be ordained in the church 'because that race is not trustworthy for such position'. Dabney promised that if 'you trust any portion of power over your church to Black hands, you will rue it'.⁵⁹

Against this backdrop, Stevens moved to Anderson, in Upstate South Carolina, in 1873, but informally continued to advise Blacks on their efforts to assume leadership positions within the Protestant Episcopal Church. In one typical letter, Stevens wrote to Frank C. Ferguson after the diocesan standing committee refused to entertain the possibility of ordaining Blacks in the church. 'I am not greatly surprised by the decision of the Standing Committee', he lamented. Try as he might, Stevens saw no options for changing the minds of his superiors. Some church leaders blamed Blacks for being unprepared for the ministry, but Stevens demurred. 'It is not your fault', he assured Ferguson. 'You have shown yourselves anxious for the church and ready to receive it. The fault must lie with those in authority.'⁶⁰

Black Episcopalians appeared to have few options until the Reformed Episcopal Church (REC) formed in New York City in 1873. The REC founding grew out of an ongoing controversy about ecumenical activity. Separate from debates among northern Episcopalians concerning the Tractarian Movement, the REC was attractive to southern Blacks for several reasons. Most Blacks in the church had been raised as Low Episcopalians who engaged in liturgical worship and relied on the *Book of Common Prayer*. The REC would allow them to continue these practices, and most importantly, Bishop George Cummins, one of the REC founders, was amenable to allowing Blacks to assume leadership positions within the church.⁶¹

It was easy to see the REC's appeal for Peter Stevens. Aside from the reformed church's liberal views on race, it lived up to its name as an institution devoted to reform. In time, the REC became a refuge for lower middle-class Episcopalians who resented elites steeped in the staid traditions of the PEC. One commentator noted that 'the Reformed Episcopal Church was turning into a largely lower-middle-class denomination' of 'working people'. Aside from this ethos, the REC issued statements espousing 'social moralism' that served as 'a form of protest against the economic misery of the Gilded Age'.⁶²

In June 1875, Rev. Benjamin Johnson, a former Protestant Episcopal clergyman who had joined the REC as a traveling missionary-evangelist, visited South Carolina on what was essentially a recruiting mission. He was aware of Stevens's frustrations regarding the proper role of the freed people in the Protestant Episcopal Church as well as his dissatisfaction with the PEC's formal traditions. As Johnson later reported, 'On the 17th of June I visited Columbia, S.C., by request of Bishop Cummins, to meet and confer with Rev. P. F. Stevens, who has made overtures for work in our Church.'

⁵⁹Dabney is quoted in Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom*, p. 220.

⁶⁰Peter Fayssoux Stevens to Frank C. Ferguson, March 2, 1874, Correspondence 1874 file, DuPre-Moseley Family Collection, the Kennedy Room of Local History and Genealogy, Spartanburg County Public Libraries, Spartanburg, South Carolina. See also Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom*, p. 221.

⁶¹McCarriar, 'A History', p. 198. See also Annie Price Darling, *A History of the Formation and Growth of the Reformed Episcopal Church, 1873-1902* (Philadelphia, PA: James M. Armstrong, 1902), pp. 56-62.

⁶²Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom*, pp. 274, 275.

It was a momentous meeting. ‘This conference resulted in the decision of Mr. Stevens to return to his old field of labor in St. Stephen’s and St. John’s, and to take charge of the congregations gathered, as a Reformed Episcopal Minister’, Johnson reported. Stevens agreed to assume his new duties in July 1875, which delighted Johnson: ‘The acquisition of so able and zealous a worker was indeed a valuable advantage to our church.’⁶³

Stevens agonized over his decision to leave the Protestant Episcopal Church. ‘The evidence was too clear to my mind’, he wrote in a letter to Bishop Howe explaining his decision. Still reflecting on the church’s rejection of Ferguson and Dawson for the ministry, Stevens was blunt in his complaint. ‘That these men were rejected because of their race was . . . apparent.’ In his opinion, ‘my success, and that of others, in winning these people to the Church, despite . . . the Church’s position towards them, had convinced me of the impossibility of the two races working harmoniously and effectively in the same diocesan organization. The colored element if fairly dealt with would be in the majority or at least constitute so large a proportion as to excite jealousy and strife.’⁶⁴

He felt compelled to join the REC because the reformers allowed freed people to become leaders and form their own churches. In Stevens’s view, turning his back on the Protestant Episcopal Church of South Carolina, which had been his home since the 1850s, and abandoning the people and institutions that had nurtured him was necessary, albeit painful. He acted owing to his firm conviction that Blacks, regardless of their status in the postwar South, should be welcomed into the church. ‘Some day our people will find that the colored man does not wait for his “white friend” to do all this thinking’, he wrote in correspondence from 1875.⁶⁵

‘Born and reared in the Episcopal Church, I have ever loved it and will love it to the day of my death’, he confessed toward the end of his letter to Bishop Howe. Yet, he must act as a matter of conscience. ‘Believe me, Reverend Sir, that it costs me no little pain to sever the ties of a life time. If I have erred I need your prayers and ask the forgiveness of you and my brethren for brethren they still are tho[ugh] they may not acknowledge it.’⁶⁶

Peter Fayssoux Stevens officially assumed his duties in the Reformed Episcopal Church, as promised, in July 1875. Four months later, Bishop Cummins visited

⁶³Rev. Benjamin Johnson in *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fourth General Council of the Reformed Episcopal Church, Held in Emmanuel Church, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, Commencing Wednesday, July 12, and Ending Monday, July 17, 1876, Published by Order of the Council* (Philadelphia: James A. Moore, 1876), p. 55; Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom*, p. 223.

⁶⁴Stevens is quoted in Eberly, ‘Our Stevens Family’, p. 13. Bishop Howe and many Episcopal clergy in South Carolina supported allowing Black laymen and clergy to join the church and participate, for example, in the diocesan convention. Howe set forth his position in Rt. Rev. W.B.W. Howe, ‘Paper’, in *Authorized Report of the Proceedings of the Eighth Church Congress in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, Held in the City of Richmond, Virginia, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, October 24th, 25th, 26th, and 27th, 1882* (ed. Committee on the Publication Appointed by the Executive Committee; New York: Thomas Whittaker, Publisher, Nos. 2 and 3, Bible House, 1882), pp. 83-90. As discussed previously, many of the laity did not agree with this position, which severely limited church leaders’ options. Tyler, ‘Drawing the Color Line’, p. 107.

⁶⁵Peter Fayssoux Stevens to editors of *The Record*, August 23, 1875, Correspondence 1875 file, DuPre-Moseley Family Collection, the Kennedy Room of Local History and Genealogy, Spartanburg County Public Libraries, Spartanburg, South Carolina.

⁶⁶Stevens is quoted in Eberly, ‘Our Stevens Family’, pp. 14, 16.

Charleston and Pinopolis, preaching alongside Johnson and Stevens. Cummins also ordained Frank C. Ferguson, Lawrence Dawson and another Black man, Edward A. Forrest, deacons in the church.⁶⁷

Following his visit, Bishop Cummins commented that '[o]ur interest in the colored people of the South could not have fallen into better hands than those of our dear brothers, Johnson and Stevens. They were not carpetbaggers, but native Southerners so thoroughly identified with the South as to have been in the Confederate Army.' In Cummins's opinion, Johnson's and Stevens's commitment to the spiritual needs of the freed people demonstrated that the reformed church 'pays no regards to politics'.⁶⁸

Within six months of assuming his duties, Stevens became the 'Pastor of all the Colored churches' within Special Missionary District of the South – the REC designation for Black churches – with the departure of Reverend Johnson. In the words of one commentator, 'A new era began for the Freedmen of South Carolina.' They still faced innumerable challenges in their daily lives, but their participation in the Reformed Episcopal Church was guaranteed. 'Now they were free to preach the Gospel, to prosper, and to grow unhindered.'⁶⁹

Because the REC originated in the northern states, the church remained strongest above the Mason-Dixon Line. Nonetheless, church leaders anxiously followed the growth of congregations in the South. Recognizing the REC's expansion in South Carolina, Stewart L. Woodford, a prominent layman, donated \$3000 to continue mission work in Georgia and South Carolina. In 1877, Stevens received \$1500 from the church for his continued work with the freed people.⁷⁰

Praise for Stevens's efforts, at least among REC clergy who visited South Carolina, was nearly universal. 'I found the Churches under the care of Rev. P. F. Stevens enjoying marked prosperity', reported Bishop Samuel Fallows following an 1877 visit. 'Nearly all of the fourteen parishes and congregations of which he has the oversight have church edifices, erected by the means or labor of their own communicants.' The buildings were important, but they were not as important as Stevens's efforts to recruit new members. 'Under the competent leadership of our honored brother', Fallows wrote, 'these Churches, with their own ordained Deacons and Presbyters, will increase in number and usefulness, without imposing any additional burden upon the Missionary Treasury of the Church.'⁷¹

⁶⁷*Journal of the Proceedings of the Fifth General Counsel of the Reformed Episcopal Church, Held in the Chapel of the Second Reformed Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, PA, Commencing Wednesday, May 9, and Ending Tuesday, May 15, 1877, Published by Order of the Council* (Philadelphia: James A. Moore, 1876), pp. 22, 31. See also Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom*, p. 223; McCarriar, 'A History', pp. 203-204.

⁶⁸The quote was provided by Benjamin Aycrigg, a REC founding layman and historiographer of the church, who claimed to be quoting Bishop Cummins. The quote is reproduced in McCarriar, 'A History', p. 205.

⁶⁹McCarriar, 'A History', pp. 203, 205.

⁷⁰Benjamin Aycrigg, *Memoirs of the Reformed Episcopal Church and the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Contemporary Reports Respecting these and The Church of England, Extracted from the Public Press, Analysed and Compared with Proven History* (New York: William Jenkin Company, 1880), p. 260.

⁷¹Bishop Fallows's report is found in *Journal of the Proceedings of the Sixth General Counsel of the Reformed Episcopal Church, Held in Emmanuel Church, Newark, New Jersey, Commencing Wednesday, May 8, and Ending Monday, May 13, 1878, Published by Order of the Council* (Philadelphia: James A. Moore, 1878), p. 45.

Compared with many other areas of the state, the Low Country witnessed relatively little racial violence during the 1860s and 1870s, unlike interior portions of the state, which experienced numerous Ku Klux Klan attacks. Blacks and whites frequently lived in proximity to each other. Because the Low Country had a large Black population, Stevens became comfortable working among people of color. Whites outside the church seldom interfered with his work.⁷²

The accolades for Stevens's exemplary work continued. Bishop Fallows personally attested to 'the high regard in which he is held, both by the white planters and the people of color'. Stevens practiced what he preached, always engaging in 'laborious, self-denying efforts among the freedmen'.⁷³

As a reward for Stevens's continued leadership, in May 1879 the general council elected him the Missionary Bishop to the Special Jurisdiction of the South. Bishop W.R. Nicholson, with Bishop Samuel Fallows assisting, consecrated Stevens at the Second Reformed Episcopal Church in Philadelphia on June 22, 1879. At the time, Stevens had 40 stations in South Carolina under his care, which included 13 ordained ministers and 1500 communicants.⁷⁴

Bishop Stevens spent the next three decades ministering in the South Carolina Low Country in and around Charleston except for brief interludes. For most of those years, he quietly went about his work. Although he appreciated contributions from northern churches, Stevens recognized the importance of building self-sustaining churches that were not overly beholden to their northern brethren. He also realized that fast-growing Black churches required new leadership. In 1880, he helped to establish the Bishop Cummins Training School, a seminary for Black Episcopalians who were barred from attending white seminaries.⁷⁵

His annual reports delivered during the REC general councils continually reflected his zeal for the mission. Stevens traveled constantly, lecturing and preaching in South Carolina as well as in neighboring southern states. He was especially proud when he ordained his son, William D. Stevens, to the diaconate on August 5, 1888.⁷⁶

⁷²Luker, 'The Crucible', pp. 66-68; McCarriar, 'A History', pp. 199-203; Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999 [1971]), pp. 72, 115-17, 349, 353; Richard Zuczek, *State of Rebellion: Reconstruction in South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 55-59.

⁷³*Journal of the Proceedings of the Seventh General Counsel of the Reformed Episcopal Church, Held in Christ Church, Chicago, Illinois, Commencing Wednesday, May 28th, and Ending Wednesday, June 4th, 1879, Published by Order of the Council* (Philadelphia: James A. Moore, 1879), p. 36.

⁷⁴Bishop William Rufus Nicholson to Peter Fayssoux Stevens, June 7, 1879, Correspondence 1879 file, DuPre-Moseley Family Collection, the Kennedy Room of Local History and Genealogy, Spartanburg County Public Libraries, Spartanburg, South Carolina. See also *Journal of the Proceedings of the Eighth General Counsel of the Reformed Episcopal Church, Held in the First Reformed Episcopal Church in New York City, Commencing Wednesday, May 25th, and Ending Monday, May 30th, 1881, Published by Order of the Council* (Philadelphia: James A. Moore, 1881), pp. 30, 41; Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', p. 18; McCarriar, 'A History', pp. 207-208; Darling, *A History*, pp. 241-42.

⁷⁵*Journal of the Proceedings of the Eighth General Counsel of the Reformed Episcopal Church*, pp. 41-43; McCarriar, 'A History', pp. 209-10.

⁷⁶*Journal of the Proceedings of the Twelfth General Counsel of the Reformed Episcopal Church, Held in the First Reformed Episcopal Church, Boston, Commencing Wednesday, May 22nd, and Ending Monday, May 27, 1889, Published by Order of the Council* (Philadelphia: James A. Moore, 1889), pp. 72, 73.

Stevens persevered despite numerous setbacks. The 1886 Charleston earthquake did not damage many REC church buildings, but an 1893 hurricane caused extensive damage, as did a nationwide financial panic that same year. 'Several of our church buildings have been blown down or injured, only two or three of which have been repaired', Stevens reported. 'In addition to this special cause, the general financial depression of the country has affected our people also.'⁷⁷

Stevens's health slowly declined during the 1890s. His wife, Mary, died in 1894. The following year, he married again, and his second wife, Harriet Rebecca Palmer, tended to him in his dotage.⁷⁸

On April 7, 1901, he suffered another loss. Frank C. Ferguson died, leaving Stevens severely depressed. 'The Convocation owes its existence to him more than any other man', he lamented. By this time, Stevens was losing his eyesight. He eventually became completely blind.⁷⁹

Aside from his church duties, Stevens was always interested in education. In 1877, he led a movement to resuscitate the Citadel, which had been shuttered since the Civil War. He assembled a group of nine alumni who petitioned the state legislature to reopen the school. After much political maneuvering and legal wrangling, the school opened its doors in 1882. Beginning in 1878, Stevens also served as the commissioner of Charleston County Schools. In 1890, he briefly served as a professor of mathematics at the all-Black Claflin College. Claflin's president later remarked of Stevens that '[h]e has devoted the best years of his life to the work of educating the colored youth and fully sympathizes with them in their efforts to improve themselves'.⁸⁰

Conclusion

His unwavering faith in the necessity of the church welcoming Black folks into the pews transformed Peter Fayssoux Stevens into an extraordinary religious figure for his time. His behavior initially appears puzzling when considered in the context of his life before and during the Civil War. His casual acceptance of the values and traditions of the white antebellum South and his support for the Southern Confederacy were consistent with his life as a young man growing up in South Carolina. He studied at – and briefly led – the Citadel, an institution specifically designed to defend whites in South Carolina from marauding Blacks. It was only

⁷⁷*Journal of the Proceedings of the Fourteenth General Counsel of the Reformed Episcopal Church, Held in Christ Church, Chicago, Illinois, Commencing Wednesday, June 6th, and Ending Monday, June 11th, 1894, Published by Order of the Council* (Philadelphia: James A. Moore, 1894), p. 121.

⁷⁸Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', p. 19.

⁷⁹Stevens is quoted in McCarriar, 'A History', p. 215. See also Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', p. 19; *Journal of the Proceedings of the Seventeenth General Counsel of the Reformed Episcopal Church, Held in St. Paul's Church, Chicago, Illinois, Commencing Wednesday, May 20th, and Ending Monday, May 25, 1903, Published by Order of the Council* (Philadelphia: James M. Armstrong, 1903), pp. 58-59.

⁸⁰The quote is found in Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', p. 19. See also *Journal of the Thirteenth General Counsel of the Reformed Episcopal Church, Held in the Church of the Epiphany, Cleveland, Ohio, Commencing Wednesday, May 27th, and Ending Monday, June 1, 1891, Published by Order of the Council* (Philadelphia: James A. Moore, 1891), p. 80; 'Colored Ministers Will Act at Rev. P. F. Stevens Burial', n.p.; Blinzy L. Gore, *On a Hilltop High: The Origin and History of Claflin College to 1984* (Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1994), p. 112; Thomas, *History*, pp. 303-28.

natural that Stevens, as superintendent of the Citadel, would defend the Southland from what he saw as a northern invasion.

Despite his attitudes earlier in life, Stevens's postwar actions were entirely consistent with his faith, and his character. The war and his ministry among Blacks changed him. Unlike many whites who kept Black folks at arm's length, avoiding all contact save interactions with domestic servants and agricultural laborers, Reverend Stevens knew the freed people and shared their concerns. He saw how they were born, lived, worked, loved, worshipped and died. He recognized them as individuals deserving of a least a modicum of approbation. Although he was not an integrationist or a champion of equality of the races, he believed that promises made must be promises kept. The church must welcome all of God's creatures into the fold. Stevens was a man of faith who was not satisfied to preach from a pulpit far removed from the congregation. He practiced what he preached. His life was a testament to his faith. He even left the Protestant Episcopal Church, an institution he had supported all his life, for the Reformed Episcopal Church over the issue of race.⁸¹

After Stevens died on January 9, 1910, Black members of the Reformed Episcopal Church honored the man who had done so much for them. 'The pallbearers will be negro ministers in the church, whose doctrines he taught for so many years to the negroes of South Carolina', the *State* newspaper reported. Stevens was laid to rest in Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston after a memorial service populated with Blacks and whites congregating together in a rare display of racial harmony.⁸²

⁸¹'Colored Ministers Will Act at Rev. P. F. Stevens Burial', n.p.; Eberly, 'Our Stevens Family', pp. 19-20.

⁸²'Colored Ministers Will Act at Rev. P. F. Stevens Burial', n.p.