

Human Slavery and the Southern Baptist Mind

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Basil Manly was one of the most influential Baptists in the South in his lifetime. He held prominent positions in Southern Baptist church life and was one time President of the University of Alabama. He also was the unofficial “Chaplain of the Confederacy,” advising several southern statesmen at key crisis points leading up to and during the War Between the States. Hence his views on social issues are of no little importance and held a certain amount of influence among his contemporaries.

Throughout his life Basil Manly developed a deep conviction that a virtuous, patriarchal republican society was ideal for walking humbly before God. Although he understood that the Bible did not offer a definitive blueprint for any particular form of state as that particularly sanctioned by God, he understood several biblical principles to point toward a decentralized, representative republic, similar to that instituted in the U. S. Constitution. As he lived through the nullification crisis of the 1830’s, the increasingly incendiary debate surrounding abolitionism within and without his denomination during the 1840’s, and the national sectional disputes of the 1850’s culminating in the war between the states, Manly became a eloquent defender of liberty and an advocate of Southern secession. In his letters, public addresses, sermons, and convention resolutions, he advocated with increasing force the rights of southerners to secede, rooting these rights in Scriptural doctrine regarding private property rights and the creation of man in the image of God. At the same time, Manly became a staunch defender of the institution of Slavery. The troubling question that immediately presents itself is how can a thoughtful person successfully integrate convictions of individual human liberty and the moral acceptability of slavery. The answer for Manly and his fellow Southern Baptists seems to be their not viewing personal liberty, private property, or slavery in the abstract as autonomous principles, but rather

complimentary components of an overarching vision of a biblically sanctioned patriarchal society.

Manly on Liberty and the State

It has been documented that the influential Basil Manly was an unmovable defender of private property and advocate of a limited state.¹ As indicated above, his convictions were part of what he thought was the biblical view of a virtuous society.

Manly's biblical ideal society was natural patriarchal, hierarchical order created by God. This was a theme he developed early in his career and stressed repeatedly during his lifetime in his addresses and sermons touching on social issues.² Manly argued that social order can never be the creation of the state. Manly had a classical Christian view of government in that he saw the state, or civil government, as only one type (and certainly not the most important type) of government instituted by God. More important than the state for maintaining social order was self-government resulting from personal virtue and the other God-ordained institutions of the family and the church.

Manly understood that because one's character is so influenced by what happens to one at an early age, he identified not the state, but rather the family as the foundation of social order. The family was a patriarchal society itself that reflected God's created order. Important for understanding the views of Manly and other Baptists regarding slavery, which will be examined below, is the antebellum Christian understanding of the biblical definition of family or household. These Christians understood God to be defining the family so that it included not only the husband, wife and children, but also any household servants, and "others, of whatever

¹ Ritenour, Shawn, "Basil Manly's View of the State," Unpublished manuscript presented at the Austrian Scholars Conference at the Ludwig von Mises Institute, Auburn, Alabama, March 30, 2001

age or condition, who reside in the family mansion, for pleasure, convenience, protection or relief.”³ When the family breaks down, argued Manly, social order breaks down, because no labor or power of the magistrate can manage a well-ordered society where family discipline has been remitted.”⁴

Manly understood that in order for the family to fulfill its God-ordained function, the right to private property must be inalienable. He argued that because land was the basis of economic prosperity for a family, respect for property rights “is essential not only to the well being of society but to its very existence.”⁵ This is true, Manly argued, because private property itself was ordained by God, and it is impossible to have continuing social order if persistently violating God’s ordinances. Although conventional wisdom might suggest that the key to protecting private property is enlisting the state, Manly looked deeper into the issue and saw that ultimately a nation must be populated with individuals who possess wisdom and knowledge, which enables them both to oversee their own affairs with virtue and to be ever vigilant against the potentially oppressive state.

When addressing social issues relating to the duties of the magistrate and the citizen, Manly repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the person. Accordingly, the state is not absolute, but is limited by the consent of the citizenry. Manly argues, “The true principle, however, of all social stability and greatness is in the test, suited alike to all people and times, but

² Manly, Basil, “Lecture on Ants,” presented to the Literary and Philosophical Society in Charleston, South Carolina, July 1836. See also A. James Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South*, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana University Press, 2000), pp. 106-29.

³ Manly, Basil, “The Domestic Constitution,” no. 1 in Basil Manly, “Sermons on Duty,” quoted in A. James Fuller, *Ibid.*, pp. 229-30.

⁴ Manly, Basil, “The Domestic Constitution.”

⁵ Manly, Basil, “National Stability.” Manly’s post script to his hand-written manuscript to this sermon indicates that this sermon was “Delivered in the Methodist Church, Tuscaloosa, Ala.; on occasion of a public Fast, according to a proclamation of the Governor. Baptists, Methodists, & Presbyterians united, in a request that I would preach to them all together. Friday June 12, 1844.”

especially suited to those freer and happier forms of civil organization, in which people at large are directly acknowledged as a source of power.”⁶ Ruling magistrates have to duty to

understand social principles and relations and obligations of parties to the compact, the constitution, the limits of the different boundaries of government the genius of the people; as well as the particular laws. Else they are the worst of *guardians*; doctoring the laws without knowing anything of the principles which govern the economy or of the constitutions and measures of civil and political health.⁷

Hence, social order required that the state must be limited by the constitution.

While the above described view of the state would seem to fit well within the tradition of classical liberal republicanism, it must be admitted that Basil Manly, Sr., along with the vast majority of his Southern Baptist brethren came to view slavery as an acceptable part of such a society. However, Manly or other Baptists of the South neither were ignorant of the cruelties that too often characterized the practice of the peculiar institution. It is most likely for this reason that their ideal solution to the slavery question seemed, at least initially was manumission and colonization.

In the early years of the Republic many protestant, including Baptist, denominations integrated Lockean ideology regarding natural rights with their interpretation of the Scriptures, concluding that the institution of slavery was a violation of the principles of liberty. In 1798, for instance, the Virginia Baptists passed a resolution criticizing slavery as “a violent deprivation of the rights of nature and inconsistent with a republican government.”⁸ Additionally, the evangelical doctrine that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world, including both slave and free, led to a further emphasis on equality. One historian views this as demonstrated by those

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Manly, Basil, “Duties of Patriotism,” Basil Manly Manuscript Sermons and Notes, James P. Boyce Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

⁸ Snay, Mitchell, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), p. 21.

same Virginia Baptists who welcomed black slaves into their churches.⁹ It should be pointed out that it was common practice to have integrated church services up until the end of the Civil War.

Believing that slavery was an evil is one thing, finding an acceptable solution was another. For many Christians of the day, colonization seemed to be the best remedy. In 1816, the American Colonization Society was founded with the mission of transporting freed slaves to Africa.¹⁰ These efforts received the support of most evangelical denominations both north and south. Supporters included the governing bodies of the Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Protestant Episcopalians. Additionally most Southern clergy who had an interest in social issues also supported colonization.¹¹

Emancipation and Colonization

Basil Manly fit, then, into the mainstream of Protestant Christian thought in April of 1823, when he made his first public statement on the issue. This statement took the form an address, "On the Emancipation of Slaves," presented to the Clariosophic Society while a student at South Carolina College.¹² Like many southern Christians of his day, Manly called for gradual emancipation and colonization of slaves. With remarkable foresight, he predicted that if the country did not settle the issue, it would eventually sunder the union.

Also like many contemporaries, Manly argued against the existence of slavery because it violated republican principles of liberty. He thought it, "repugnant to the spirit of republican institutions," and that it violated the principle that "all men are created equal."¹³ Manly

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Snay documents that these sentiments were not only those of Baptists, but held sway throughout evangelical Protestantism.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 23-24.

¹² Fuller, *Op. Cit.* pp. 31-35.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

explained that he feared that the institution of slavery could create an atmosphere in which a new tyrant could emerge who would treat the entire people as slaves.

Another reason Manly gave for emancipation of slaves is that the country faced, in his mind, a real danger of slave insurrection. He pointed out that the black slave population in the south was increasing at a more rapid pace than the white. He also understood that as blacks learned to read, they would eventually find out about our nation's libertarian heritage. Once they learned more of liberty they would be likely to desire freedom more and more, culminating in violent revolts.¹⁴

Manly concluded that there was no solution except colonization. He was skeptical of the abilities of freed blacks to successfully integrate in white society. Freed slaves, he argued, would be viewed with derision and contempt. If, in fact, colonization was not possible, Manly thought that slavery must continue with masters exercising the "blended laws of justice and mercy."¹⁵

A. James Fuller, Basil Manly's chief biographer, reads this conclusion as evidence that his entire oration was a veiled justification of slavery, as if, because Manly knows his solution is impractical, slavery must continue. Fuller's claim seems problematic. In the first place, Fuller admits that both Manly's sons, Charles and Basil, Jr., stated that Manly's address accurately represented his views at the time. Fuller also documents that Manly's actions also partially validated his arguments when in May of 1832 he helped eleven black members of his congregation at First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, who wanted to emigrate to the freed slave colony in Liberia. He both encouraged them verbally and wrote letters of commendation for them.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 34-35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

The 1830's brought a change in thinking regarding the institution of slavery. In May of 1835, the American Anti-slavery Society began a massive direct mail campaign, designed to "flood the nation with antislavery pamphlets, kerchiefs, medals, and even blue wrappers around chocolate," to 20,000 influential Southerners, many of them clergy.¹⁶ The campaign was the most radical to date, both in its directness and in its call for immediate and full emancipation of slaves.

The directness of the attack on the morality of slavery *per sé* led to a shifting of the public pronouncements on slavery from Baptists and other Protestants in the South. A year before the abolitionist crisis, Baptist publications such as the *North Carolina Herald Interpreter* was calling for "an eventual and, as far as practicable, emancipation," of slaves. Southern Baptist thinking on this issue, however, was turning from calling for colonization to the justification and the melioration of the slavery institution. Indeed as late as 1840 a *North Carolina Biblical Recorder and Southern Watchman* indicated that it "did not want to see the institution perpetuated."¹⁷ However, during the late 1830's these views passed to the background, making way for arguments designed to morally justify the southern institution of slavery to Northern abolitionists.

Just as some antislavery arguments did see the light of day after 1835, there was already a Southern Christian literature defending slavery by the mid-1820's. Richard Furman, the pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, published his *Expositions of the Views of Baptists, Relative to the Coloured Population of the United States* in 1822 following the

¹⁶ Snay, Mitchell, *Op. Cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Denmark Vessay slave revolt.¹⁸ The man who succeeded Furman in the pulpit at First Baptist, Charleston, was none other than Basil Manly, Sr.

Natural Theology and Slavery

While ministering to the church, Manly was expected to take part in the social life of Charleston as well. He became an active member in Charleston's Literary and Philosophical Society. In 1836 he addressed the society on the nature and habits of the ant.¹⁹ In his "Lecture on Ants," Manly responds to Solomon's injunction to "consider the ant," by using the nature and habits of the ant as an example for human society. By appealing to the laws of nature as set forth in God's creation, Manly is able to communicate his ideal of a Christian, republican, patriarchal society that by this time included slavery. In his lecture he notes that ants are analogous to humans in that ant communities possess a natural hierarchy, a division of labor, and harmony of society.

Manly's views on slavery appear in the section of his lecture devoted to commentary on various habits of ants. He first gives detailed discussion of the ants' labor habits. He notes that queen ants do no work except lay eggs. He also notes that no members of the ant society directs the labor of others with the only exception being the White Ants of Africa. For "All other species, their societies are nearly pure republican democracies."²⁰ He notes that worker ants build colonies with a division of labor in tasks similar to "mining, masonry, and architecture," and also by laboring in an agricultural setting milking, herding and protecting their aphids, which Manly calls their "cows."²¹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁹ Fuller, A. James, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 106-24.

²⁰ Manly, Basil, "Lecture on Ants," Manly Family Papers, William Stanley Hoole Special collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, p. 19

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 19.

Manly then begins a rather extensive description of the social state of ant. He notes that, like humans, ants live in society which he defines as, “the community, its collective wants, sympathy of desires, and mutual intelligence of design.” He additionally notes that they seem to have a common language for communicating with one another. They appear to hate idleness and often engage in war, fighting for territory. The strong often attempt to conquer the weak, but what the weak lack in strength, they often make up for in numbers. In so fighting, ants have been observed to use various tactics and strategies.

Now while it was pointed out that ants in general hate idleness, Manly identifies two African species of white slave-making ants that prefer to have their work done for them by other ants obtained via conquest. These are species that became weary of labor and enslaved other ants to do it for them. Manly remarks that these ants were wiser than the human kings of Africa, because unlike their human counterpart, the slave-making ants do not try to capture and enslave adults, who naturally bristle under subjugation having an experiential knowledge of freedom. Instead, the slave-making ants obtain slaves by carrying off the eggs of the conquered ants, raising their slaves to know nothing other than slavery. Manly marvels with wonder at the instincts with which God gifted these ants.

In Manly’s opinion, the state in which the slave is able to live is a mark of God’s goodness. He argues that the goodness of God’s providence to the slaves “is seen in not having made this subjection the source of misery to the subject of it—but rather of protection and benefit.”²² The ants that are enslaved are smaller than other species, so they could not defend themselves from other attacks. Since taken at the egg stage, they cannot remember any former life, and hence are content. Manly then uses the content state of the slave ant and applies it as an analogy to the issue of human slavery. Manly argues, “It surely ought to comfort the

abolitionists to know that although the ants do hold slaves, the masters are humane and gentle, and the slaves are contented, industrious, and happy.”²³

Manly was quick to point out, however, that even as he says many blessings attending the master-slave relationship, there are nevertheless dangers for the masters that need to be guarded against. He notes that the institution of slavery tended to make the ant masters entirely dependent on their slaves.²⁴ The slave-making ants became increasingly lazy and less suited and inclined to labor, so that they became fit for nothing except war. Manly notes that the masters will not even feed themselves.

Manly concludes this section of the lecture by taking special notice, for his audience, of one American species of slaveholding ant that was local to the region near to Charleston. He documents that this species, although it held slaves similar to its African counterpart, also did work themselves, sometimes harder than their slaves. This helped them live together with their slaves in even greater harmony than African slave-making ants.

Manly’s conclusions are clear. What God created as good for these ants can also be good for humans. Slaves and masters can and do live together in harmony as the master recognizes his role as provider and protector of the slave, and as he avoids the habit of slothfulness. Manly justifies his conclusion throughout by appealing to natural theology, by considering the ant and learning from him.

The Duties of Masters and Servants

Manly’s arguments justifying the institution of slavery, however were not only or even primarily based on natural theology, but on the Scriptures. In the spring of 1842, while president of the University of Alabama, he “began a series of discourses on social and relative duties—at

²² *Ibid.* p. 54-55.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 55.

the request of the Sunday Schools connected with the Methodist and Baptists Churches,” in Tuscaloosa.²⁵ This series he entitled “Sermons on Duty,” which outlined what he took to be God’s view of an ideal Christian society.

One sermon in this series focuses on the God-ordained “Duties of Masters and Servants.”²⁶ This particular sermon was first preached in his ministry at the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina in April of 1837 and then subsequently included in his series preached in Tuscaloosa. In this sermon Manly first presents a Biblical justification for the existence of the institution of slavery and then expounds on the regulations God places on both masters and servants. In doing so, Manly uses as his primary text, Ephesians 6:5-9 which exhorts, “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect for persons with him.” He additionally draws upon an impressive set of passages taken from the entire breadth of Scripture, including verses out of Genesis, Joshua, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Malachi, Matthew, Luke, I Corinthians, Galatians, I Timothy, Titus, James, I Peter, and Philemon.

In defending the institution of slavery by appealing to Scripture, Manly aligned himself with the bulk of Southern Christian thinkers. Many of the arguments put forth by Southern

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 56-57.

²⁵ Fuller, *Op. Cit.*, p 182.

clergy, including Baptists, were rooted in the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture.²⁷ These theological issues quickly had practical consequences. The northern abolitionist movement had attempted to take the high moral ground by arguing that slavery violated Christian principles. Baptists in the Alabama, for example, reacted by passing a resolution, mostly written by Manly, that they would withhold funds from the Board of Foreign Missions and the American and Foreign Bible Societies until they were certain that they had no ties to abolitionists. As a result anti-slavery societies connected with various denominations began to gain members in the northern regions. In 1840 the American Baptist Anti-slavery Convention was created, which called for immediate emancipation and greatly concerned Baptists in the South.²⁸ This conflict would eventually lead to Baptists in the South leaving the national convention and forming their own Southern Baptist Convention with its own mission board.

In reaction to the more radical calls for immediate emancipation of slaves, Baptist preachers and thinkers began to shift their focus away from the colonization of gradually freed slaves to a Scriptural analysis of slavery itself. Prominent Southern Baptist Iverson Brookes published defense of slavery which was argued primarily from the Bible. Brookes argued that we could find the God's sanction of slavery throughout Scripture, with special emphasis on the Apostle Paul's letter to Philemon. In this letter Paul returns a runaway slave to his master with instructions to treat him kindly. Consequently, Brookes thought that the South was upholding God's Word in defending the institution of slavery²⁹

²⁶ Manly, Basil, "Duties of Masters and Servants," no. 8 in Basil Manly, "Sermons on Duty." Basil Manly manuscript Sermons and Notes, James P. Boyce Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

²⁷ Snay, Mitchell, *Op. Cit.*

²⁸ Fuller, *Op. Cit.* p. 217.

²⁹ Startup, Kenneth Moore, *The Root of All Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the Old South*, (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1997)

As will be seen more fully below, however, Baptist clergy, as well as clergy from other Protestant denominations did not think that because God ordained the institution everything that happened within that institution was acceptable. Brookes, for instance, recognized that there were masters who did abuse their slaves and attributed this to the masters' greed.³⁰

Baptist publications were often filled with rebukes and exhortations directed to masters who it was perceived that did not treat their slaves as humans. Various Baptists commented on the abuses within the institution in the *Christian Index*. It was argued that masters violated the clear commands of Scripture by splitting up of slave families.³¹ One member of the clergy expressed concern that many Southerners viewed cruel masters as good Christians and influential Baptist Richard Fuller warned that if masters did not obey God in their duties to their slaves, God's judgement would fall upon the land.³² John Broadus, Baptist minister and theologian, was concerned that slaves were a "sadly neglected part of the community."³³ A writer for the *Christian Index* pointed out that if Southern masters do not heed God's instruction concerning how slaves are to be treated, then they could not expect Christians in the North and throughout the world to listen to their arguments defending slavery.³⁴

For his part, Manly begins his sermon, "Duties of Masters and Servants," by noting that in the Old Testament, God recognized as legitimate the obtaining of slaves in a number of different ways: as captives in their wars claiming the promised land, as payment for debt, and by purchasing them from foreigners. He additionally notes that purchasing and owning slaves was recognized as acceptable in the Law of Moses and at the time of Solomon.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 69.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 71.

³² *Ibid.* p. 72.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 73.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 72.

Turning to the New Testament, Manly points out that Jesus never condemned slavery, but “leaves it to be retained and meliorated as all other permanent relations were, by the principle of his religion.”³⁵ Manly understood that some opponents of slavery might argue that Jesus was merely keeping silent, not because he recognized slavery as sanctioned by God, but because he did not want to needlessly stir up controversy and detract from his central gospel message. Manly counters this objection by pointing out that Jesus never was silent due to the opinion of man.

Manly pays special attention to an instance when Christ healed the slave of the Roman centurion as related in Matthew 8:5-13. Jesus had an excellent opportunity to condemn slavery if he wanted, but refused to raise any objection whatsoever with the master-slave relationship.

Manly also documents that the pillars of the early church, the Apostles, do not condemn the institution of slavery in any of their inspired writings, but presume the legitimacy of the institution in their regulating it. Manly argues that the Apostles do not prohibit slavery, “but proceed to state the mutual duties, rights, limitations of the parties, in connection with the other permanent relations of men.”³⁶

Next Manly deals with a number of objections raised against the morality of the institution of slavery. The first objection he discusses is that slavery is an evil and should be removed. To this Manly replies that there are many evils in life that God ordains some of us to endure, such as poverty, imprisonment, deformity, and hereditary disease. It does not appear to Manly that slavery is outside of the providence of God anymore than these other difficulties are.

A sharper objection leveled against slavery that Manly examines is the claim that slavery is inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity, that it violates the Golden Rule. Manly is not

³⁵ Manly, Basil, “Duties of Masters and Servants.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*

convinced by this objection either. He argues that the command to love your neighbor as yourself or to do unto other as you would have them do unto you does not alter the slave-master relationship any more than that between a parent and child or of ownership of any kind. Manly argues that the same interpretation of the Golden Rule would lead to divestiture of all property for the poor and would level all distinctions which is against the Gospel, nature, and the providence of God. Manly here reveals his view of equality in expressing that all men are equal as men with the rights of humanity, but not in mind, body, and state. In other words, there are certain rights that all men have as creatures of God bearing His image, but this does not mean that all are equal in the intellectual and physical capabilities or their station. God ordains that some people be born into slavery, hence it is not a violation of the Golden Rule for them to stay in slavery, as long as they are treated kindly.

Manly then provides another reason for rejecting the argument that slavery *per se* is unkind and unloving. He argues that, claims to the contrary notwithstanding, slavery resulted in black slaves in the south experiencing a greater standard of living than other working class people throughout the world, including the northern United States. He quotes statistics compiled by a Reverend T. Edwards and presented in a sermon in Rochester, N. Y. in 1836. The statistics as reported led Manly to conclude that fully four-fifths of the human race at that time were in subjection to uncontrolled tyranny. Manly gives examples of the compensation and working conditions of laborers in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Russia, Poland, France, and Great Britain and characterizes them as relatively harsh compared to the environment in which the southern slaves live.

Manly rejects the accusation that slavery violates the golden rule, then, because slavery actually is of great material benefit to the slaves themselves. Manly argues that the slaves were

“less worked, as well fed and clothed, and liable to fewer hardships, changes,” and other material tribulations than the laboring classes throughout the world, even those in the northern regions of the United States. Manly goes so far as to argue that the slave in the South is materially better off than free blacks. Manly states that a “southern slave of equal intelligence, and industry, and morals, is vastly his [the freed black man’s] superior.” Manly then uses personal experience in revealing that of those freed blacks from Charleston who left for the freed slave colony in Liberia “all were disappointed, some returned in disgust--others wished they had never gone, some were compelled from mere want to ask charity of their brethren who remained behind in servitude in this city, and all acknowledged that they had to work harder and face worse than in this country.”³⁷

As benevolent as the institution of slavery was concerning the material welfare of the servant, an even greater benefit, in Manly’s eyes, was the fact that, as a result of being brought to the United States, many Africans were being exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Manly explained that the “subjection of the African Race to a mild and patriarchal government as slaves in this country,” was “one of those wise and kind arrangements of Providence to bring them to the light of the Gospel and the blessings of civilized life, in the only way they are capable of them, which should command our reverence and wonder.” Manly argues that the Africans were not being forced to trade freedom in Africa for slavery in America. In their own country Manly thought that they would be subjected to worse bondage. Alluding perhaps to the plight of the Old Testament Patriarch Joseph, whose brothers sold into slavery, Manly preached that, “whatever may have been the motives of men engaging in their transportation, God has overruled it for good.”³⁸

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

While all of this may seem tremendously optimistic, Manly clearly was not pollyannaish when faced with the realities of the actual practice of slavery. His sermon does not end with a description of the happy lot of slaves in the South, but continues with many exhortations to masters regarding their duties to their slaves and their God. Indeed Manly preached that, “except as the relation [of master to slave] in the main is promoting of the sense of human happiness, it is not to be supposed that the benevolent Father of mankind has established and sanctioned it.”³⁹ In other words, Manly was pointing out that even though, in God’s providence, He ordained the institution, God clearly does not sanction abuse within the institution.

For the institution of slavery to function as it was intended, the masters had to recognize themselves not as consumers of slaves, but as patriarchal. They were ordained to be the slaves protector and guardian, the promoter of their lives and happiness, and their benefactor and friend. This, of course, included the responsibility to give them “suitable food, raiment, and lodging,” caring for them when they were sick and properly taking care of them when they become old and no longer able to work. In other words, they were not to be treated like a thing, such as a plow to be discarded whenever one saw fit, but they should be treated as one of the family.

Manly preached that, regarding work, the master should provide proper instruction to the slave, telling them what to do and how to do it. Additionally they should set an example to them in their own work and when called to work with them as the occasion arose. On this point Manly may have been again drawing from personal experience. When Manly was fifteen years old, he was called upon to manage his family’s farm while his father was in bed recovering from being gored by a bull. Basil Manly thought it very important to establish his authority with his father’s slaves as quick as possible.

He was earliest to rise in the morning. On the first day he told the slaves that he would take the lead hoeing corn in the field that day. Anyone who failed to keep up would take a thrashing...the slaves

³⁹ *Ibid.*

continued their joking, sure that their experience and strength would let them how circles around their mater's son. They soon discovered their mistake. Manly took the lead and set a grueling pace. All day long he kept it up, under the hot sun. His hands blistered and his back ached, but on he went, without stopping or complaining. Before the day was out, the young man was truly "Mas Baz," and his mastery kept the farm running until his father recovered.⁴⁰

In his sermon, Manly further emphasized the necessity of using wisdom when assigning work loads. Work should be graduated according to the capacity and strength of the slave. His sermon manuscript shows a couplet regarding the amount and difficulty that should be placed upon one's slave. "Not too much—else discouraged and hurt/Not too little—else intriguing." Manly finishes his point by flatly stating that "whoever is too proud of lazy to do these things will not be a good master or mistress."⁴¹

Manly then discusses the issue of physical punishment. The personal experience noted above demonstrates that at age 15 he had already accepted that slaves might some times warrant "a thrashing." In this sermon, Manly points out that, according to Proverbs 29:19, slaves will not always be corrected by words alone, in which case physical punishment is warranted. However, especially here, Manly argued that God did not give *carte blanche* to the masters. He advised that if physical punishment did become necessary "it should be the mildest possible consistent with the object to be affected." Manly had little patience for cruelty to slaves in the name of God's ordination of the institution.

Manly concludes his exhortation to masters by encouraging them to be kind to their slaves. Masters should listen to the complaints and requests of their slaves. Certainly they should not be forced to do anything that is wrong. By all means they should provide their slaves with the opportunity to receive religious instruction and to worship God.

⁴⁰ Fuller, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.

The final section of Manly's sermon, "Duties of Masters and Servants," is a discussion of what is required of slaves. Manly demonstrates that God requires slaves to be obedient and faithful to their masters. His sermon then encourages both slaves and masters to do what God requires of them. Masters are to care for and treat their slaves kindly, while slaves should joyfully obey and be faithful to their masters. If this became the practice, then harmony could exist in that society and the institution of slavery could serve the purpose it was intended to serve.

National Stability and Slavery

Two years later, Basil Manly had an opportunity to stress these themes again in front of a large audience. Friday, June 21, 1844 was declared a Fast Day by the Governor of Alabama. The Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians of Tuscaloosa requested that Manly preach the Fast Day sermon on this occasion. He obliged and delivered his message, "National Stability."⁴²

This sermon would prove to be one of the most extensive general public presentations of Manly's views regarding political philosophy, economics, and slavery. He took for his text Isaiah 33:6 which teaches that for the Godly man, "wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure." He sets before his listeners the contrast between nations that rely on "power, cunning, and violence," for their security and those "who serve and wait on God." He explains that good nations are made up of people "relying on moral and intellectual purity and elevation as their glory and defense." He argues that a nation will only be granted stability to the extent that its individual citizens are filled with Godly wisdom and knowledge. He stresses that the state must be restrained by law and by healthy public opinion. Manly then applies his general theme to various issues, warning

⁴¹ Manly, Basil, "Duties of Masters and Servants."

against profligate immigration, mass democracy, fractional reserve banking, and then turns his attention to what he increasingly viewed as a potentially divisive issue. “The existence of negro slavery among us is a subject of great and increasing importance; requiring the exercise of the profoundest wisdom and knowledge, that our times may be stable, and our defenses sure.” Note that Manly did not lightly consider the issue of slavery or think it was an easy institution to deal with.

On this Fast Day, Manly did not lay out his Scriptural defense of slavery, assuming that his congregation was already familiar with his views. Referencing his own sermon, “Duties of Masters and Servants,” Manly explains, “as to the lawfulness of holding slaves, and the consistency of this institution with the Scriptures of both testaments, I have freely spoken my views, on a former occasion from this place.” He then proceeds to give a brief account of the history of slavery in Europe and the United States and some reasons that slavery, in the form it was intended at least, is a positive good. He then again exhorts masters to properly care for their slaves and to treat them kindly.

Manly uses his section on history to document that the South was not peculiar in participating in the peculiar institution. Manly notes that the history of slavery demonstrates that slavery existed in Europe before it did in the United States. Manly relates to his audience that the first African slaves that set foot in Europe were ten slaves brought to Lisbon, Portugal by Gonzales Baldiza in 1442. Demonstrating his scholarship, he recounts that,

In 1504 permission was granted by Isabella of Spain, to introduce into Hispaniola such negroes as had been born in slavery in the Christian countries; and a few were brought to the new world in the following year. Their introduction, direct from Africa, grew into a regular business of traffic and transportation under the laws of Ferdinand V and of Charles V. The latter, in 1517, granted a

⁴² Manly, Basil, “National Stability,” Basil Manly Papers, Basil Manly Jr. Papers, South Carolina Baptist Historical Collection, James Buchanan Duke Library, Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina.

patent to one of his Flemish favorites, containing an exclusion right of importing slaves, 4000 annually, into Hispaniola, Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. This favorite sold his patent to some Genoese Merchants, for 25,000 Ducats; and they were the first who brought into regular form the commerce for slaves between Africa and America.⁴³

He also documents that under a Sir John Hawkins, the English were partaking of the slave trade as of 1562, or 45 years before there was any British settlement in North America.

Manly then recounts the origins of African slavery in the American Colonies. The first introduction of black slaves into North America was from a Dutch man-of-war that delivered 20 Africans to Jamestown, Virginia in August of 1620. In 1631 a merchant group with the blessing of Charles I began slave operations to the new world on a large scale. The first slaves reached Boston Harbor in 1645, Maryland and South Carolina in 1671, but did not receive admission into Georgia until 1747. The trade grew so that by a few years before the War for Independence 60,000 Africa slaves were brought into the colonies annually. Manly concludes this historical sketch by stating that the importation of slaves, “at first and for the most part, were contrary to the wishes and denunciations of the inhabitants.”⁴⁴ He then gives the most recent census figures documenting how many slaves were then in the country. Manly estimated that, at the time of his sermon, the slave population was at two and a half million, with more that ten per cent living in Alabama. This, Manly points out, is reason enough to give the issue of slavery careful attention.

Manly’s first point he wants to make regarding slavery is a practical one. Harkening back to his first public address on slavery, his college oration, “On the Emancipation of Slaves,” Manly discusses various slave colonization attempts in detail. “Experiments of colonization in Africa, of colonization in a district of one [of] the states of this confederacy; of emancipation both among British Subjects in the West Indies, and among American citizens in this land, all

⁴³ *Ibid.*

professing a high scope of justice and philanthropy and great sympathy for the race , have been fairly tried.” As Manly noted two years earlier, these efforts proved to be disappointing. Additionally, Manly argued that “Divine Providence also has permitted an experiment, in the first discovered part of the western world, in which the sovereign power has been entrusted to their own hands, will full license to institute what forms of government they man choose.” This example shows too that the experiment was a failure. “If the accounts of impartial observers in all these various situations are to be credited, none of them have improved the physical condition of the negro, as a class.”⁴⁵

Manly’s point is similar to that which he made all those years ago in college. Colonization experiments proved to fail. He thought that one cannot argue against slavery by claiming that slaves are materially worse off than those Africans who are free, because it is simply not true. Manly claims that African slaves had an “easier lot than their brethren enjoy anywhere else on earth, not excepting their own country.” According to Manly they were the “best provided,” and “best ordered laboring population” in the world.

Nevertheless Manly thought the world was against the South and he advised his brethren to prepare for a coming separation from the North. In doing so, he offers a plea to God, “Heaven in mercy grant, that, for the coming crisis we may have all that wisdom and knowledge which may be the stability of our times, and strength of salvation.”⁴⁶

Manly then begins exhorting his congregation to good works regarding the slaves. His first point was that the slaves were a mission field. He observed that slaves were largely possessing of almost no moral or intellectual instruction, describing them being “virtually as

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

heathen.” He charged the masters in the audience to see to their religious instruction. The Gospel should be preached to them.

This preaching, however, should be done orally. Manly feared that teaching them to write and read would allow them to be led astray by Northern abolitionist agitation, which would in the long run be destructive for the slave as well as the master.

Manly then makes a strong appeal to slave owners to care for and protect their slaves. In so doing, he forcefully presses the point that their slaves were human beings and should be treated as such.

There is not an animal on our farms but has appropriate attention and provision, according to its peculiar nature and the whole range of its wants. How much stronger claim does our fellow man in our service present to our appropriate guardianship! “How much better is a man than a sheep!”

For Manly these words were not mere sentiment. A telling instance regarding Manly’s view of his slaves has been documented by historians. “When his faithful servant Larrey died, he arranged a special funeral service and showed such concern that a member of his congregation remarked that ‘with this pious pastor...the value of souls is not according to the complexion of the skin.’”⁴⁷

Manly continues by arguing that through slavery, God was working a special providence to further His kingdom by exposing the African race to the Gospel of Christ. “It would seem that, in the inscrutable ordering of God, we have been brought into this relation to them, the only one which can harmonize in one society two classes of beings so remarkably dissimilar for the very purpose of communicating to them God’s precious truth.” In exhorting slave-owners present to provide religious instruction to their slaves he appealed to their “sense of gratitude of

God.” He listed the numerous benefits they received from their slaves. “The labor of our slaves procures for us the luxuries and comforts of life; they constitute a great part of our wealth. They kindly nurse us in infancy. They relieve the fatigue of our journeys...they watch and support us in sickness, they risk their lives for us in danger, and when we die, the faithful old servant follows us to our grave and vents his...grief.” Manly concludes his Fast Day sermon by reminding his audience that after the judgement believers “from every tribe, tongue, and nation will be taking their place in the new Heavens; and shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.”⁴⁸

Thus national stability requires applying Godly wisdom and knowledge to the institution of slavery as well as other social issues. For Manly, such wisdom and knowledge shows us that God in his providence had ordained slavery to be used for His kingdom. Masters owe it to God and to their slaves to treat them kindly, especially by giving them Christian instruction.

A close study of Manly reveals that he came to defend the institution of slavery based on his reading of Scripture and his view of God’s providence in history. He did not attempt to argue that slavery was just because the African race was unhuman or less human, but simply that God ordained certain members of that race to live under slavery, for the mutual benefit of both master and servant. Viewed from this standpoint, Manly was able to integrate his acceptance of slavery with his view of a free republic whose magistrate is constrained by its laws and citizenry.

⁴⁷ Tupper, H. A., quoted in Timothy George, “Faithful Shepherd, Beloved Minister: The Life and Legacy of Basil Manly, Sr.” *The Alabama Baptist Historian*, Vol. 27, January 1991, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Manly, Basil, “National Stability.”