“Mississippi’s Greatest Minister”: A Historical Study of Cornelius W. Grafton’s 61-Year Pastorate, 1873-1934

David Thomas Irving

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/2520

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.
“MISSISSIPPI’S GREATEST MINISTER”: A HISTORICAL STUDY OF CORNELIUS W.
GRAFTON’S 61-YEAR PASTORATE, 1873-1934

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of History
The University of Mississippi

by

David T. Irving

May 2023
ABSTRACT

Cornelius W. Grafton (b.1846, d.1934) pastored two Presbyterian churches in Southwest Mississippi for 61 consecutive years (1873-1934). He moderated the Presbyterian Church, U.S. General Assembly in 1916 and wrote a 658-page unpublished History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi. This dissertation studies Grafton’s ministry—his student years at the University of Mississippi and Columbia Theological Seminary, his sermons, his public opposition to lynching, and his periodical and historical writings—to understand how white Christians in the South thought of and responded to their context from Reconstruction through the Progressive Era and into the 1930’s. Many of the priorities of Grafton’s ministry corresponded to those of the fundamentalist movement. He believed that he lived and ministered in a world governed by divine providence. He preached and wrote for a primarily religious purpose, to bring people to Christian conversion and consecrated living. His interpretations of history and society flowed from his theological beliefs and sought to promote his religious aims.
DEDICATION

For Sarah Grafton Irving

הָּֽלְלַֽה הָ֗לוּרְשַּׁאְי הָיֶנָ֖ב וּמָ֣ק

Proverbs 31:28
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Finishing this dissertation gives me the much-anticipated privilege of thanking many of those who improved its content and supported its completion. I would like to thank the Mississippi Department of Archives and History for its joyful assistance with the Cornelius W. Grafton Papers and related materials, especially my encouraging friend Clinton Bagley, the C. Benton Kline, Jr. Special Collections and Archives at Columbia Theological Seminary, especially former archivist Brian Hecker, and the Presbyterian Historical Society.

I served the Raymond Presbyterian Church and the Woodland Presbyterian Church while completing the program. Each encouraged my work and upheld me in prayer. Special thanks are due to the elders of both congregations, whose patience, support, and service enabled me to study and write alongside my pastoral duties; Paul Adams, Clarke Stewart, John Burnam, Britt Burrell, Troy Gibson, and Bo Morgan. Secretaries Elizabeth Frazier (d.2022) and Melanie Brown contributed to a joyful work environment and typed many “Dr. Grafton’s Message” articles from a grainy scan of the microfilm.

I am grateful to have studied at three excellent academic institutions: Dartmouth College, Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, MS), and the University of Mississippi. The instruction, patience, and expertise of the history faculty at Dartmouth—especially Professors Robert Bonner, Allen Koop, Anelise Orleck, George Trumbull, and Heidi Whelan—stimulated my interest in history and equipped me for graduate study. Thanks are due to the faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS, especially Dr. Guy Waters for his generous guidance and friendship. I am grateful for and benefitted from each of the professors who taught
my graduate seminars at the University of Mississippi; Drs. Garrett Felber, April Holm, Rebecca Marchiel, and Charles Ross. The instruction and expertise of Drs. Isaac Stephens and Jeffrey Watt in early modern European religious history provided engaging and enjoyable learning opportunities outside of my major field. I count it a special gift to have been taught by the late Dr. John Neff in what proved to be his final graduate seminar. Drs. Marc Lerner and Rebecca Marchiel provided patient, knowledgeable, timely, and encouraging support as Graduate Program Coordinators. I am grateful for the time and encouragement of my dissertation committee; Drs. Drew Billings, Darren Grem, and Jeffrey Watt. I give particular thanks for my advisor, Dr. Ted Ownby. Dr. Ownby’s combination of personal gentleness, historical and historiographic awareness, and editorial skill have improved every aspect of this dissertation. Working with him has been a joy.

Numerous friends have assisted and encouraged me in my work. Dr. Otis Pickett guided me through the application process and offered helpful perspectives throughout the program. My “consistory” of friends, Rev. Dr. David Barry, Rev. Ryan Biese, and Dr. Michael Lynch provided experience, insight, and humor. Rev. Dr. Allen Stanton set an example of joyful perseverance, finding time and energy to encourage me while he finished a dissertation and a book during brain cancer treatments. Mrs. Linda Durr Rudd, Rev. Michael Herrin, Rev. Dr. Milton Winter, Rev. Caleb Cangelosi, and the late Rev. Dr. Joe Martin offered expertise and support related to Union Church and Mississippi Presbyterian history. Josh Bower has given thoughtful interest and encouragement and even joined me for road-trips through Jefferson County, MS. Rev. Nathan Lee has prayed with and for me every week since before the program began. Special thanks are due to James “Bebo” Elkin for his attentive mentorship, steadfast
support, perceptive advice, and affectionate friendship, as well as for being the first to introduce
and guide me through Southern Presbyterian primary sources.

Most importantly, I thank my family. Descendants of Dr. Grafton, to whom I am distantly
related by marriage, have shared stories, time, documents, and interest—Mary McCann, Lib
Greer, Jamie Clarke, Sam Duncan, and John Pope. Sonny and Tommy Peaster first introduced
me to Dr. Grafton and Union Church. Their extensive knowledge of the Grafton family and of
Mississippi Presbyterian history has improved this dissertation, but the greater blessing has been
the time spent together in this shared interest. My in-laws have given their encouragement,
interest, patience, babysitting, prayers, and affection—Jamie and Monica Peaster, Matt, Taylor,
Hamp and Rho Peaster, Josh and Lucy Peaster, and Robert, Annie, and Beau Montgomery. My
siblings, Jennifer Irving and James Irving, and I have had overlapping graduate school careers.
While at opposite ends of the country, their love from afar has made this degree feel like a shared
endeavor, one that we have pursued and completed together. I thank David Isaac and Megan
Irving along with them, whose love for Jennifer and James respectively has enriched our entire
family. My parents stressed the importance of education, an emphasis that has undoubtedly
contributed to the pursuit and completion of this degree. My late mother, Cheryl Irving, spent her
professional life in public education while giving her best energy, support, and love to our
family. My dad, Tom Irving, has set an example of historical inquisitiveness and more
importantly, servant-hearted faithfulness, that has guided me to this point, and that I aspire to
imitate. My children, two of whom have been born since I matriculated, have filled my life with
joy, appropriate perspective, and gratitude—Camp, Mac, Jack, and Elsie. My dear wife Sarah
Grafton, my greatest earthly gift, has at once sacrificed the most and encouraged the best. She
has only helped and supported me, and has undoubtedly played the most significant earthly role in my completion of the program.

My greatest debt and gratitude are to the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—whose everlasting love, effectual grace, and abiding consolation are my strength, hope, and joy, even more so now than when I began in 2019. May anything good that I have done at the University and everything good that will flow from my time as a student, be to His praise. “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:36, ESV).”
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... ii

DEDICATION ...................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................... iv

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ............................................................................................... ix

INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................ 1

CHAPTER 1: PREPARING: COLLEGE, SEMINARY, AND EARLY MINISTRY DURING RECONSTRUCTION, 1866-1876 ................................................................................ 11

CHAPTER 2: PREACHING: GRAFTON’S SERMONS, 1876-1890 ......................................... 53

CHAPTER 3: PROTESTING: GRAFTON AGAINST LYNCHING, 1880-1918 ............................. 92

CHAPTER 4: PUBLISHING: “DR. GRAFTON’S MESSAGE” IN *THE MISSISSIPPI VISITOR*, 1915-1928 ........................................................................................................ 132

CHAPTER 5: PRESERVING: GRAFTON’S UNPUBLISHED *HISTORY OF PRESBYTERIANISM IN MISSISSIPPI*, 1924-1934 ........................................................................ 169

CONCLUSION ...................................................................................................................... 213

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................................. 217

APPENDIX ........................................................................................................................ 227

VITA ..................................................................................................................................... 233
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Cornelius W. Grafton Seminary Graduation Photo (1873) ......................................................... 227

2. Cornelius W. Grafton photo from *Life and Thought of a Country Preacher* ......................... 228

3. Cornelius W. Grafton photo #3 .................................................................................................. 229

4. Cornelius W. Grafton photo #4 .................................................................................................. 230

5. Cornelius W. Grafton photo #5 .................................................................................................. 231
INTRODUCTION

On August 3, 1934, the Jackson Clarion-Ledger ran a front-page article announcing Adolf Hitler’s swift rise to power in Germany. The paper said, “He concentrated in his own hands the functions of President and of chancellor as soon as the aged president and patriot, Paul von Hindenburg, died.” More than 237,000 Mississippians would soon serve during World War Two. But surely those who read this news had little idea of its massive implications for their futures.

Also on the Clarion-Ledger’s front page, next to this news from Germany, came news from Jefferson County, Mississippi announcing the funeral of Dr. Cornelius W. Grafton. The paper reported, “about 25 ministers of this denomination from every section of the state attended the services.” Dr. J. B. Hutton, pastor of Jackson’s First Presbyterian Church, and a friend of Dr. Grafton’s, conducted the packed service in the old Presbyterian church building in Union Church. This was the third day in-a-row that the Clarion-Ledger printed a front-page article about Dr. Grafton. The same edition also included two tribute pieces, a lengthy one by Hutton and another titled, “Mississippi’s Greatest Minister Goes to His Reward.” The latter said, “perhaps no state has not known, in some manner, the influence of this sturdy soldier of Christ. Certainly, all of the Southland knew him well—knew him and cherished his holy works.”

---

2 Dennis J. Mitchell, A New History of Mississippi (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 368.
This dissertation studies the 61-year ministry of the Rev. Dr. Cornelius Washington Grafton, who served two presbyterian congregations in Southwest Mississippi from his ordination in 1873 until his death in 1934. Born in Madison County, Mississippi in 1846, he fought briefly for the Confederacy and then enrolled at the University of Mississippi, where he was graduated with first honors in 1868. He attended Columbia Theological Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina where he sat at the feet of famous Southern Presbyterian ministers like James Woodrow, William Swan Plumer, John L. Girardeau, and Benjamin M. Palmer. He was ordained in the Presbyterian Church, U.S. in 1873 as the pastor of two congregations, Union Church Presbyterian Church in Jefferson County and Ben Salem Presbyterian Church in Lincoln County. He served these two congregations for the entirety of his ministry, until his death in 1934. Throughout those 61 years, he taught school, wrote regular columns for a statewide Presbyterian periodical, served as the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, U.S. General Assembly in 1916, and wrote an unpublished 658-page *History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi*, all in addition to his regular ministerial duties of preaching, visitation, and service in the church courts.

While Grafton left voluminous papers after his death, and while his contemporaries believed his death worthy of three consecutive days of newspaper headlines, he has not factored prominently in the historiography of religion in the South. The first and most substantial direct interaction with Grafton and his writings was Allen Cabaniss’ 1942 study, *Life and Thought of a Country Preacher*. This book contains four thematic chapters, “His Life and Times,” “His Sermons,” “His Writings,” and “An Attempted Evaluation and Conclusion.” While each chapter provides helpful insights into its designated subject, the book’s structure inhibits an integrated
understanding of how Grafton’s writings and sermons addressed and were shaped by his personal life and historical context.

Further engagement with Grafton’s life and writings has been largely confined to church related histories published by and for religious groups. Warren A. Candler’s Bishop Charles Betts Galloway (Cokesbury, 1927) discusses Grafton’s relationship to Galloway, quoting Grafton at length. Louis C. LaMotte’s Colored Light (Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1937), a history of Columbia Theological Seminary, briefly describes Grafton’s ministry and work in education. James O. Chatham’s Sundays Down South (University Press of Mississippi, 1999) describes, from the vantage point of the mid 1960s, Grafton’s lingering influence in Union Church. David B. Calhoun’s Our Southern Zion (Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), also a history of Columbia Theological Seminary, mentions Grafton briefly. The most substantial discussion of Grafton, and the most scholarly among those mentioned thus far, is found in Milton R. Winter’s massive three volume history of Presbyterianism in Mississippi (Published by the Author, 2021). Winter devotes an entire chapter of his second volume to Grafton’s life, ministry, and writings. He also relies heavily on Grafton’s unpublished History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi throughout the first two volumes.

Four known scholarly works cite Grafton’s writings or archives. Priscilla Lowrey’s master’s thesis “The Introduction of Presbyterianism into Mississippi” (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1974) cites his History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi. Ernest Trice Thompson’s three volume Presbyterians in the South (John Knox Press, 1973) cites the same. Randy J. Sparks’ two books on Mississippi religious history, On Jordan’s Stormy Banks (University of Georgia Press, 1994) and Religion in Mississippi (Mississippi Historical Society, 2001) include the Cornelius W. Grafton Papers at the Mississippi Department of Archives and
History among their sources. The paucity of academic references to Grafton’s papers, combined with their use in arguably the most significant and comprehensive histories of Southern Presbyterianism (Thompson) and religion in Mississippi (Sparks), suggests that they are insufficiently studied rather than insignificant.

This dissertation proceeds chronologically through Dr. Grafton’s ministry in five chapters, beginning in 1866 with his enrollment at the University of Mississippi and ending with his death on August 1, 1934. Each chapter corresponds not only to a specific time frame in his ministry, but also to a particular source base in his extant writings. These five source bases facilitate interaction with different historiographic discussions and reveal themes that transcend sources and time periods.

Chapter one studies Grafton’s preparation for ministry during Reconstruction, including his career as a student and the early years of his ministry. It begins with his experience at the University of Mississippi and gives close attention to the valedictory address he delivered in the 1868 graduation ceremony. The chapter proceeds to study Grafton’s years as a presbyterian seminary student in Columbia, South Carolina through his class notes along with later writings that describe his time as a seminarian. At Columbia, he was trained in the doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms and narrowed his focus from the general pursuit of “truth” described in his valedictory to the proclamation of the Christian gospel and the expansion of the kingdom of God. The chapter concludes with a study of Grafton’s early sermons in the Union Church and Ben Salem congregations, which further illustrate his focus on theological instruction and pious moral reformation for his congregation.

This first chapter shows Grafton’s optimistic hopes for civilizational progress and national improvement as a college student and his desire for the expansion of the kingdom of
God as a seminarian and young minister. It also introduces a theme that pervades all of Grafton’s writings, namely, his belief that history was governed by divine providence and filled with doctrinal and moral lessons for contemporary Christians. Related to this theme, his descriptions of Reconstruction presupposed a race-based social hierarchy which, he believed, came from and would be maintained by God.

Reflections on Grafton’s education and early ministry support two long-held observations made by historians of Southern religion. First, Gaines Foster has shown that former Confederates abandoned their vision for an independent nation of slaveholders and accepted reunion and abolition. In his 1868 valedictory at the University of Mississippi, Grafton, a Confederate veteran, optimistically anticipated national, rather than sectional progress through intellectual and religious advancement. Second, as the focus of Grafton’s writings narrowed from the nation in his valedictory to the church in his seminary education and early sermons, he prioritized what Samuel S. Hill, Jr. called the central theme of Southern evangelicalism, namely, the conversion of individuals to faith in Christ and godly living.

Chapter two studies C. W. Grafton’s preaching by examining hundreds of his sermon manuscripts, most of which date between 1875 and 1890. He believed that preaching was the heart of the minister’s work, and his sermons reflect that conviction. The chapter considers basic questions like when Grafton preached, to whom, what was the content of his sermons, and how were they received by his hearers. He believed that the Bible was the inspired word of God, without error and authoritative in all it said. He based each sermon on a portion of Scripture, usually one verse or short paragraph of verses, from which he made doctrinal and practical applications to his church members. Like the sermons he preached during and shortly after seminary, these sermons prioritized Christian conversion and holy living. He preached doctrinal
subjects, like the sinner’s justification by faith and the atonement of Christ, and practical subjects, like Sabbath observance, benevolent giving, and family piety. Very few of his thousands of words over hundreds of sermons engaged social or political topics. And in the rare occasions in which they did, they did so to illustrate theological or moral points.

This investigation of Grafton’s sermons reveals multiple parallels to the burgeoning fundamentalist movement, which would blossom in the early decades of the twentieth century. He began with an inerrant Bible. From that unchanging starting point, he led educational efforts in church and school that promoted civilizational stability at a time of cultural shift. Like other fundamentalists, Grafton routinely adopted anti-modern positions, showed an ambivalence towards culture, and prioritized the importance of saving souls.

Chapter three studies C. W. Grafton’s opposition to lynching. More people were lynched in Mississippi between 1881 and 1940 than in any other state, making Mississippi the worst lynching state in the nation. Extant sources record Grafton’s public responses to three lynchings—the 1880 murder of Will Reed in the Caseyville community near Ben Salem, the 1899 lynching of an unnamed black man in Port Gibson, and the 1919 lynching of Dock Gordon in Union Church. In each case, Dr. Grafton unequivocally condemned lynching as a sin against God and a violation of his moral law. He did so, however, within and even in support of the prevailing framework of race-based social hierarchy and white paternalism.

His opposition to lynching took the form of many other lynching opponents in his time. He believed that lynching undermined the rule of law, used lethal force that only the magistrate had the right to exercise, and violated the sixth commandment prohibition against murder. In one memorable case, Grafton accused his entire congregation of complicity in a nearby lynching.
This chapter places Dr. Grafton’s responses to lynching in conversation with those of his Christian contemporaries, including white Georgia evangelist Sam Jones and black Mississippi journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett. This approach situates Grafton within a larger context of Christian responses to lynching. In her study of lynching in the South, Amy Louise Wood found that most Southern churches remained silent on lynching. Grafton did not.

Chapter four studies Grafton’s monthly column in the statewide Presbyterian periodical *The Mississippi Visitor*. From 1915 into 1928, the *Visitor* published “Dr. Grafton’s Message” on a range of theological, devotional, and practical subjects. This chapter focusses on the ways these columns responded to prominent themes in the progressive era, including World War I, religion and science, women, children, urbanization, and race. During this period, Dr. Grafton was elected Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. General Assembly in 1916, an assembly dedicated to the ministry and health of country churches, like Union Church and Ben Salem.

Grafton’s writings on these subjects followed fundamentalist lines. He opposed theological and cultural modernism, using an inerrant Bible as his weapon. But he did not stop at critique. He also sought to construct and defend an alternative vision, a positive one, of what the Christian life would look like if it embraced traditional presbyterian theology and piety, traditional gender roles, and a commitment to rural communities. Grafton wrote these articles at the height of his regional prominence.

Finally, chapter five studies Dr. Grafton’s largest literary production, his unpublished 658-page *History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi*. Grafton wrote and presented on multiple church historical subjects in the first two decades of the twentieth century, before the history project developed in earnest. While the idea for a history of Mississippi’s Presbyterians had been discussed as early as 1905, this project began in 1924 and Grafton completed his manuscript
in 1927. He hoped that his history would inspire generations of Presbyterians to imitate the sacrifice, faithfulness, and courage of Mississippi’s pioneer Presbyterians. Sadly, his magnum opus was never published.

This chapter begins by surveying Grafton’s other historical writings. It then describes the genesis and development of the project and identifies the manuscript’s key themes. The chapter compares Grafton’s approach to history writing with the approaches of his contemporaries, both amateur and professional. Here again, Grafton’s interpretations and convictions mirrored those of the fundamentalists. And here again, his providential understanding of history permeated his interpretations of the past.

This dissertation aims to make three main contributions to the study of postbellum Southern religious history. First, it provides an in-depth examination of rich and understudied primary sources to understand C. W. Grafton’s ministry on its own terms. Instead of beginning with one or several historiographic questions and limiting research to targeted sources that address those questions, this project begins with a comprehensive approach to the voluminous source material. From that comprehensive reading, various emphases and themes emerge. In particular, Grafton’s extant writings show that the thrust of his ministry was religious. He preached, taught, and wrote so that people would profess faith in Jesus Christ and conduct themselves in an increasingly pious manner. In short, a religious leader’s literary remains reveal his primarily religious goals. While this may be unsurprising, Grafton’s longevity, influence, location, and ideological consistency over time make his story unique and worthy of exploration.

Dr. Grafton’s focus on faith and piety provides the necessary context for the dissertation’s second intended contribution, namely, that his limited social, racial, and political commentary must be understood within its more basic religious framework. Such a contextual
reading should result in at least two conclusions. First, while Grafton certainly did engage issues like race, gender, and social reform, he did so infrequently. Put differently, social and political subjects were not the emphasis of his ministry. Christian conversion and piety were his emphases. Therefore, engagement with these subjects, including that which follows below, ought to give an accurate impression of the limited space they occupy in his preaching and teaching. Second, keeping the overarching religious thrust of Grafton’s ministry clearly in view should illuminate his engagement with social and political subjects. Doing so enables that engagement to be interpreted as consequent to his theological convictions, rather than independent of or even antecedent to them. For example, Dr. Grafton wrote that the demise of black rule during Reconstruction was a moral certainty. As will be discussed below, that social and political conclusion grew out of his deeper theological belief in providence and divinely established social orders. The fundamentally religious nature of Grafton’s ministry shows how infrequently he addressed social and political subjects as well as the essentially religious way he addressed them when he did.

Third, this dissertation interacts with several streams of historiography related to religion in the South after the Civil War. Grafton’s preaching and writing support Samuel Hill’s decades-old conclusion that Southern evangelical Christianity placed the conversion experience at the center of its existence. He drew from Lost Cause themes by using Confederate veterans as examples of piety and virtue. However, his preaching rarely referenced the Confederacy and more often expressed hopes for progress in national rather than sectional terms. Grafton’s engagement with progressive era themes unfolded along consistently fundamentalist lines, while offering a positive vision for a Christianized rural and traditional life that moved beyond a mere critique of modernism. His opposition to lynching clarifies the variety of Christian responses to
that phenomenon, as he rejected any exceptions to its impermissibility while also supporting and defending the basic racial and social structures in which lynchings occurred. Finally, his *History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi* closely resembles the pre-professional approach to history writing that obtained in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. While he finished his *History* in 1927, long after the push for professionalization had developed, and while he did participate in professionalized history writing through his 1906 journal article, his writing teemed with the moral and spiritual lessons that characterized the pre-professional history writing of the late nineteenth century. He believed and wrote that all history revealed God’s guiding hand and enduring moral order and he used history, as he used the rest of his ministerial endeavors, to shape and enliven the doctrine and piety of his readers.
In the spring of 1926, the Rev. Dr. Cornelius Washington Grafton travelled from his home in Union Church, MS to Columbia, SC for a meeting of the Columbia Theological Seminary Board of Trustees. The seventy-nine-year-old minister “had not been back to Columbia since graduating in 1873.” Between board meetings, he visited the graves of James H. Thornwell and John L. Girardeau, theological and homiletical titans of a former age, whose influence continued to permeate the Southern Presbyterian church and shape Grafton’s ministry. He was pleased to find that, despite improvements to other buildings, “the old chapel of the Seminary stands as it was 53 years ago…the smallest but the most famous of all the buildings.” He wrote, “the whole atmosphere was heavy laden with past memories.” But the school’s atmosphere was, quite literally, about to change. In just over a year, the Presbyterian seminary would move to a new campus just outside of Atlanta in Decatur, Georgia. The institution, which had embodied Grafton’s ideal of Old School presbyterian ministry, piety, theology, and church order, was moving to the capital of the New South. Standing on the old Columbia campus one last time, more than half a century after his graduation, Grafton stood at a crossroads of history and progress, both governed, he believed, by divine providence. These themes of historic

---

5 Cornelius W. Grafton, “A Trip to Columbia Seminary,” Mississipi Visitor 15, no. 7 (June 1926), 7-9, microform, Reformed Theological Seminary Library, Jackson, Miss.
7 Grafton, “A Trip to Columbia Seminary,” 7-9.
Presbyterianism, civilizational and missional progress, and reverence for God’s all-governing providence pervaded Grafton’s 61-year pastorate and had roots in his years of preparation for the ministry.

This chapter examines Cornelius W. Grafton’s education and early ministry during Reconstruction. The years between Confederate defeat and Democratic “redemption” were, for Grafton, largely years of preparation; undergraduate studies at the University of Mississippi, divinity school at Columbia Theological Seminary in South Carolina, ordination examinations, and the first years of a new pastorate in Jefferson County, Mississippi with a young and growing family. Grafton’s academic training and early ministry introduce central themes of his 61-year ministry, specifically, his progressive hopes for both nation and church, his understanding of history as governed by providence and useful for moral formation, and his conception of divinely instituted social order.

I. The University of Mississippi

Cornelius Washington Grafton was twenty-one years old when he arrived at the University of Mississippi in the fall of 1866. He joined two hundred forty-three other students on campus, a student body “somewhat older than before the war…[with] less tendency toward frivolity.” Grafton recalled of his student days, “Jefferson Davis was then at Fortress Monroe; Federal troops were garrisoned in our principal cities; the Reconstruction period had just begun; and Mississippi and the whole South were wrapped in mourning. In such a body of teachers and students, and under such circumstances, there was bound to be a deep undertone of the soberest

---

8 Allen Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi: Its First Hundred Years*, 2nd ed. (Hattiesburg, MS: The University and College Press of Mississippi, 1971), 64.
thought.” He concluded, “I suppose no body of students ever assembled at the State University that were more sober and thoughtful than those who attended the first three or four years after the war.”

While Grafton and his schoolmates may have been less frivolous than their antebellum predecessors, many of them were not as well prepared. On account of the War, young men went to the University lacking the requisite training. Faculty assumed an increased teaching load to provide special preparatory courses on campus from 1867 to 1870. Cornelius, however, had attended a schoolhouse at Concord, where he began studying the Latin classics at the age of ten. He presented himself for admission to the University in 1866 and, following an interview with Chancellor Waddell and examinations by the faculty, he was admitted directly to the Junior class. He went on to finish first in the class of 1868, with an academic average over 97% in his second semester. According to his grandson, Thomas H. Grafton, “His was said to have been the highest record up to that date at the University.”

C. W. Grafton was an outlier academically, but in other ways he epitomized an ordinary student at the University of Mississippi. He joined the Delta Psi fraternity. He was one of “eighteen of a class of twenty-four graduating had been Confederate soldiers.” Most of the student body served in the Confederate army, as did a majority of the faculty, which included

---

11 Cabaniss, *The University of Mississippi*, 64.
15 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), first page.
General L. Q. C. Lamar. In addition to the common bonds of fraternity life and military service, many in the University community participated in or promoted Christian religious observance. Multiple faculty members were ordained ministers, most notably the presbyterian Chancellor Rev. John N. Waddel. Grafton joined a student prayer circle, along with future presbyterian minister T. L. Haman (class of 1870) and future First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, MS ruling elder Calvin Wells (class of 1869). This prayer group played a decisive role in the life of its most famous member, Bishop Charles B. Galloway. J. B. Hutton later recalled in a memorial to Grafton, “When they [Rev. C. W. Grafton, Hon. W. Calvin Wells, Rev. T. L. Haman] reached Canton a mere lad was put in their custody. When they reached Oxford they formed a family prayer circle. In this circle, perchance, was his [Grafton’s] first great achievement towards world conquest. They won the lad entrusted to them for Christ, and we know him as the beloved Bishop C. B. Galloway.” Bishop Galloway’s wife remembered, “My husband was converted at a students’ prayer meeting, held in the room of his friend, Mr. Calvin Wells, at the University of Mississippi…. Soon thereafter he decided that he would enter the ministry.” Like Grafton, Galloway began his studies in the fall of 1866 and graduated after two years in 1868.

Grafton’s two years in Oxford proceeded in relative poverty and peace. Textbook shortages and boarding costs pressured students, some of whom still wore parts of their gray uniforms to classes. He and some of his classmates “prepared their own meals because the

---

18 Cabaniss, The University of Mississippi, 61-63, 64. David G. Sansing, The University of Mississippi: A Sesquicentennial History (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 117.
19 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 34.
21 Candler, Bishop Charles Betts Galloway, 21.
22 Candler, Bishop Charles Betts Galloway, 17.
23 Cabaniss, The University of Mississippi, 64.
university board was too high for them…and forced the prices down."

But, the black Union troops which had been stationed in Oxford after the war had departed in May 1866, before Grafton matriculated that fall. He was graduated in the summer of 1868, around the time Republican Adelbert Ames became Governor of Mississippi, but before Republican reforms took effect. Circumstances in Oxford would intensify and deteriorate after he graduated. In 1871, L. Q. C. Lamar fractured the cheek bone of U. S. Marshall in an Oxford courtroom with a chair during a trial and was cheered by Klan members and University students alike. Around the same time, the entire University faculty threatened to quit when a rumor spread of a possible black student. But in 1868, these events were all in the future. As such, Allen Cabaniss fittingly described Grafton’s Oxford years as the University’s “false dawn.”

As first honor man for the class of 1868, Grafton delivered the valedictory at commencement that spring. Confederate memorialization had been front and center in the previous two graduations. In 1866, Captain Francis Asbury Pope, the lone representative of the class of 1861, moved the audience to ringing applause and flowing tears as he honored Mississippi’s battle-crippled former governor Charles Clark, who was seated with him on the platform in the college hall. The next year, Rev. T. D. Witherspoon, pastor of Oxford’s First Presbyterian Church and former son-in-law-to-be of the late Rev. James Henley Thornwell, called graduates to preserve the memory of the unique pre-war Southern civilization and transmit it to future generations. He pled with graduates “to embalm in literature, and thus preserve in

---

24 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 37.
25 Sansing, The University of Mississippi, 119.
26 Mitchell, A New History of Mississippi, 199-200.
27 Mitchell, A New History of Mississippi, 199.
28 Cabaniss, The University of Mississippi, 60.
29 Cabaniss, The University of Mississippi, 65.
fragrant memory at least that peculiar type of civilization which has been the ornament of the
South.” By the time Grafton ascended the rostrum in the spring of 1868, a clear precedent of
Southern and Confederate remembrance had been set. But, while martial imagery ran
throughout his 3,000 plus word speech, he gave scant attention to the War, or anything related to
it.

Now twenty-three years old, with two years of coursework behind him, the state
University’s first honor man took the stage, looking out over the gathered audience in front of
him. His classmates were seated behind or beside him, accompanied by faculty and
administration. Grafton began his valedictory, as graduation speakers sometimes do, by setting
his current moment in a vast world-historical context, beginning, quite literally, in the beginning.
“Ever since the golden birds of Paradise sang their mournful requiem over the fall of man truth
and error have maintained constant conflict, and this conflict unimpaired by the wasting ruins of
untold centuries is now raging with undiminished ardor throughout all quarters of the world.”
The raging conflict Grafton went on to describe was not over Vicksburg or Shiloh or the rights of
secession. It was a metaphysical conflict, the battle between truth and error. And he and his
classmates were among the soldiers, those who “assumed the cross,” as “champions of truth”
engaged in battle. This battle was still raging, but he assured his hearers, “truth with its
conquering legions has long had the advantage.”

Grafton spent less time defining the nature of truth than describing its effects. Truth led to
progress. “Superstition and darkness grow pallid and flee before its [truth’s] approach. The tide

31 Cabaniss, The University of Mississippi, 67, quoting T. D. Witherspoon, The Appeal of the South to its Educated
Men (Memphis, TN: The Association, 1867).
32 Valedictory Address by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 1, 1868, box 1, folder 1, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers,
Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as Grafton Papers).
34 Valedictory Address by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 1, 1868, Grafton Papers.
of improvement is ever advancing onward and outward.”

Christianity was a part of this tide. “The peaceful blessings of Christianity the benign influence of social and domestic life are spreading with rapid strides.” But his vision of progress and improvement through truth was not reduced to the conversions of individuals or the growth of the Church. Truth promoted national development. As truth advanced, “the bulwarks of national liberties become stronger and yet more strong.”

Finally, truth’s victory will be seen when “the mind shall reign in undisputed dominion,” as the “great wave of civilization” progresses forward. Civilization progressed through institutions, “colleges schools and churches,” which prepare, “the weapons of those engaged in the Conflict.” And the University of Mississippi was one of the “mighty engines of improvement, mighty machines to prepare the Armor and polish the weapons of the valiant soldier…which year after year has been sending forth its contributions to the support of that cause in which the champions of truth are engaged.”

Grafton’s valedictory described a world at war. But this war was not like the one in which he fought only four years earlier. It was a civilizational war, a battle between progress and backwardness, between liberty and tyranny, between improvement and stagnation, between civilization and heathenism. This war included the Church, but also transcended it. Churches joined colleges and schools to advance civilization, promoting the life of the mind, national liberty, and peace within a broadly Christian framework.

Thanks to the University, Grafton and his classmates were now ready to enter the cause of their forefathers. This was not the Confederate Lost Cause, but a broader cause of truth and
human progress which he described in explicitly national, not regional terms. The cause of truth was one of “national liberties,” and “national growth and improvement.” He even described the University of Mississippi as “this great pillar of the union.” One can only wonder what General Lamar thought when he heard the valedictorian describe his university in such terms.

Grafton did mention the Civil War, but not to praise its combatants or memorialize the Southern cause. In the context of his farewell to the “Gentlemen of the Board of Trustees,” he praised them as those, “who made the welkin ring with loud acclams as it rose again from the tomb to which mourning heroes with heavy hearts consigned it when the dark canopy of war enshrouded the land in its murky folds.” In this speech, the greatest threat put forward by the Civil War was its threat to the University, which was a bulwark in the larger civilizational conflict between truth and error.

After thanking the faculty and trustees, Grafton turned to the students, those not yet graduating, and urged them to “follow in the tracks of your predecessors,” and explore the vast “temple” of knowledge with “the lamp of science.” He assured them that if they did, “when our labors are over the goal is reached, together we will shake hands with the friends of truth on the boundless shores of the unseen world.” Then, whether with a metaphorical flourish of oratory, or with a universalism he would later jettison, he described the inhabitants of that unseen world, “the Platos and Newtons and Galileos who have gone before us, who will meet us at the gate of the celestial fields and with venerable smiles salute the warriors from the field of conflict, and with loud anthems peeling throughout the vales of the Elysian realms welcome us to the abodes

---

42 Valedictory Address by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 2, 4, 1868, Grafton Papers.
43 Valedictory Address by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 5, 1868, Grafton Papers.
44 Valedictory Address by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 9, 1868, Grafton Papers.
45 Valedictory Address by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 12, 1868, Grafton Papers.
46 Valedictory Address by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 13, 1868, Grafton Papers.
of happiness and bliss.” Plato, Newton, and Galileo were neither Confederate heroes nor presbyterian divines. And at least Plato, to say nothing of the other two, was not a Christian at all. But here they were, in Grafton’s valedictory, waiting to one day greet the University’s underclassmen in the celestial halls of bliss. They were on the right side of Grafton’s cosmic metaphysical conflict and had reached a joyous end, even if only metaphorically.

Plato’s inclusion in the halls of bliss did not easily square with Grafton’s presbyterian theological commitments about redemption through Christ alone. But Christian redemption was not Grafton’s primary concern in this speech. Rather, the conflict he described and in which he urged his hearers to engage transcended region and even, to an extent, religion, though it could by no means be conceived without it. He set forth a hope of progress, a cause in which school, college, and church worked towards the same goal of civilization through knowledge. He concluded with words of affection for his fellow graduates and then a final “Farewell! Farewell!”

Grafton’s valedictory illustrates Gaines Foster’s observation that “to interpret their [former Confederates’] posture solely as continued defiance underrates the importance of the concession southerners did make: abandonment of their vision of an independent nation of slaveholders.” Foster continues, “The vast majority [of southern whites after the war] remained loyal to old political values and to the principle of white supremacy, but even so accepted reunion and the abolition of slavery.” Grafton’s vision of universal progress had the whole nation in mind. The University of Mississippi was a “pillar of the union,” not just of the South.

47 Valedictory Address by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 13-14, 1868, Grafton Papers.
50 Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 21.
Further, his vision was decidedly forward looking and hopeful. The Civil War may have threatened the University for a time, but the waves of civilization continued to progress undeterred.

What Foster observes about the South generally, E. T. Thompson observed of Southern Presbyterians in particular. He wrote, “Synods and presbyteries, as well as the General Assembly, individual ministers and editors alike—all urged the people to accept defeat on the battlefield as the will of God, to submit to the powers that be, to strengthen the church, to resist the temptations to self-indulgence or worldliness, to do their part in the rebuilding of the new South.”

Grafton’s valedictory fit this mold. Thompson further identified two streams within this overarching response to defeat. Virginia theology professor R. L. Dabney represented the first, a primarily backward-looking glorification of the old South, which he likened to “the bronze Athena, standing in massive strength upon the living rock of the Acropolis, crowned with the insignia of victory and empire.”

Dabney’s fellow Presbyterian minister and friend, Dr. Moses Hoge, represented the second, which looked forward to the New South, embodied by Stonewall Jackson’s little daughter, hoisted before the crowds at the unveiling of her father’s statue in Richmond. Grafton’s speech embraced the latter vision, one filled with the hope of national strength, one in which obstacles, even those as severe as the War, could not stop civilization’s progress.

II. Columbia Theological Seminary

---

The University of Mississippi’s first honor man would eventually record one of, if not the longest consecutive pastorates in the history of the state. However, Grafton did not immediately enroll in seminary or even decide for the ministry right after graduation. Instead, he moved about twenty-five miles west of Oxford to Sardis, Mississippi and began teaching school. Even at this early stage in his career, his reputation preceded him. In Sardis, Grafton met Samuel Craighead Caldwell, whom he prepared for the University of Mississippi.\footnote{Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 40-41.} Caldwell later followed Grafton to Columbia Theological Seminary and into the Presbyterian ministry in South Mississippi, where the two labored side-by-side, Grafton in Union Church and Caldwell in Hazlehurst, for more than forty years.\footnote{Robert Milton Winter, \textit{Citadels of Zion: A History of Mississippi Presbyterians}, vol. 1, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Memphis, TN: Published by the Author, 2021), 170.} Caldwell later recalled, “I shall never forget the thrill of that occasion when my father announced that C. W. Grafton was to be our teacher…He graduated at the head of the most famous class that has ever gone out from that great institution of learning…When the time arrived for school to start at Sardis, Mississippi, I saw my father drive up to the front gate in his buggy with a young man who proved to be C. W. Grafton…From that day our association was most intimate: friends, members of the same fraternity, co-laborers, co-presbyters.”\footnote{Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 41, quoting an unpublished manuscript by S. C. Caldwell.} The older outlived the younger and Grafton had the unusual duty of preaching both Caldwell’s ordination in 1888 and his funeral in 1930.\footnote{Winter, \textit{Citadels of Zion}, 1:186.} While he stayed for only two years, Grafton’s time in Sardis shaped the rest of his life in another way. He joined the presbyterian church in Sardis, transferring his membership from Concord church in Madison County, where he grew up.\footnote{Concord Presbyterian Church Session Minutes, p. 44, May 4, 1869. A member of this now-dissolved congregation in Madison County, Mississippi gave me a typed copy of these session minutes.} His future wife, Sue Webb Doak, was the daughter of the Sardis presbyterian minister Rev. Daniel
G. Doak. Grafton’s grandson later wrote, “The courtship must have been very restrained. Near the end of his life, Grandpa told me that after they had become engaged he found her so charming one afternoon that he kissed her. She left the room and when he next called sent word by the maid that he ‘musn’t presume.’”60 After two significant years in Sardis, Grafton left Mississippi for his denominational seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, joined by two friends from the University of Mississippi, Thomas L. Haman and Daniel K. McFarland.61

Columbia Seminary was experiencing a gradual but ultimately short-lived recovery when Grafton, now age 23, arrived on campus in the fall of 1870. The seminary had 61 students when the war began.62 It reopened in September 1865 with only five students, “six months after Sherman’s troops left the ash-strewn capital of South Carolina.”63 George Howe, John Adger, and James Woodrow constituted the faculty.64 Their homes destroyed, Adger and Woodrow lived with their families in one of the dormitories.65 Woodrow, the Perkins Professor of Natural Science, would soon become a lighting-rod in the Southern church for his views on creation and evolution. These three men were quickly joined by William S. Plumer, a sixty-five-year-old Pennsylvanian, distinguished author, and churchman, who was forced to resign his professorship in Pittsburgh for refusing to pray for the success of the Union armies.66 In the spring of 1870, the board called Joseph Ruggles Wilson, former pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Augusta, GA, brother-in-law to James Woodrow, and father to future president Woodrow Wilson, to teach

59 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 41.
60 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), first page.
61 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 41.
63 Clarke, To Count Our Days, 105-106.
64 Clarke, To Count Our Days, 105.
65 Clarke, To Count Our Days, 105.
66 Clarke, To Count Our Days, 107.
homiletics and pastoral theology. The student body grew from five in 1865 to thirty-five in 1870 when Grafton arrived. It rose to fifty-seven just after Grafton left in 1874.

The young minister-to-be and his fellow post-bellum Columbia students began their theological education with “an intense study of Hebrew under Howe’s direction.” Howe also taught courses in Greek New Testament. Plumer taught an introduction to theology which included Paley’s *Evidences of Christianity*. Adger taught early church history during two class periods each week, using Kurtz’s *Manual of Sacred History*, which began, literally, with Adam. Joseph R. Wilson rounded out the first-year curriculum with a course on “experimental and practical religion.” Thus, he spent his first year studying Old Testament Hebrew, New Testament Greek, theology, early church history, and practical divinity.

Grafton’s extant notes from some of these courses reveal the seminary’s theological contours, which shaped not just his student years but also his ministry long after he graduated. His notes on church history from the spring of 1871, identified theological principles from the early church which were then connected to contemporary discussions of church doctrine and government. His notes record his responses to questions from his reading in Johann Lorenz von Mosheim’s 1726 *Institutiones Historiae Ecclesiasticae Novi Testamenti*. Grafton found Mosheim to be “somewhat contradictory,” in his conclusions on early church government. Grafton understood Mosheim to say that “there was no such form [of church government] but

---

67 Clarke, *To Count Our Days*, 108.
68 Clarke, *To Count Our Days*, 108.
69 Clarke, *To Count Our Days*, 108.
75 C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, pp. 3-9, 1871, C. Benton Kline, Jr. Special Collections and Archives, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia.
76 C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 10, 1871.
that Jesus Christ and the apostles left it open as a matter to be decided by circumstances.”\textsuperscript{77} Grafton was not convinced. He wrote, “My own opinion is that the form of government was really ‘jure divino’ both directly from the Apostles and by inheritance through the Jews.”\textsuperscript{78} In other words, church government was given by God, by divine right, and not something left to human circumstantial convenience. He continued by reasoning, “because in so important a matter and from which afterwards sprung so many evils the primitive church would surely not have been left without some directions.”\textsuperscript{79} Thus he concluded, “the democratic form of government seems to have come down from the days of Abraham and we must believe that it had its first origin in the sanction of God.”\textsuperscript{80} This conclusion had practical relevance for Grafton and his presbyterian classmates because it meant that the government of the first century church, at least before the early “church government was corrupted,” was, in essence, the government of their Southern Presbyterian church.\textsuperscript{81} He reasoned, “For the first two centuries the government of the Church was a pure democracy. Each church was independent and elected its own rulers. The common interest was the spread of the gospel, the common motive was the glory of Christ.”\textsuperscript{82} From where, then did hierarchical forms of church government, like those of Roman Catholicism or the Church of England, come? He wrote, “Prelacy and popery spring naturally from continued transgressions of the primitive form.”\textsuperscript{83} Grafton believed that God used such deviations from “democratic” church government to discipline and sanctify the Church for its good, saying,

\textsuperscript{77} C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 10, 1871.  
\textsuperscript{78} C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 10, 1871.  
\textsuperscript{79} C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 10, 1871.  
\textsuperscript{80} C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 10, 1871.  
\textsuperscript{81} C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 11, 1871.  
\textsuperscript{82} C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 18, 1871.  
\textsuperscript{83} C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 18, 1871.
“indeed, popery was a necessity, that the church might receive a severe schooling, and come forth purified and prepared to cherish true principles.”

Here Grafton defended a central point of his presbyterian doctrine, that the government of the church, specifically a “democratic” government in which church members elect men to rule and serve the church, was not a matter of denominational preference or circumstantial convenience but a matter of obedience to God. Deviations from this divinely given form led only to error, exemplified by Roman Catholicism and episcopacy. In short, presbyterian church government had been in place in the church since Abraham, through the Old Testament, into the New Testament, and remained the divine law to which the church must adhere.

Under Adger’s tutelage, Grafton interacted with and criticized Mosheim’s positions on church government to find those of his own denomination in the Bible and in the history of the early church. He took a similarly critical approach in engaging Augustine’s view of religious toleration. Reflecting on the execution of Priscillian for heresy by Christians in AD 385, Grafton concluded, “Augustine was sincere in his convictions of truth and desired that all error should be extirpated. I don’t believe that much can be said in his defense as intolerance which will lead to bloodshed and death in all kinds of opinions religious and political in all ages nations sexes and climes is to be utterly and unconditionally condemned.” Thus Grafton rejected both religious and political violence “unconditionally.” This rejection of political violence and intolerance in his seminary days would emerge again in the future when he encountered multiple instances of lynching in the communities he served, acts he condemned in terms not unlike those he used here in his notebook. As with his notes on church government, his notes on Augustine’s views of religious toleration reflect not merely an interest in understanding significant figures in church

---

84 C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 18, 1871.
history but evaluating them in light of the doctrines of the presbyterian church in the nineteenth century.

While his student years at Columbia Seminary appear to have been largely successful, they were not without disagreement or difficulty. Grafton received some humbling and pointed criticism from theology professor William Swan Plumer. Plumer, a prolific author and two-time General Assembly Moderator (1838 and 1871) did not appreciate one of Grafton’s student sermons on Romans 10:14, specifically how Grafton described the salvation of infants who were not capable of hearing the gospel preached. Grafton wrote on the back of his sermon manuscript, “Condemned by Plumer. The cause of a heated argument between me and my brethren.”

In addition to his views on the theology and practice of the early church, Grafton’s notebooks also provide a small window into his extra-curricular life as a divinity student at Columbia. He copied into a notebook he used for class notes lines of love poetry by Walter Colton, a nineteenth century minister and newspaper publisher. “And then he falls in love, a curious feeling; A kind melancholy flow of soul; A soft sensation o’er his heartstrings stealing.” After copying the poem in its entirety, he noted in his book, “Works of Walter Colton found with a little country maiden on the road from Cheraw S.C. to Chesterfield May 15th 1871.” May 15 was a Monday that year, and Grafton likely encountered the young “maiden” while walking home after filling a pulpit in one of the two locations the day before. The event made some impression on the twenty-four-year-old. Decades later, his grandson recalled the encounter, “During the summer vacation of 1871 Grandpa preached in Chesterfield, S.C., and early in September had a week in Cheraw. As he was walking to Cheraw a girl driving an ox-cart

---

86 Romans 10:14 Sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, 1872, box 1, folder 1, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
87 C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 56, 1871.
88 C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 56, 1871.
harnessed to “Buldy and Baldy” gave him a ride. She came to see him at Columbia Seminary in 1927 when he was attending a trustees meeting.”

After a summer in Chesterfield, South Carolina, Grafton returned to Columbia, about 85 miles southeast, for his second year of divinity school. His notebook from this period picks up with Mosheim’s second volume. Professor Adger led this course, in which, according to Columbia Seminary historian Erskine Clarke, he “taught church history two days a week, rushing from the apostles in the first century to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.”

In addition to Adger, Grafton and his fellow second-year classmates had three theology courses with William S. Plumer and also took Old and New Testament exegesis classes in Hebrew and Greek respectively. The second year curriculum was rounded out by Professor Wilson’s practical theology courses which studied rhetoric and pastoral work.

Grafton’s notebook gives a sense of the main theological topics studied and discussed at the Seminary. These included the real presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the use of images, and the history of the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary. He recorded a series of proof texts for the divinity of Christ from the Old Testament prophets with relevant applications by the New Testament apostles. He also had sections on the names ascribed to Christ, the attributes of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and baptism. Notes on funeral

---

89 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), first page. While it is of little significance, the dates given for this encounter in the notebook and in his grandson’s account do not match. The former is to be preferred, since it was recorded by C. W. Grafton close to the time it occurred.
90 C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 59, 1871.
94 C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, pp. 110-111, 1871.
95 C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 112, 1871.
96 C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, pp. 113-122, 1871.
97 C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, pp. 125-128, 1871.
98 C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, pp. 129-130, 1871.
texts and sermon ideas provided prompts for future practical ministry duties.\textsuperscript{99} Quotes by or about various theologians reveal some of the influential authors and interlocutors from Grafton’s seminary years, including Princeton theologian Archibald Alexander’s \textit{Thoughts on Religious Experience}, seventeenth century English nonconformist John Owen, controversial eighteenth century New England theologian Samuel Hopkins, nineteenth century Scottish presbyterian Robert Murray M’Cheyne, as well as New Orleans presbyterian Benjamin Morgan Palmer and his own professors William S. Plumer and Joseph Ruggles Wilson.\textsuperscript{100}

The twenty-four-year-old Grafton studied theology not merely for its own sake but in preparation for the pastorate. As such, his academic preparation ran parallel to a process of candidacy and examination within his denomination, the Presbyterian Church in the United States. On October 28, 1871, the Presbytery of Central Mississippi, meeting at the Raymond Presbyterian Church in Hinds County, took Grafton under its care as a candidate for the gospel ministry. The Presbytery assigned him a four-part trial examination in order to be licensed to preach; a Latin exegesis concerning the divinity of Christ, a critical exercise on the Greek text of Romans 9:1-5, a lecture on Philippians 1:1-8, and a sermon on 1 Corinthians 3:11.\textsuperscript{101}

At the end of the spring semester, Grafton returned home to Madison County, Mississippi to sit for the exams he had been assigned the previous fall. The Presbytery of Central Mississippi convened May 22, 1872 at the Canton church, about 15 miles south of the Concord church where he grew up.\textsuperscript{102} His father, George Washington Grafton, an elder at the Concord church, attended the meeting to witness his son’s examination. The younger Grafton was joined by his fellow

\textsuperscript{99} C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, pp. 138-171, 220-256, 1871.
\textsuperscript{100} C. W. Grafton lecture notebook, p. 159, 1871.
\textsuperscript{101} Presbyterian Church in the U.S. Presbytery of Central Mississippi minutes, 1865-1950 [microform], October 28 and 30, 1871, pp. 273, 275.
\textsuperscript{102} Presbytery of Central Mississippi minutes [microform], May 22, 1872, p. 300.
university and seminary student T. L. Haman, whom the presbytery examined at the same meeting, with Haman preaching that day and Grafton the next. Presbytery reported, “As Mr. Grafton had here, in person, appeared before Presbytery, he was examined as to his motives for seeking the gospel ministry. The examination was sustained.”\textsuperscript{103} He was then examined in the languages, Ecclesiastical History, Sacraments, Church Government, and Homiletics and also gave his popular lecture and critical exercise before the presbytery and then preached his trial sermon.\textsuperscript{104} After preaching the sermon at eleven o’clock, presbytery adjourned and resumed at two o’clock, continuing with his exam.

Grafton’s popular discourse on Philippians 1:1-8 utilized martial language like that of his valedictory. But this time, he did not charge soldiers for the general cause of truth but soldiers for the cross of Jesus Christ. He urged, “In this day of ours when the enemies of the cross are bold and daring, treacherous and insinuating, let every one who loves his Lord buckle on anew that armor which Christ himself has prepared and commit himself to the work in the strength of the Lord his God. let every one employ himself in the interests of his Master remembering that there is not one calling in life, not one conceivable undertaking, that is worthy of one moment’s attention, unless it bears directly upon the advancement of Christ’s kingdom here on earth.”\textsuperscript{105} Four years earlier, from the graduation stage in Oxford, he charged his audience to battle for the cause of the truth. This cause certainly included the church, but it also transcended it. Church, school, and university together fueled the march of progress. The heroes of this cause were Plato, Galileo, and Newton, not just Owen, Alexander, and Palmer. But here, from Canton’s First Presbyterian Church, Grafton cast a narrower and more explicitly and exclusively Christian

\textsuperscript{103} Presbytery of Central Mississippi minutes [microform], May 23, 1872, p. 301.
\textsuperscript{104} Presbytery of Central Mississippi minutes [microform], May 23, 1872, p. 301.
\textsuperscript{105} Popular Discourse on Philippians 1:1-8 by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 13-14, 1872, box 1, folder 2, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
vision for life, one that sought to promote not a cause of civilizational progress that included Christianity, but the cause of Christ himself.

He preached his trial sermon before the presbytery from the assigned scripture text, 1 Corinthians 3:11, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” He described the gospel offer of salvation to all people, “every man woman and child of all ages, colors and climes, who will throw off the bondage under which the old covenant has bound him, and simply accept what has been done for him by the Mediator of the New Covenant, and by faith appropriate to himself His perfect work, shall live in the enjoyment of the hope of that eternal life which Christ obtained as the promise of the first covenant and at last enter upon its full fruition in the New Jerusalem above.” He continued, “it follows that all men who would be saved must look to Him alone who has wrought out salvation by his own merit and confers it solely of his own free grace. In short, the first covenant condemns the world, the second saves it.” He concluded that God’s new covenant in Christ was the “hope which cheers the strong man in his contest with the world, which revives the drooping invalid and lights up the eye of the dying pilgrim as he moves through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.”

Here again, Grafton’s themes reveal both continuity and discontinuity with his college valedictory. He described life as a conflict and contest, and again did so without identifying the Confederacy as one of the parties in the struggle. But as in his discourse on Philippians, this contest was uniquely Christian, a conflict between the believer and the world. The hope for all nations was not merely the advance of civilization, but Jesus Christ, whom they must receive by faith. “We are prepared to offer him to the world and invite the young and strong though weak

---

106 Trial Sermon on 1 Corinthians 3:11 by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 7-8, 1872, box 1, folder 2, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
107 Trial Sermon on 1 Corinthians 3:11 by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 8-9, 1872, Grafton Papers.
108 Trial Sermon on 1 Corinthians 3:11 by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 15, 1872, Grafton Papers.
and thirsting souls to come and slake their thirst at a fountain which will flow forever, to exhort the skeptic and the moralist to abandon the way of death and flee from the Avenger of blood to this the only Refuge that offers peace and safety, to show him as a Savior to the hardened convict and profane debauchee of every class and say in the language of Paul, ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners even the very chief’.”¹⁰⁹ Some, like Plato, who inhabited Elysian halls in his Oxford speech no longer fit the criteria for heaven as Grafton described them from the Canton pulpit. They were on a way to death. The “New Jerusalem above” belonged to those who received Christ’s salvation by free grace, not just anyone who labored for civilizational progress through learning.

The Presbytery of Central Mississippi unanimously sustained Grafton’s examinations and licensed both him and his friend Haman to preach the gospel as probationers for the ministry.¹¹⁰ Before the meeting adjourned, the presbytery passed a motion that, while ordinary, would prove massively significant for Grafton and for Presbyterians in Mississippi for decades to come. “Mr. Grafton was granted permission to serve the Union church, within the bounds of the Presbytery of Mississippi for three months. The Presbytery appointed Mr. Grafton to preach at Yazoo City the final Sabbath in September next.”¹¹¹ Grafton would spend his summer in Union Church.

Union Church, Mississippi was a small, rural town in Jefferson County, about twenty-four miles west of Brookhaven and eighteen miles east of Fayette. The community had been known as the Scotch Settlement, on account of the many families of Scottish descent residing there. Grafton recalled in 1906 that some church members still had a Gaelic Psalter and

¹⁰⁹ Trial Sermon on 1 Corinthians 3:11 by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 18, 1872, Grafton Papers.
¹¹⁰ Presbytery of Central Mississippi Minutes, May 23, 1872 [microform], p. 301.
¹¹¹ Presbytery of Central Mississippi Minutes, May 23, 1872 [microform], p. 302.
Catechism.\textsuperscript{112} The Union Church Presbyterian Church, one of the oldest in the state, was organized in 1817. When Grafton arrived in the summer of 1872, the church reported 114 communicant members – individuals who had made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ before the church’s elders and been admitted to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.\textsuperscript{113} This total did not include the young children of members, of which there were many (the church recorded 12 infant baptisms in one year, from August 1871 to August 1872).\textsuperscript{114} In addition to the Union Church congregation, he also served the Ben Salem church, about nine miles east on the road to Brookhaven.

Grafton spent the summer learning the work of a presbyterian pastor, especially preaching to the Union Church and Ben Salem congregations on Sundays. He based his sermons on a passage of Scripture, usually one or two verses, which he used to explain various aspects of Christian doctrine and piety. More than just explain, he sought to shape the thinking, beliefs, and behaviors of his congregations.

Grafton’s opening sermon to the Ben Salem congregation on the first Sunday of June took up the theme of the atonement, from Galatians 1:6. He argued that the Christian gospel was the only way to relieve the sense of guilt that plagues all human beings. Man made many futile attempts to assuage guilt and attain merit before God, but all in vain.\textsuperscript{115} He said,

\begin{quote}
We are pained when we look upon the mystic and see him leaving the bosom of his family and the society of friends and retiring to the dens and caves of the desert, that by the development of inner light in heavenly contemplation, his pathway might be opened up to God. The follower of Juggernaut prostrates himself before the Car of his idol god and suffers his body to be crushed hoping that thereby some merit may be charged to his
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[113] Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, 1820-1887, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 142. Mrs. Rudd transcribed these session minutes from the microfilm copy of the following at at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Union Church Presbyterian Church (Union Church, Miss.) Records, microform.
\item[114] Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 142.
\item[115] Galatians 1:4 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 2, 1872, box 1, folder 3, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
\end{footnotes}
account. The Hindoo heathen burning with Enthusiasm buries herself in the waters of the Ganges in the vain hope that her sufferings win for her to approbation of her God. And the poor pilgrim with naked feet limps over burning sands and toils over rocks and mountains to the shrines of his false gods in delusive hope of satisfying conscience.\textsuperscript{116}

Fruitless attempts to atone for sin were not just found outside of Christendom. He continued, “Crusade after crusade has been made with the same design and thousands and millions of treasure have been expended with thousands and millions of suffering but all in vain. Guilt still exists and conscience still cries aloud. How precious to these sincere followers of delusions might be the consolation in these few gospel words.”\textsuperscript{117} Grafton taught that these religious endeavors, along with the guilt that inspired them, were rooted in sinful human depravity. He explained, “every human heart is a fountain of depravity whence flow streams of corruption.”\textsuperscript{118}

The sermon concluded by identifying the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ as the solution. Grafton said that Jesus Christ made an atonement for sin and offered this atonement to his hearers as the only source of liberty from guilt and merit to stand before God. This sermon and others like it reflect what Samuel S. Hill called, “the central theme” of the southern protestant churches, namely, “the conversion of individuals.”\textsuperscript{119}

Two weeks later he preached in Union Church from Luke’s gospel on the parable of the barren fig tree. He lamented that many churches throughout the ages have heard the vineyard owner’s words, “Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground (Luke 13:7, KJV)?” He said, “hundreds of churches in our own land which have witnessed the new birth of thousands under the mighty energy of the eternal Spirit have receded from their high position and because they fed not their lamps with the

\textsuperscript{116} Galatians 1:4 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 2, 1872, Grafton Papers.
\textsuperscript{117} Galatians 1:4 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 2-3, 1872, Grafton Papers.
\textsuperscript{118} Galatians 1:4 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 4, 1872, Grafton Papers.
Instead of flourishing with much fruit, “they have become disintegrated and disorganized and their mounds of rubbish give sad testimony to the Cumberer’s sentence.” Grafton believed that the trials and unrest in America at the time were a part of God’s divine husbandry, pruning and purging the church to prevent it from being cut down. He explained, “Already into the hotbed of our national corruption has he thrust a flaming brand. By furious civil convulsions permitted by his sovereign will he is now purging the nations. The Church is undergoing an ordeal which bears too well the stamp of the Chastening Hand.” These chastening afflictions ordained by God were no abstract difficulty in Grafton’s mind. He found evidence of the same in Union Church. He preached, “this our own individual Church as you are well aware has been suffering under an icy chilliness the fearful premonition of approaching dissolution – inevitable dissolution unless checked by the revival of internal life. While Church and nation have alike suffered there is no individual who have been exempted from the common suffering of all.” His own congregation was undergoing God’s husbandry too. And he warned members that the church might dissolve unless its internal life revived. Why were they in such straits? “By our coldness in God’s service, by our freezing attentions upon the sanctuary we are bringing the church into disgust with the world and are helping the devil our worst foe to roll on his terrible machinery in his attempted conquest of the human race.”

These two sermons from Grafton’s summer work in south Mississippi stressed themes that would become mainstays in his ministry in the following decades. He preached man’s accountability to God, the reality of eternal reward or punishment, and man’s guilt before God.

---

120 Luke 13:6-9 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 8-9, 1872, box 1 folder 4, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
on account of sin, which was traced back to Adam in the garden. As seen in the first sermon, he offered Jesus Christ as the only remedy for man’s guilt, the only atonement for man’s sin, the only source of merit before God. Non-Christian religious observance, and even some professedly Christian religious observance, like the Crusades, were merely futile man-made attempts to assuage guilt. Further, his preaching explained historical events, including what he identified as “national corruption” in his own time, as governed by the providence of God. The afflictions his own congregation faced were God’s chastening hand, a divinely ordained means to revive their religious zeal and commitment to the church’s work and worship. He spiritualized the economic and political turmoil of the Reconstruction period to thaw the “coldness” and “freezing attentions” of the people.

After serving the Union Church and Ben Salem congregations in June, July, and August, Grafton travelled north to fulfill his preaching assignment in Yazoo City. Then he continued further north to Sardis, home of his first job after college and his soon to be wife, Sue Webb Doak. Before returning to Columbia for his final year of seminary, Grafton preached once more in Union Church, on the last Sunday of September.

The elders of the two congregations met to extend a pastoral call Grafton two weeks after this preaching appointment. He likely knew of the possibility of this call when he went to preach. That awareness made his choice of sermon subject interesting. He chose to preach a sermon from 1 Timothy 5:17 entitled, “Duties of Private Members to Elders,” in which he explained church members’ responsibilities to their officers.\textsuperscript{125} He encouraged the congregation to receive the protection and correction through discipline of the church’s elders and to give them kindly sympathies and hearty prayers. He traced the office of ruling elder—ordained church elders who

\textsuperscript{125} 1 Timothy 5:17 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, 1872, box 1 folder 5, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
were not vocational pastors—back to Moses and through the Old Testament, concluding, “the office of ruling elder is the most ancient office known to the world.”

His choice of subject was either very bold or very savvy. Was he bold for charging the congregation to obey its rulers only weeks before they would vote whether to make him one? Or was he savvy for telling the congregation to honor their ruling elders, the men who most influenced the congregation’s decision? Perhaps he was both.

Regardless, as Grafton returned to South Carolina for his final year of seminary the elders of the Ben Salem and Union Church congregations met at Union Church on October 12, 1872 to begin the formal process of calling him to serve as their pastor. The elders instructed each church to appoint a committee to call him and forward that call along to the presbytery. Their call took the standard form,

The congregations of Union and Bensalem churches being on sufficient grounds, well satisfied of the ministerial qualifications of you C. W. Grafton and having good hopes from our past experience of your labors that your ministrations in the gospels [sic.] will be profitable to our spiritual interests to earnestly call and desire you to undertake the Pastoral office in said congregations, promising you in the discharge of your duty, all proper support and encouragement and obedience in the Lord. —— free from worldly cares and avocations we hereby promise oblige ourselves to pay the sum of twelve hundred dollars (viz.) Union Church eight hundred and Bensalem Church four hundred in regular quarterly payments in advance during the time of your being and continuing the regular Pastor of said churches.

In testimony whereof we have hitherto respectively subscribed our names this 12th day of October A.D. 1872.

With their decision made, the two churches then forwarded the call ahead to their presbytery, Mississippi Presbytery, which oversaw the congregations in the southwestern part of the state. From Mississippi Presbytery, the call was forwarded to the Presbytery of Central

---

126 1 Timothy 5:17 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 9, 1872, Grafton Papers.
127 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 145.
128 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 145.
129 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 146.
Mississippi, where Grafton’s credentials resided. And on November 8, 1872, Central Mississippi agreed to place the call in Grafton’s hands for him to accept. Grafton was neither present, nor was his input required, for this months-long process. Calls came from the congregation through the courts of the church, and it was the minister’s duty to respond to them, not to generate them.

The two congregations together pledged twelve hundred dollars to their prospective minister, a figure which Grafton’s later writings show to have been more aspirational than realistic. When he was elected Moderator of the denominational General Assembly in 1916, he told the assembly, “For many years, when the session of Union Church meets to make out reports for Presbytery, when responding to the question concerning the payment of pastor’s salary, they always say, ‘Paid in full,’ if the amount reaches $600.”

As presbytery’s processes moved along, Grafton continued to work towards completion of his seminary degree in South Carolina. As a senior, he took more exegetical courses in the Old and New Testaments, studied the theology of salvation and eschatology, and received instruction in church government and the sacraments. Professor Wilson led him and his classmates through practical coursework on the pastorate and students preached in the daily chapel meetings, with feedback from faculty and classmates. Each student was assigned a faculty member for mentorship on personal piety and academic progress.

While his writings make no known mention of it, Grafton’s seminary years coincided with a massive controversy within the Southern Presbyterian church over James Woodrow and his teaching on evolution. Woodrow, the brother of Professor Joseph Ruggles Wilson and uncle

130 Presbytery of Central Mississippi Minutes, November 8, 1872 [microform], p. 321.
132 Clarke, To Count Our Days, 110.
133 Clarke, To Count Our Days, 110.
134 Clarke, To Count Our Days, 110.
of the future president who bore his name, held the Perkins Professorship of Natural Science in Connection with Revelation. This chair was established in 1859 by a gift from a Columbus, MS judge and ruling elder to educate prospective ministers in the natural sciences with the goal of defending the faith amidst new scientific developments, especially Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*. Robert L. Dabney of Union Seminary in Virginia published articles against this chair and a debate ensued that lasted well into the 1880s and was called, “the greatest controversy the Presbyterian Church, U.S., has ever known.” Grafton did not address this debate head on, but statements in sermons and later writings rejected changes to traditional doctrines in favor of those modified by contemporary scientific writings. In a sermon from Romans 5:14, which he preached in South Carolina, Tennessee, and Mississippi, he said, “For death reigned for a period of nearly three thousand (2728. Usher) years before that law was given upon sinai.” Grafton preached what was the standard view of the age of the earth and creation, following the calculations of early modern English theologian James Ussher. He wrote the exact number of years between creation and the giving of the Mosaic law at Sinai in his manuscript in parentheses above “nearly three thousand.” If Woodrow taught evolutionary theory or an old age of the earth to Grafton, he was not persuaded.

Denominational controversies notwithstanding, he completed his seminary course and was graduated from Columbia in the spring of 1873. As he did in Oxford, he finished his degree together with his friend T. L. Haman. The veteran and Ole Miss first honor man was now

---


136 “The Principle of Representation,” Romans 5:19 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, box 1, folder 6, pp. 3-4, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
twenty-six with a long thick moustache and goatee. Before leaving Columbia, he served as a “groomsman at the wedding of Woodrow Wilson’s sister to Professor George Howe’s son.”137 The couple was married in the small Columbia Seminary chapel.138 Then he returned home for his own wedding, marrying Sue Doak in Sardis on Sunday, May 18, 1873.139 He preached the following Sunday at his home church, Concord in Madison County, and then travelled southwest to Jefferson County in time to preach at Union Church on June 1.

III. Beginning in the Ministry

Only weeks after graduating seminary and marrying Sue, Grafton and his bride began to settle into their new home in Union Church. It was new for them, but it was not new. The congregation did not have a finished manse, so the newlyweds moved into the home of one of Union Church’s ruling elders, Mr. Buie.140 Sadly, and apparently unknown to them at the time, the Buie’s hospitality proved fatal. Grafton’s grandson remembered, “it was a year or two before the manse was built, and during this time the couple lived in the home of a Mr. Buie...There was tuberculosis in this family, and it was during this period that tuberculosis entered the family. Sue Webb Doak died June 18, 1885, and the two oldest children in 1895.”141

For the young Graftons in 1873, their future challenges with tuberculosis were unknown. Reconstruction was their most obvious present challenge. Mississippi was readmitted to the Union in February 1870 after the ratification of its new constitution in November 1869. James Alcorn was inaugurated as Governor in 1870 and served through November 1871. Alcorn was

137 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 45. See also Clarke, To Count Our Days, 108.
139 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 45.
140 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 16.
141 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), second page.
followed by Ridley Powers and then the more radical republican Adelbert Ames, who served from 1874 through March 1876. As tensions rose across Mississippi, including riots in Clinton and Vicksburg, white Democrats regained control of the state legislature in 1875. Ames eventually “resigned under impeachment charges” in May 1876 and Mississippi sent a Democratic congressional delegation to Washington later that year, marking the end of Reconstruction and the completion of the white democratic “revolution.”  

Grafton left few written evaluations of these Reconstruction years, but the little he did write made his feelings clear enough. After interviewing Grafton in Union Church in 1931, when he was eighty-four, Henry McLaughlin wrote, “in the early part of his pastorate he lived through the Reconstruction period. For a while he and all his people were under the dominion of the negroes, just out of slavery.” Neither McLaughlin nor Grafton offered details of what being “under the dominion of the negroes” entailed for white members of the Union Church community. Years earlier, in his 1916 denominational moderator’s address, Grafton said, “During the early part of this pastorate, we were living in what was known as the ‘Reconstruction period.’ As a result of political agitation the negro race was for awhile dominant. It was a moral certainty, however, that this state of things would not be tolerated long. But it was quite embarrassing for the preacher to take his place as adviser during those distressing days.” Grafton did not specify how he served as an “adviser” in the Reconstruction period. But he was sure that, as a matter of moral certainty, black rule would come to an end. By implication then, he must have viewed the reestablishment and maintenance of white rule as a moral certainty. Grafton preached boldly and defended publicly the image-bearing humanity and due process.
legal rights of African Americans. But, as his descriptions of Reconstruction show, he did so within the framework of a racially based social hierarchy that was inherent to the transcendent moral order as he understood it.

Grafton’s approach to race here, as elsewhere, corresponded to what Paul Harvey calls “theological racism.” Theological racism is, “the conscious use of religious doctrine and practice to create and enforce social hierarchies that privileged” Southern whites over Southern blacks.145 Harvey describes Grafton’s outlook and approach accurately when he writes, “in everyday speech, folklore, self-published tracts and pamphlets, Sunday School lessons, sermons, and high-tones theological exegeses, white southern theologians preached that God ordained the division of the races…and, therefore, that God sanctioned the inequality between white and black.”146

During this tumultuous period of Reconstruction, C. W. Grafton was ordained to the Christian ministry at the age of twenty-six. He had preached regularly at Union Church and Ben Salem since June 1. The day of his ordination finally arrived on Thursday, July 24, 1873. “At a meeting of the Presbytery of Mississippi held at Union Church July 24 and 25 of this year 1873, Rev. C. W. Grafton, licensed of central Mississippi Presbytery was received, examined, ordained, and installed Pastor of Union Church and Ben Salem. Rev. Joseph Stratton presided, pronounced the constitutional questions and led in the ordination prayer. Rev. Burgess charged the Pastor, C. W. Grafton.”147 His grandson recorded Dr. Grafton’s recollections from the day, “He was ordained at Union Church, July 25, after a two-days examination…The examiners had plenty of time with few distractions and must have enjoyed the grilling.”148

146 Harvey, Freedom’s Coming, 2.
147 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 149.
148 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), second page.
Grafton served the Union Church and Ben Salem congregations together. By the time of his ordination, communicant membership at Union Church had risen to 132.\footnote{Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 147.} Church life revolved around Sundays, “the order of service on Sunday has been Sunday School at ten o’clock, preaching at eleven, then go home, eat dinner and spend the evening in private reading and family devotions.”\footnote{Grafton, \textit{A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church}, 6.} In his earlier years, the church also held a mid-week service on Wednesday afternoons.\footnote{Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought}, 124.} The congregation sang psalms and hymns, and for the first decade of his ministry, did so without instrumental accompaniment, the pitch being set by a tuning fork.\footnote{Grafton, \textit{A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church}, 9.} Grafton said “for the first ten years a ruling elder with a peerless voice, raised the tunes and carried the music…the singing has been congregational all along.”\footnote{Grafton, \textit{A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church}, 9.} The church later purchased a Mason and Hamlin organ and the pastor’s wife and daughters led the music.\footnote{Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 149-150. For more on Sunday Schools in the South see McMillen, \textit{To Raise Up the South: Sunday Schools in Black and White Churches, 1865-1915} (2001).}

In his first session meeting with the ruling elders of Union Church, the newly ordained minister got right to work. Prior to Grafton’s arrival, the session’s activity was largely limited to the reception and transfer of members and the ecclesiastical discipline of those who deviated from orthodox doctrine or piety. Under its new minister, its work expanded. The session approved the organization of two Sunday schools, one at nearby Zion Hill and one at Union Church, as well as the division of the congregation into 5 districts corresponding to the 5 elders, for visiting the membership.\footnote{Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 149-150. For more on Sunday Schools in the South see McMillen, \textit{To Raise Up the South: Sunday Schools in Black and White Churches, 1865-1915} (2001).} “Each Elder shall have his own district and by pastoral visitation reading the Scriptures, uniting with the families in prayer, admonishing offenders, and rebuking
negligence. Shall endeavor to promote the spiritual interests of his part of the congregation.”

E. T. Thompson observed that Southern Presbyterian sessions often divided their congregations into districts to assist in visitation and catechizing of the membership. While Presbyterians in the South had begun organizing Sunday schools as early as 1815, Grafton’s efforts here are the first recorded instance of Sunday schools in Union Church.

Sunday schools and pastoral visitations notwithstanding, the heart of Grafton’s ministry in Union Church was preaching. His extant sermons, along with his own reflections on them, paint a detailed picture of his preaching ministry. Grafton’s sermons were not short talks. He explained in 1916, “a sermonette has never been tolerated in our country pulpit. Our people would be astonished to see their preacher stop at 25 or 30 minutes. Forty minutes is standard length, sometimes fifty, sometimes an hour. They come back and sometimes shrug their shoulders at the long sermons, but the country preacher goes right straight ahead.”

Grafton based these forty to sixty minutes messages on a passage of scripture, usually only a verse or two, from which he drew a doctrinal conclusion and made various applications to church members’ lives. He wrote, “the staple of the preaching has been mainly doctrinal.”

Grafton remembered an address by B. M. Palmer in his last year of seminary, just months before his ordination, that encapsulated his approach to preaching.

In 1873 Dr. Palmer visited Columbia Seminary and delivered a fine address to the student body. He spoke of Westminster Calvinism in the loftiest terms and some of us have never forgotten it. And for all these years at Union Church the fundamentals of theology have been proclaimed. To wit: the doctrines of original sin, man’s total depravity, God’s sovereign will, eternal election of a multitude that no man can number, a definite atonement by Jesus Christ the Son of God for His people, irresistible grace in the regeneration of the soul, and the final, certain perseverance of the saints. These are

---

156 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 149.
158 Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 1:224.
159 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 8.
160 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 6.
sometimes called dry bones of theology, but our people have not found it so. These
doctrines go to the very bottom of human nature and set forth God in his beauty and
glory, and country people love these great truths, and it would do you good to hear them
discuss these great themes.161

In addition to doctrinal preaching, Grafton also sought to make practical applications to the lives
of his congregants. “Along with the doctrinal, following Paul’s example, we have had the
practical. And the great themes of Sabbath observance and the training of children, the religious
home, the Abrahamic covenant, the duty of prayer, and generally all the commandments of the
Decalogue as the rule of life, have been set forth.”162

Grafton’s first sermon as an ordained minister typified this doctrinal approach to
preaching. He took as his text Paul’s words to Timothy, “Who hath saved us and called us with
an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which
was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (1 Timothy 1:9).163 He outlined the sermon
have presented in this verse the prince moving cause of man’s salvation…It is declared that it is
not of works. It is declared that it is by grace.”165 He explained that men were prone, from the
youngest child to the publican on the street to seek to earn salvation by keeping the precepts of
God’s law.166 But, he said, the way of works was shut, with the cherubim and his sword standing
ready to oppose.167 If man cannot be saved by his works, what then was this grace that saves?
“Here…it signifies the love of benevolence, the feeling of favor or mercy which God had for a
fallen race and which prompted him to contrive a way for their salvation and being contrived to

161 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 6-7.
162 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 7.
163 1 Timothy 1:9 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 1, box 1, folder 7, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi
       Department of Archives and History.
164 1 Timothy 1:9 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 1, Grafton Papers.
165 1 Timothy 1:9 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 2, Grafton Papers. Underlining original.
166 1 Timothy 1:9 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 2-3, Grafton Papers.
167 1 Timothy 1:9 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 3, Grafton Papers.
carry it out by a Redeemer.”\textsuperscript{168} He called his congregation to look to Jesus Christ and especially Christ’s crucifixion to see and understand God’s grace:

We can never appreciate the costliness of that grace until we have looked at it in the person of Jesus Christ. Not Christ as a glorified Redeemer receiving the homage and worship of sainted millions but as the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who bore our sins in his own body on the tree, wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Go to the cross raised on Calvary and there under canopy of skies darkened through sympathy for a Savior’s shame estimate if we can the cost of God’s free grace.\textsuperscript{169}

He concluded, “Here my friends is a theme for our constant adoration. Here is grace – eternal – sovereign – free – costly and efficacious grace…Let us glory in nothing but the grace of God.”\textsuperscript{170}

This first sermon stressed the importance of God’s sovereign grace, displayed most clearly in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Grafton’s doctrinal preaching showed itself again later that summer, this time comparing the claims of Christ to those of other religious leaders using Hebrews 2:3, “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation.”\textsuperscript{171} He asked,

who had ever proclaimed a salvation to the world has ever had the boldness to claim a divine origin. Mohammed claimed to be the prophet of God but laid no pretensions to divine relationship. Confucius laid not claims to anything more than mere humanity. So also the authors of Brahminism and Buddhism. But Christ claimed to be the Son of God full of grace and truth and his claims to the divine sonship were substantiated by his actions.\textsuperscript{172}

Whether there were followers of Mohammad, Confucius, or Buddha in Jefferson County in 1873 or not, Grafton wanted his congregation to understand that only Jesus was the divine Son of God. He argued for the superiority of Jesus in comparison to other world religious figures. He also argued for the superiority of the Christian understanding of salvation and the afterlife. He said of

\textsuperscript{168} 1 Timothy 1:9 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 4, Grafton Papers.
\textsuperscript{169} 1 Timothy 1:9 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 10-11, Grafton Papers.
\textsuperscript{170} 1 Timothy 1:9 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 13-14, Grafton Papers.
\textsuperscript{171} Hebrews 2:3 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 3, box 1, folder 7 Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
\textsuperscript{172} Hebrews 2:3 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 3, Grafton Papers.
Islam, “Mohammed offers a heaven to his followers but it is such a place as can be [illegible] alike by the murderer and the babe in its innocence. He offers joys indeed but joys that may be touched with hands red with blood.”  

By comparison, the salvation of Christ is greater because those who enter heaven “must all be alike pure and spotless as the Redeemer himself.”

Moving from Islam to ancient Greece he said, “the Elysium of the Ancients was a shadowy realm, far away from the abode of those whom they called gods, alive with beings that were animated with human passions. But the happiness of Christ’s salvation is drawn from association with the immutable creator.”

But what if someone rejected religion entirely and became an atheist? He explained, “we cannot escape by turning Atheist or pagan for we should even remember that our belief whether real or assumed can never alter existing facts.”

He continued, “in reality, between the man who hopes for salvation in this way between the moralist and the atheist there is no enviable difference. The atheist denies that there is a God. The moralist admits his existence but degrades him by stripping him of his crowning attributes.”

If his first sermon stressed the centrality of grace in the Christian gospel, Grafton used this sermon to argue for the exclusivity of the Christian gospel. He taught that world religions, atheism, and moralism could not save a person and bring her to a happy eternity. Only Christianity could do that.

Grafton also used his sermons to address practical concerns faced by his congregation and wider community, especially those related to family life. Grafton began the year 1874 in Ben Salem with a sermon on the duty of family worship. He argued that a religious family is not

---

173 Hebrews 2:3 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 4, Grafton Papers.
174 Hebrews 2:3 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 4-5, Grafton Papers.
175 Hebrews 2:3 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 7, Grafton Papers.
176 Hebrews 2:3 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 11, Grafton Papers.
177 Hebrews 2:3 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 12, Grafton Papers.
merely one that is associated with a church but one that practices its religion, especially through family prayer. He believed that lack of family piety was to blame for what he saw as a proliferation of vice. The state was not to blame, but the family. He reasoned,

The state is not the true foster mother to the crimes and vices which reign with undisputed sway throughout the land, as she is generally supposed to be. The state being bound up together only by common interests, is too cold an organization to engender vice. The state is not the proper target for the aim of all the shafts of criticism and censure when the people arm themselves against the prevalence of corruption. The true source of all the mischief is in the families of the land. There it is that the latent germs of wickedness take root, there it is that they are nursed into existence and become strong; from the family they pass over into the state and become fastened upon the body politic. The solution to this problem was not, in Grafton’s mind, new policies but new piety. “By no possible legislation can reform be effectual when the families of our country are the hotbeds of iniquity and vice.” He preached, “reform the home and you reform the nation.”

Grafton seemed to have had specific individuals or movements in his sites as he continued the sermon. “There are persons in our midst who cry out loudly for reform, bewailing in measured terms the coldness of the church and longing to see better days. Do they know where reform must begin? In the families at home.” What should such reform look like? Grafton’s answer was clear; daily prayer and scripture reading in the home. He pressed the Ben Salem congregation,

There is not one in this house today, whether he be associated with the Church or not, that can possibly shake off his obligations to serve God by leading his family in these solemn acts of devotion. You are called on today to lead your children and family by precept and by example, to pray with them and pray for them. As God will be your judge make no tarrying in this matter. It will do your own souls good, it will revive the Church,

---

178 Jeremiah 10:25 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 1-3, box 2, folder 9, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
179 Jeremiah 10:25 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 3-4, Grafton Papers.
181 Jeremiah 10:25 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 6, Grafton Papers.
182 Jeremiah 10:25 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 9, Grafton Papers. Underlining original each word.
183 Jeremiah 10:25 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 12, Grafton Papers.
it will bring you the peace of God and give you the pleasure of presenting your dearest
ones on earth to our Father and God above.\textsuperscript{184}

He applied the Bible not just to family life in the home but to wayward youths who had
left the home. In November 1873, he preached from 2 Corinthians 7:10, “For godly sorrow
worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh
death.” He saw worldly sorrow working death in the nation’s youth. “Every youth feels the
aching emptiness, the undefinable longing of a sorrowing heart, provided that heart has not been
filled with the fulness of God. And very few youth that are not restrained by the power of
education and the moral influences of the Bible that do not give indication by their appearance
and behavior that they are harvesting a measure of woe.”\textsuperscript{185} Worldly sorrow exercised a deadly
influence on American youth and Grafton knew where it was clearly displayed. “The prisons of
our large cities filled with beardless faces downcast with sorrow and enveloped in gloom evinces
the truth that the sorrow of the world worketh death and the youth of the land receive their full
share of the harvest.”\textsuperscript{186} He went on to explain that these sorrows plaguing young people were
rooted in sin. Worldly sorrow is but a bitter foretaste of the sorrows of hell. These downcast
youth must instead exercise godly sorrow by repentance.\textsuperscript{187}

Grafton’s emphasis on the importance of family piety and the disastrous consequences of
its absence echo Ted Ownby’s observation that Southern Christians viewed their homes as a
“counterpoint to…aggressive, self-indulgent pleasure seeking of male recreation.”\textsuperscript{188} Of the four
qualities Ownby identifies as constitutive of southern religious home life—prayer, quiet,

\textsuperscript{184} Jeremiah 10:25 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 15, Grafton Papers.
\textsuperscript{185} 2 Corinthians 7:10 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 5-6, box 2, folder 8, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
\textsuperscript{186} 2 Corinthians 7:10 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 5-6, Grafton Papers.
\textsuperscript{187} 2 Corinthians 7:10 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 7, 10, Grafton Papers.
harmony, and self-control—these early sermons display a close connection between family prayer and national moral life. Grafton preached that the beardless faces of young men filled large city prisons because the moral influences of the Bible had not reached or restrained them. Grafton believed that true reform would only begin in the home, specifically, the home shaped by daily rhythms of prayer and scripture reading. Further, as Ownby also observes, Grafton stressed that was the husband’s particular responsibility to “serve God by leading his family in these solemn acts of devotion.” Grafton’s later sermons would feature additional elements of the religious home, especially the quiet of Sabbath rest and the peril of unself-controlled youth.

Grafton did not wait until he had accrued more years among the members to exhort them directly and even rebuke them publicly. The Sunday after preaching on family religious life, he moved to address the duty of financial giving from Ecclesiastes 11:1, “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” He began with a note of understanding, “there are some reasons why I hesitate at this particular juncture of affairs to present the subject naturally to be drawn from this text. One reason is the pressure of the times. Another is the repeated calls which are made upon the charities of the church.” But these hesitations did not get the better of him. Grafton preached, “one may rise up with a feeling of discontent and say is there to be no end to these calls of the church for contributions? This question is answered by a plain NO. There is to be no end.” Giving, Grafton taught, was the ordained means to carry out the church’s ordained end of bringing the gospel throughout the world. The Old Testament specifically required one tenth to be given as a tithe. “But the law of the New Testament,

190 Ecclesiastes 11:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 2, box 2, folder 9, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
193 Ecclesiastes 11:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 5-6, Grafton Papers.
whatever some may say to the contrary, devolves this whole matter upon the hearts and consciences of the people, allowing every man to give just what he pleases ‘according as God hath prospered him’.” This fact notwithstanding, Grafton proceeded to give a financial rundown, from the pulpit, of the previous year’s benevolent giving, as a part of the sermon.

I desire that you shall see the whole amount for yourselves. The collections taken up last year for the causes of the church from the membership of Union Church amount to the sum total of $19.00. Putting the membership at 120 and supposing an equal distribution amongst them all we would have a fraction over 15 cents to the member, for carrying the gospel to the heathen, for relieving the widows and orphans of poor dead preachers, for sending the bible to the nations in darkness and for hastening on that acceptable year of the Lord when shouts of Jubilee shall resound throughout the world. The amount above does not include the amount you have paid for the support of your own church here at home. It is the amount you have sown to the cause of general benevolence throughout the church.

He notified the congregation that he planned to make the same announcement calculating the amount given to benevolence the following year. “And let us all indulge the hope that the records will show a reasonable hope for a more bountiful harvest.” To spur on their giving, Grafton described the church’s mission work throughout the Sandwich Islands. He figured that the ratio of money given for missions compared to the money generated by trade in the islands was roughly 4 to 11, “a clear profit of nearly two hundred per cent on the amount expended.” He explained, “the reason for this very remarkable increase is in the fact the Xianity elevates the aspirations of the savage. He who wandered in idleness through the wilderness clad in the skins of wild beasts now aspires to decent clothing and decent food.”

---

194 Ecclesiastes 11:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 8, Grafton Papers.
195 Ecclesiastes 11:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 10, Grafton Papers.
196 Ecclesiastes 11:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 10, Grafton Papers.
197 Ecclesiastes 11:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 10, Grafton Papers.
Grafton revisited the subject of benevolent giving in a sermon on cooperation from Nehemiah 4:6, “So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.” He illustrated the essential importance of cooperation with a counterexample: southern defeat in the Civil War. The veteran explained, “While during the late war Southern independence proved a failure because men would not work together.” On the other hand, the “mighty railroads” provided a positive example of the power of cooperation. When it came to cooperation, he wanted Union Church to be more like the railroad and less like the Confederacy. After calculating that average benevolence giving to missions, widows, and other benevolences, he determined that giving amounted to 42 cents per member. He declared, “How much do you value the souls of the millions in heathenism? 42 cents worth.” He then raised the question of the church’s own finances, reminding himself with a note in his manuscript, “state first appreciation of the people.” But after that, he said, “failure of the church in pastoral support. I mention it because it is a real hindrance to the gospel. The man you owe you will generally avoid.” The congregation, and the minister, were suffering because the members were not working together.

Grafton believed that the doctrinal and practical elements of his preaching, and therefore of his congregants’ lives, were interconnected. Concluding a sermon on the grace of God from Ephesians 2:8, he said, “I have endeavored to present this doctrine of grace today and if you would only accept it there would be no further need of sermons on duties of giving, family

---

200 Nehemiah 4:6 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 1, box 12, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
203 Nehemiah 4:6 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 11, Grafton Papers.
204 Nehemiah 4:6 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 11, Grafton Papers.
prayer, observing the Sabbath attending our worship eve (?).”\textsuperscript{205} He knew that the practical moral and religious issues his congregation faced would be eliminated if they would only understand and more fully grasp the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Then they would desire to give, to conduct family prayers, and to sanctify the Sabbath day.

The new minister preached the sermons on Christian benevolence and family piety, all flowing from the grace of God in Christ, as his own family grew in number. After moving to Union Church in 1873, his first two children were born during the Reconstruction years; Henry Doak in 1874 and Nellie in 1875.\textsuperscript{206} The rest followed shortly thereafter; Mary in 1877, Thomas in 1878, Carrie in 1879, Susie in 1880, and Maggie in 1883.\textsuperscript{207} Carrie and Maggie died in infancy and the two oldest, Henry and Nellie died of Tuberculosis in 1895.\textsuperscript{208}

Grafton’s experience of the Reconstruction years was largely hopeful. His University of Mississippi valedictory anticipated national improvement and civilizational advance through the teaching of the “truth,” both academic and theological. Seminary training and a call to the ministry shifted and narrowed his focus to the advancement of Christ’s kingdom on earth. With this narrowed focus came a more critical outlook, as he warned against national corruptions and the necessity of spiritual reformation to circumvent or overcome them. While he lamented national corruptions which brought forth divine chastisement, he also took comfort in divine providence and the enduring moral and social orders it upheld.

\textsuperscript{205} Ephesians 2:8 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 16, box 2, folder 9, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
\textsuperscript{206} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 52.
\textsuperscript{207} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 52. See also Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), second page.
\textsuperscript{208} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 52, 55.
CHAPTER TWO
PREACHING: GRAFTON’S SERMONS, 1876-1890

Thomas H. Grafton spent the summer of 1929 in Union Church. Thomas was preparing to enter the ministry—the third generation in a row from the Grafton family—and preached for his grandfather each Sunday.209 Looking back on that summer, he remembered his grandfather’s study in the old manse, built just after he had arrived more than half a century earlier, where he went to work each day. He remembered the organized personal library and nearly six decades worth of chronologically filed sermons that his grandfather kept there. He also remembered “a well-worn path” behind the study, “up and down which the old scholar paces as he evens out the rough parts of his sermon.”210 By the summer of 1929, the older Grafton had preached thousands of sermons, the fruits of an untold number of traversals back and forth on his path, past the cows and under the beech trees. He had given his life to preaching.

C. W. Grafton believed that preaching was the heart of his pastoral work. As a seminary student, he preached from Romans 10:14 on the urgent need of preaching for the salvation of the lost, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”211 He went on to spend his life preparing and delivering sermons, often multiple times each week.

209 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), third page. See also Cornelius W. Grafton, Ministerial Log Book, 1920-1934 (Union Church Presbyterian Church: Union Church, MS), 35-36. This log book is one of two and records sermons, offerings, presbytery and synod attendance, baptisms, funerals and other information related to Dr. Grafton’s ministry. The original books, which I have not seen, is in a safe in the annex of the Union Church Presbyterian Church in Union Church, MS. The late Rev. Dr. Joe Martin photocopied these log books for me.
211 Romans 10:14 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, 1872, Grafton Papers.
And he continued preaching until just ten days before his death, when he delivered his final sermon on the “Life and Service of Moses,” on July 22, 1934.\textsuperscript{212}

This chapter studies Dr. Grafton’s sermons. While Dr. Grafton’s first biographer had access to 975 sermon manuscripts, ranging in date from 1871 to 1928, only about half of those sermons are now extant.\textsuperscript{213} All but two of these were dated before 1900, with the majority having been delivered between 1875 and 1895. These sermons provide a clear sense of the content and emphases of Grafton’s ministry in Union Church and at Ben Salem from the end of Reconstruction through the early 1890s. They show how Grafton thought about his time and place, how he understood the needs of his congregants, and how he sought to shape their lives and beliefs from the pulpit. Specifically, rather than using his pulpit to explicitly advocate Lost Cause civil religion, social action, or political programs, he proclaimed the necessity of Christian conversion and consecrated living from the Bible, which he believed to be inerrant and inspired by God. In these and other homiletical emphases, Grafton’s sermons reflected the priorities of the developing fundamentalist movement.

\textbf{I. When did Grafton preach?}

C. W. Grafton preached to his Union Church Presbyterian Church congregation most Sundays. Notes in sermon manuscripts suggest he spent much more time preaching there than at his other, smaller charge to the east in Lincoln County at Ben Salem. A normal Sunday schedule, he explained in his 1916 Moderator’s address, included, “Sunday School at ten o’clock, preaching at eleven, then go home, eat dinner and spend the evening in private reading and

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{212} Cornelius W. Grafton’s Ministerial Log Book (1920-1934), 58. \\
\textsuperscript{213} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 193.
\end{flushleft}
family devotions.”

At different points in his ministry, the congregation also gathered again on Sunday evening for a second worship service. Quarterly observances of the Lord’s Supper included extra services with preaching, to prepare the congregation to partake of the sacrament. He reminded the flock in an 1875 sermon on Psalm 84:10, “The nature of Saturday’s services as preliminary to the Lord’s Supper—the Apostle says examine etc—these services are preparatory. And a man should have as good an excuse to stay from the Saturday service as the Sunday services.”

In the summer communion, the church often invited a guest minister to preach a series of sermons over three or four days. Funerals further multiplied preaching opportunities. And the congregation held a midweek meeting, sometimes on Wednesday afternoons and other times on Saturday afternoons, in which Grafton again taught from Scripture.

The Sunday-centric life of the Union Church congregation, with the sermon at the center of that central day, rarely, if ever varied, even for holidays. This was not uncommon for Presbyterians. According to Morton H. Smith, the Southern Presbyterian church did not recognize Christmas as a special day of observance until 1951. Smith wrote that in 1899, the General Assembly reminded the denomination, “There is no warrant in Scripture for the observance of Christmas and Easter as holy days, rather the contrary (see Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:16-

---

216 Psalm 84:10 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, April 1875, box 2, folder 12, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
219 Morton H. Smith, *How Is The Gold Become Dim: The Decline of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., As Reflected in its Assembly Actions*, 2nd ed. (Jackson, MS: The Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church, 1973), 98-99. Thanks to Tommy Shields for bringing this reference to my attention, and to Ryan Biese for making his copy of this book available to me.
21), and such observance is contrary to the principles of the Reformed faith, conducive to will-worship, and not in harmony with the simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

If Grafton thought holidays had any uniqueness for church life, it was only insofar as they offered special opportunities for spiritual improvement, not because they were divinely sanctioned holy days. Around Thanksgiving in 1881, he exhorted believers to remain thankful all year long. “Last Thursday the day for public thanksgiving. Reasons for such a day. Prosperity of the nation and general progress in all the departments of art and science. With the Christian every day should be a thanksgiving day.” He used Christmas in 1875 to remind congregants of their mortality. “Christmas comes but once a year. So I thought yesterday and took down my pastor’s roll and looked over the death list. See how many since Christmas last dawned have laid down their armor. How many more before the merry greetings of another will have said I have finished my work.” The following year in 1876, Christmas provided an opportunity to review the year’s spiritual privileges.

At the very opening of this year the voice of the Master was heard from this sacred desk to every living man to make his peace with God, to throw off the wages of sin and accept the wages of eternal life. And as the days and sabbaths numbered into weeks and weeks numbered into months and the revolving seasons have at last brought around the period when we must bid an eternal farewell to this year, the voice of the Lord has never been hushed. The Son of God has presented his calls most impressively in numerous ways; through the preaching of the word, through the weekly attendance at prayer meeting, the Sunday school, the communion table and by mourning processions following the dead into the house of God and thence to the grave. Through all this period the voice of mercy has never been hushed.

---

221 Psalm 116:12 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, November 1881, box 4, folder 27, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
222 Luke 2:49/John 17:4 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, December 1875, box 2, folder 13, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
223 Matthew 20:6 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 5, December 25, 1876, box 3, folder 16, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
The elders held a session meeting on Christmas day in 1878.\textsuperscript{224} Christmas day fell on a Sunday in 1881. Grafton preached from Proverbs 23:26, “my son, give me thine heart.”\textsuperscript{225} He said, “Christ says my son give me thine heart. This whole subject of giving the heart to God appropriate because today is Christmas. It is the supposed anniversary of the Savior’s birth. The day of gifts.”\textsuperscript{226} He continued, “Now then while we are thinking of what we shall give to one another let us pause and think of what shall we give to the man of God on this his birth day.”\textsuperscript{227} Christmas provided an opportunity for the congregation to give their hearts to Jesus as they heard his word preached.

Holiday or not, Grafton led the Union Church congregation in the Sunday worship service, the lion’s share of which was taken up with the sermon. He matter-of-factly told fellow presbyterian elders in 1916 that he, “has always preached too, as long as he wanted to. A sermonette has never been tolerated in our country pulpit. Our people would be astonished to see their preacher stop at 25 or 30 minutes. Forty minutes is standard length, sometimes fifty, sometimes and hour.”\textsuperscript{228} Not all of Dr. Grafton’s hearers embraced his views on sermon length. He observed, “Our bright young girls go off now and then and attend preaching in the cities. They come back and sometimes shrug their shoulders at the long sermons, but the country preacher goes right straight ahead.”\textsuperscript{229}

In addition to the preaching itself, Sunday worship services included prayer and congregational singing from the \textit{Presbyterian Psalmodist}.\textsuperscript{230} Early in his ministry, a ruling elder

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{224} Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 169.
\item \textsuperscript{225} Proverbs 23:26 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 1, December 25, 1881, box 4, folder 27, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
\item \textsuperscript{226} Proverbs 23:26 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 1, Grafton Papers.
\item \textsuperscript{227} Proverbs 23:26 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 1, Grafton Papers.
\item \textsuperscript{228} Grafton, \textit{A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church}, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{229} Grafton, \textit{A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church}, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{230} Grafton, \textit{A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church}, 8.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
led the singing by voice with the pitch being set by a tuning fork. Later, Grafton’s wife and daughters led the music, accompanied by a Mason and Hamlin organ. He happily recalled, “we have been singularly free from that dreadful affliction which some preachers encounter—trouble with the choir; jealousy among the musicians.”

II. To whom did Grafton preach?

Union Church Presbyterian Church was a rural congregation. However, it consistently reported higher membership statistics than the state average for Presbyterians. Between 1870 and 1880, the Mississippi Synod had between 160-164 churches with between 6,563-9,008 total communicants. In 1880, the largest church in the Mississippi Synod was B. M. Palmer’s First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans, with 749 members. But the average presbyterian congregation in Mississippi had between 40 and 55 communicant members. Union Church Presbyterian Church, despite meeting in a town of only 83 people, more than doubled the state average in church membership. The congregation grew from 114 communicants and 51 baptized non-communicants in 1875 to 140 communicants and 50 baptized non-communicants in the spring of 1880. Amazingly, the congregation recorded 21 infant baptisms in 1880, with 48 children participating in the Sunday school and Bible class. While communicant membership hovered around 140, the congregation reported 100 baptized non-communicant members in

231 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 9. See also Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 124.
232 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 9.
233 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 8.
234 Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:281.
235 Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:284-285.
237 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 157, 175.
238 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 175.
1884. Grafton’s flock at Union Church consisted of nearly 250 souls. In 1879, he told his congregation that they ranked first in the Mississippi presbytery in numbers.

While the names on the church roll increased in this first decade of his ministry, more names on the church roll do not always correspond to more people in the pews on a Sunday, a reality which Grafton and his fellow elders experienced and lamented. The Union Church session reported in 1883, “we lament the fact that a large portion of the people seldom attend preaching and seem dead to all thought in any such case.” The report continued, “Notwithstanding the faithfulness with which the truth has been proclaimed from the pulpit, we have had no apparent outpouring of the Holy Ghost, having had but few accessions to the membership with no marked improvements otherwise of the church.” In 1884, the narrative commented, “some of our members come to church very irregularly and some do not come at all.” Grafton acknowledged that while families living close to the church building could easily attend and also be visited, others in outlying areas “rarely ever get to church and they cannot have the benefit of the Sunday School and the prayer service. And when the preacher goes to see them, it’s a long hard day’s work…Some of the trips the country preacher has taken, make one tired to think about.” Grafton saw some of these members very infrequently. “A visit to quite a number of our families cannot be made oftener than once a year.” The elders reported in 1885, “the attendance upon services of the sanctuary is in many instances to be deeply deplored. Many

239 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 182.
240 Deuteronomy 10:14 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, January 1879, box 4, folder 21, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
241 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 186.
242 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 186.
243 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 191.
244 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 9.
245 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 9.
members of the Church often absent themselves from divine service.” In short, the number of congregants on the official church roll far exceeded the number who heard the weekly sermon.

Grafton’s experience in the decade and a half after Reconstruction mirrored that of many of his ministerial contemporaries. E. Brooks Holifield observed that, “most of the clergy were, as they had always been, country preachers. In 1865, 80 percent of Americans lived in rural areas with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants, and most ministers preached in country churches. By 1920, more than half of Americans lived in towns and cities, but more than 65 percent of the clergy still preached in the country. The majority of these rural ministers served two or more small congregations with an average membership of forty-six.” While Union Church was larger than the average congregation, like most of his clerical peers, Grafton served multiple rural congregations at the same time.

Those members who did participate in church life struggled to support the church financially. In the Spring of 1879, the elders and deacons resolved, with Grafton’s concurrence, to request that presbytery change the terms of his call from $600 per year to $400 per year. A report concluded that the former terms were not met on account of “the removal by death of 7 of our most prominent members…on account of the stringency of the times…[and] for a want of more spiritual consecration.” The next year, the congregation gave $627.85 in total to the church, $400 of which covered the pastor’s salary.

The church building itself was organized for reverent Christian worship with Bible preaching. In 1883, Grafton preached from Leviticus 19:30 on reverencing the sanctuary. He

---

246 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 193.
248 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 171.
249 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 171.
250 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 176.
explained that one method of reverencing the sanctuary was “by a neat and orderly ornamentation.” Like many Presbyterians before him, Grafton desired simple and functional orderliness in the sanctuary, a space fit for preaching, prayer, and sacraments.

When the congregation gathered for worship each Sunday, the men and woman sat on different sides of the sanctuary. C. W. Grafton’s daughter Susie explained the seating arrangements in an interview in the 1960s. “Among the older members of our church the women still sit on the right-hand side and the men sit on the left in Sunday worship. The younger ones don’t do it any longer—their families all sit together—but the older ones still do. It comes from the belief that you need to keep your mind clear and pure during worship. My father felt that way strongly.” She continued, “True worship requires single-mindedness…So we split right and left as soon as we walk in the back door of the church. My generation got so used to it that now we wouldn’t feel right doing anything else.” The strict separation of men and woman in worship services did not mean that men and woman needed different gospels. “Jesus Christ puts woman on an equality with man so far as all the offers of salvation are concerned,” Grafton preached. “There is nothing offered to man that is not offered to woman.” While Grafton offered the men and women of Union Church the same gospel, they received it from different sides of the sanctuary.

Gender, rather than ethnicity, would have been the most visible organizing principle during Grafton’s ministry because, by the time of his arrival, the congregation was exclusively

251 Leviticus 19:30 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 2, January 1883, box 5, folder 30, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
252 James O. Chatham, Sundays Down South: A Pastor’s Stories (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 84.
253 Chatham, Sundays Down South, 84-85.
254 Luke 10:42 sermon for Miss Lula Bowen funeral by Cornelius W. Grafton, April 1875, box 2, folder 12, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
white. This had not always been the case, as Union Church once had dozens of black members. But like so many other white evangelical churches in the South, African Americans did not return to Union Church after the Civil War. In March of 1871, the session decided,

Whereas there are a number of names on our church roll of persons who have been absent for years without making any application for a letter and have been entirely lost sight of by the church and further there are appearing on our church roll the names of 56 colored members who have entirely drawn off from us, never to assemble or worship with us and have been regularly reported. Therefore it was ordered by the Session that the names of all those who have been absent, both whites and colored, be dropped from the roll and no more be reported as members of this church until they have their membership renewed.\textsuperscript{256}

The session dropped 72 of the 176 communicants from the roll, including those 56 black members, in 1871.\textsuperscript{257} The church’s racial makeup did not change over the decade that followed. The session reported in 1882, “The colored churches have preaching of their own. Union Church has no colored members and we have not yet seen the way clear as a church to undertake any special work for their congregations.”\textsuperscript{258} It reported similarly in 1886, “there is no effort among us to instruct the colored people, they preferring their own ministry and teachings.”\textsuperscript{259} In 1880, the session did note a $12.00 contribution to the Tuscaloosa Institute, in support of J. G. Brown, who was listed as a colored candidate for the ministry.\textsuperscript{260} Two years later, the congregational narrative said that the church “has contributed something to all the causes of the General Assembly except the Tuscaloosa Institute.”\textsuperscript{261} Grafton preached to a white congregation in Union Church.

The Union Church congregation’s experience mirrored a pattern of postwar black withdrawal from white churches that prevailed across the South. Before the war, the Southern

\textsuperscript{256} Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 139.  
\textsuperscript{257} Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 140.  
\textsuperscript{258} Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 181.  
\textsuperscript{259} Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 198.  
\textsuperscript{260} Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 176.  
\textsuperscript{261} Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 181.
Presbyterian church’s black membership was much smaller than that of their Baptist and Methodist counterparts. In 1860 in Georgia, for example, the Presbyterians reported 643 black members compared to more the 27,371 black Methodists and 27,691 black Baptists. The already small presbyterian numbers further declined after the war, as many black Christians left white churches for independent or black-led congregations. By 1866, the Southern Presbyterian church stopped reporting statistics on “colored” members altogether.

The departure of black Christians from white churches did not lead white Christians to absolve themselves of spiritual responsibility for their newly emancipated neighbors. In 1872, the Synod of Mississippi resolved that while emancipation released whites from “the peculiar responsibilities resting upon us as owners of slaves, we have not been freed from the obligation to preach the Gospel to those who dwell with us…in the same territory.” Within a framework of paternalism and racial hierarchy, Grafton sought to follow through with this resolution. For example, he preached at “St. Paul’s Colored Baptist” on November 20, 1904 after preaching to his Ben Salem flock earlier the same day.

III. What did Grafton preach?

If asked about the content of his sermons, Dr. Grafton would have said, “the staple of the preaching has been mainly doctrinal.” His sermon manuscripts suggest that this self-assessment was accurate. Most of his sermons consisted of theological expositions of a one verse or a handful of verses of Scripture with applications for faith and life. Surviving sermons were

263 Stowell, Rebuilding Zion, 85-89.
264 Stowell, Rebuilding Zion, 81.
265 Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:308, quoting Minutes of the Synod of Mississippi, 1872, 12.
266 Grafton, Ministerial Log Book, 1901-1920 (Union Church Presbyterian Church: Union Church, MS), 20.
267 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 6.
almost always preached from a portion of the New Testament. Doctrines he emphasized included “original sin, man’s total depravity, God’s sovereign will, eternal election of a multitude that no man can number, a definite atonement by Jesus Christ the Son of God for His people, irresistible grace in the regeneration of the soul, and the final, certain perseverance of the saints.”


Grafton also gave practical instruction from the Bible. He said, “along with the doctrinal, following Paul’s example, we have had the practical. And the great themes of Sabbath observance and the training of children, the religious home, the Abrahamic covenant, the duty of prayer, and generally all the commandments of the Decalogue as the rule of life, have been set forth.”

For example, he preached “Remember the Sabbath Day” from Exodus 20, “The Sustaining Power of Religion” from 2 Timothy 1:12, “Redeeming the Time” from Ephesians 5:16, “Husband and Wife: the Conjugal Relation” from Luke 1:6, and “Christ’s Preciousness to the Believer” from 1 Peter 2:7. To these he added biographical messages about biblical and church historical figures. “The biographical has had its due share of notice. Adam and Eve, and Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, Moses to Aaron and Miriam and Joshua. Then in later history, John Wesley, George Whitefield, David Livingstone and others have all claimed attention from a body of eager listeners.”

---

268 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 6-7.
269 Box 3, folders 18, 19, 20 and box 4, folders 28, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
270 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 7.
271 Box 3, folder 19, 20, 23; box 4, folder 27; box 5, folder 31, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
272 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 7.
sermons after preaching them, rather than before, apparently preaching from a rudimentary outline.\textsuperscript{273}

Two southern presbyterian ministers especially influenced Grafton’s view of preaching, Benjamin Morgan Palmer of New Orleans, and John L. Girardeau of South Carolina. He had crossed paths with both men during his seminary years in Columbia. He wrote after attending Palmer’s funeral in New Orleans, “No nobler men than Palmer, Thornwell, Girardeau, and John B. Adger, and the twentieth century will be rich if it produces such.”\textsuperscript{274} He and Palmer served together in the Mississippi Synod until 1901, when New Orleans joined a new synod. In 1932, Grafton remembered a sermon Palmer preached almost fifty years earlier at Hazlehurst in 1873 on the doctrine of adoption.\textsuperscript{275} From Palmer, he drew the doctrinal substance of his preaching, which was rooted in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the 1640s. He recalled, “In 1873 Dr. Palmer visited Columbia Seminary and delivered a fine address to the student body. He spoke of Westminster Calvinism in the loftiest terms and some of us have never forgotten it. And for all these years at Union Church the fundamentals of Theology have been proclaimed.”\textsuperscript{276}

For preaching style, he followed Girardeau. Grafton said, “Dr. Girardeau once told a body of students never to be hampered by the rules of rhetoric. Let rules teach you but never bind you.”\textsuperscript{277} He elsewhere remembered Girardeau’s advice, “Don’t be strangled by the rules of Rhetoric; if you feel hot, speak hot; and if you feel loud, speak loud.”\textsuperscript{278}

\textsuperscript{273} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 70-71.
\textsuperscript{274} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 113.
\textsuperscript{276} Grafton, \textit{A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church}, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{277} Grafton, \textit{A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church}, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{278} David’s Captains by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 6, box 7, folder 42, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
Grafton remembered Girardeau’s avoidance of political subjects. “To think of Dr. Girardeau preaching a political sermon or pandering in any way to political or social problems however important would be unthinkable.” Grafton’s own sermons evidence a similar unwillingness to engage in politics from the pulpit, even if he did occasionally participate in political life in the community.

While key figures like Palmer and Girardeau, and historic theological statements like the Westminster Confession of Faith certainly shaped his approach to preaching, most fundamental was his conviction that the Bible was the inspired word of God. He explained in an 1882 sermon, “Inspiration in short secures the absolute truth of every statement and idea in the word of God.” He called the Bible, “the first and greatest of all the wonders of the world.” And while he spent more than six decades expounding the Bible, he did not tire of it. In 1916, he said, “The farther one goes in the King’s garden, the more he sees and wants to see. The Scripture is a deep well and the country preacher has never gotten to the bottom of it.” It was from this foundation—the absolute truth of every statement and idea in the Bible—that Grafton spent his life preaching sermons from all over its pages.

With the bible as his inspired guide and foundation, Grafton’s chief concern in preaching was the salvation of his hearers. In an 1875 sermon from Romans 8:8, he stressed man’s need for conversion, not just moral or behavioral reform. He lamented, “saddening to think how many blind leaders of the blind there are. An old preacher said to me he ‘saw no objection to urge the

279 David’s Captains by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 6, Grafton Papers.
280 David’s Captains by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 7, Grafton Papers.
281 2 Timothy 3:16-17 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, January 1882, p. 9, box 4, folder 28, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
282 2 Timothy 3:16-17 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.
283 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 7.
sinner to reform.’ Then the thief would never have been saved. Reformation does not make a man a Christian."284

One month earlier he preached from Luke 15:10, “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” He inquired of his congregation, “I wondered this morning if there would be any rejoicing in heaven today, and why not?”285 On more than one occasion he concluded a sermon with the appeal, “Come to Jesus.”286 He sought to keep the urgency of these matters before his own mind when preaching. On the back of his Romans 8:8 manuscript, he wrote himself a note, “preach with all the heart.”287

The priority of salvation in Grafton’s preaching was on full display in an 1876 sermon from Romans 5:1, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” He proclaimed, “You have seen desolated fields and villages burnt, you have heard of the maidens of Judah captives in Babylon, you have seen Confederate orphans and the graveyards of soldiers – Behold the consequences of war! If now war between man and man is so deplorable, how must it be for man when he is at enmity with God.”288 What did war with God look like? “Would you see the consequences of war with God, look at the criminal face furrowed with sin, the home in which happiness is an entire stranger, look at the speechless despair of the dying impenitent and see the smoke of his torment ascending to God forever and

284 Romans 8:8 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, July 1875, box 2, folder 13, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
286 Matthew 7:18 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, January 1879, box 4, folder 21, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
287 Romans 8:8 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.
288 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, January 1876, p. 2, box 3, folder 14, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
ever.”289 But man need not be at war with God. “For just as war with God is the source of every evil, so peace with God is the source of every real good. This happy estate shows itself in the calming of the guilty conscience and in the provision of an anchor for all the affections of the soul. The peace with God is a pledge of his everlasting favor, his almighty support in every trial in time, his approval in the judgment.”290 He continued with another illustration from the Civil War, “You have heard soldiers groan and cry for peace; so earnestly desiring it that they would accept it on almost any terms. The reason is they are tired and warn out with the din and alarms of war and wish to get back once more to the embrace of those they love. So when our long war with God is over, we are at once delivered from the miseries of that sad enmity and brought into a circle where love holds everlasting sway.”291

Grafton then pressed the people from his pulpit, “Are you at peace with God?”292 He explained, “the text declares that to have peace with God we must be justified i.e. we must be regarded by the Judge to be just such as the law demands us to be. We must be regarded and pronounced righteous.”293 How could this occur? He answered, “We are justified through our Lord Jesus Christ. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life. Our Lord Jesus Christ, moved by eternal love for the gift that the Father gave him, came into the world and in behalf of God’s elect fulfilled every jot and tittle of the conditions that a just and holy God demanded.”294 And how could man receive Christ as his righteousness? “Divine wisdom has suspended all the benefits of

---

289 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 2-3, Grafton Papers.
290 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 3, Grafton Papers.
291 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 3-4, Grafton Papers.
292 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 4, Grafton Papers.
293 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 4-5, Grafton Papers.
294 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 8, Grafton Papers.
X’T’s death on the simplest of all conditions, simple faith. Does anyone ask ‘What must I do to be saved’? The reply is, all have been done, only believe.”

This sermon illustrates two significant aspects of Grafton’s preaching. First, he prioritized the salvation of his listeners. In doing so, he epitomized the argument Samuel S. Hill made in *Southern Churches in Crisis*. “The main practical impact of the southern church’s ministry has to do with the conversion of individuals.” Grafton’s ministry pursued and promoted this impact. He preached that each one of his hearers must believe in Jesus Christ to be forgiven their sins and inherit God’s gracious salvation. Second, while social and political subjects like criminality and the Civil War did appear in this sermon, they did so as illustrations subservient to his spiritual aim of conversion. He called the Civil War to mind, battles of which were fought in Union Church, not to redo those battles, but to illustrate the consequences of war with God. Behind the social ill of criminality lied a deeper issue of sin and irreconciliation with God. While Grafton’s sermons provide some insight into his views on these and other subjects, they also show a subservience that borders on complete absence of the Civil War, politics, and social reform compared to his central themes of salvation and Christian piety.

Alongside, and flowing from his preaching of salvation in Christ, Grafton preached on the practical duties of the Christian life. He summarized the Christian life as a life of service, preaching in 1876, “if we desired a term which should most concisely yet adequately describe a true Christian perhaps we would find none more appropriate than the term Believing Servant. For faith and service enter essentially and hand in hand in the constitution of every Christian.”

---

295 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 9, Grafton Papers.
296 Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis*, 79.
297 Mark 14:3 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, January 1876, p. 1, box 3, folder 14, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
A life of believing service would be seen, Grafton believed, in the way one spent his time. He held up the woman who anointed Jesus as a model because she gave her choicest time to Jesus.\footnote{Mark 14:3 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 8-9, Grafton Papers.} He asked his congregation,

How often have you pleaded want of time when the Lord through his church wanted your service? And indeed, time after time, when you have been called up to the sanctuary to engage in the delightful act of prayer and praise, how often have you said ‘I really cannot spare the time.’ You have virtually said, ‘my time is too good to give to Christ.’ See how unlike this woman who hesitated not to give to the service of the Lord her choicest time. Think for a moment how many hours during the past year that you could use for selfish purposes have you given to the service of your Lord. True you have devoted Sabbath after Sabbath in coming to the Lord’s house to worship. But you should remember this is the Lord’s day and you could not decently employ it in any other way than by coming to worship. And the law would arrest you if you engaged in the ordinary pursuits of trade. But outside of the Lord’s day which is not your own how much of your own time, precious it may have been to your own interests or equipment, have you devoted to the Lord’s service? How much of your time in the future are you willing to devote to Christ? Oh let it be the choicest use of your best time to take the box of ointment and break it and pour it upon the Savior’s head.\footnote{Mark 14:3 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 8-9, Grafton Papers.}

While all the Christian’s time, especially the choicest of it, was to be devoted to the Lord's service, Grafton’s preaching stressed the importance of the Sabbath day for the Christian life. Ted Ownby observes that, “the commitment of Southern evangelicals to an ethic of self-control showed most clearly in their observance of a very quiet Sabbath day.”\footnote{Ownby, \textit{Subduing Satan}, 106.} He continues, “Sunday was a day set apart for home and church. Those two institutions—the centers of evangelical life—held a power on Sunday that they held on no other day.”\footnote{Ownby, \textit{Subduing Satan}, 109.} Grafton’s preaching extolled this Sabbath-centered piety as the ideal for his congregation. The Westminster Shorter Catechism—which Grafton learned as a child and taught for decades—accurately summarized his convictions on the Sabbath. “The fourth commandment requireth the keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his Word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a
holy Sabbath to himself.” He fleshed this out for his hearers by asking them, “How shall we keep the Sabbath”? And he answered, “Things we must not do. Sleep. Eating and drinking. Etc…” To these prohibitions he added, “things we must do. Go to church; promptly, prayerfully, closet and family exercise.”

Grafton longed for this ideal to be met in Union Church. But he lamented that Sabbath breaking was “the great sin of this community.” Sabbath desecration was at least as heinous as other social ills, and even stood behind them as their cause. “Jails and penitentiaries [are] filled with Sabbath breakers,” he explained. In February 1878 he preached, “Some time during the last year Dr. E. J. B. was found to have embezzled church money. He was tried etc…He is called a criminal. On the other hand here is one who has been using regularly 52 Sabbaths every year of God’s time. Which is the greater criminal. One has stolen money. The other has stolen the Lord’s time. No difference in principle between the one that steals money and the one that steals time.”

This 1878 sermon was by no means his last word on Sabbath observance. In addition to preaching on the subject, he chaired the Mississippi Synod’s committee on the Sabbath. His committee advocated a Sabbath for postal workers and laborers, even though “the great corporations that are employing these laborers are making a hard fight against the efforts for a weekly day of rest.” He lamented that in his own Synod, “we still have, and are likely to have...

---

303 Exodus 20 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 3, 1883, box 5, folder 31, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
304 Exodus 20 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 3, Grafton Papers.
305 Exodus 20 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 4, Grafton Papers.
308 Exodus 20 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 19, Grafton Papers.
309 “The Sabbath,” Minutes of the Synod of Mississippi 82nd Session (Port Gibson, MS: Chamberlain-Hunt Academy Print, November 19-21, 1912): 528-530,
for years to come, much cause for grief over the way our people treat the Sabbath day.”

His committee’s solution was simple, “Don’t travel on Sunday; don’t visit on Sunday; don’t seek your own pleasure on Sunday. With all fidelity use the Sabbath day for the worship of God.”

The committee concluded its report by recommending that the Synod’s Summer School give the sabbath a place in their program, and that is exactly what they did. In the summer of 1914, Dr. Grafton delivered three addresses to the Synod’s Training School, “The Meaning of the Sabbath,” “Keeping the Sabbath,” and “Religious Home.”

Grafton was remembered for his teaching on strict Sabbath observance long after his ministry in Union Church came to an end in 1934. James O. Chatham, who pastored Union Church from 1964-1966, wrote that while Dr. Grafton had been dead for thirty years, “you couldn’t tell it. His spirit still moved powerfully over the village, fashioning its thinking and its way of life...Even with Dr. Grafton so long gone, many still would not have dared transgress his wishes.” This was especially the case, in Chatham’s mind, concerning the Sabbath day. He recalled, “Any transgression of the Sabbath, of any sort or degree, would call down the fire of heaven. No one was to do even a mite of work on Sunday, and no one

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/590be125ff7c502a07752a5b/t/5ec73059ba11af05a70cc6a1/1590112347471/Grafton%2C+Cornelius+Washington%2C+The+Sabbath.pdf

310 “The Sabbath,” Minutes of the Synod of Mississippi 82nd Session (November 19-21, 1912): 529.
311 “The Sabbath,” Minutes of the Synod of Mississippi 82nd Session (November 19-21, 1912): 530.
312 “The Sabbath,” Minutes of the Synod of Mississippi 82nd Session (November 19-21, 1912): 530.
313 “The Sabbath,” Minutes of the Synod of Mississippi 82nd Session (November 19-21, 1912): 530.
315 Chatham, Sundays Down South, 82.
was to cause anyone else to work.”

Chatham and his wife were often invited to congregants’ homes for lunch after the morning worship service. One Sunday lunch lingered in his memory.

On one particular Sunday we arrived at a family’s house to find that the entire dinner—country ham, chicken and dumplings, green beans, corn, okra, squash, corn bread, and pies—had been prepared on Saturday and laid out on the dining room table overnight. We were to sit down and eat it just as it sat, no warming, no carrying it from the kitchen, no salting, no peppering, no nothing except for lifting off the light paper napkins that had tried to protect it from the flies. It was, to say the least, a strange meal, but our hosts saw nothing strange in it at all. When we finished, we replaced the napkin coverings, got up from the table, and adjourned to the living room. The food and dishes were left until Monday. This happened in two different households we visited.

Weekly Sabbath observance was related to another of Grafton’s pastoral emphases, marriage and family life. “It is sometimes said that ‘man is a creation of circumstance’. But this can be true only when we carry the word ‘circumstance’ back to the cradle and make it mean mainly ‘family surroundings,’ which instrumentally make man what he is.” As he had done in a previous sermon, he rejected the idea that society would be reformed by electing different public officials instead of addressing the root of society, the home. “Just here it will not be out of place to criticize the efforts of many would be reformers throughout the world. ‘Reform,’ is the watchword of the political parties. The attempt is made to carry out reform by turning out of office or retaining in office certain men who are in favor or disfavor: in other words to purify the land by purging the ‘seat of government’. The principle is true but let it be remembered that the true seat of government is not in the Capital building but in the families that are scattered far and wide throughout the country. Here is where true reform should begin.”

---

316 Chatham, *Sundays Down South*, 82.
317 Chatham, *Sundays Down South*, 82.
argued, was to “purify the family and you will purify the state.”320 How should the family be purified? Grafton believed that this purification would occur through family worship. “It is at the domestic altar, the family hearthstone, that the cardinal virtues of the religion of Jesus take deepest root, spring up and shine and send forth at length their blessed perfume on the church and on the world. It is impossible indeed to divorce the church from the family. They are forever enjoying and receiving mutual advantages from one another.”321

Grafton went on to discuss the nature of the marriage relationship, describing it as established by God before man’s fall into sin. He said, “It follows from this view that the relation of husband and wife can never be regarded in accordance with the Scripture, as a mere civil contract. The state has no more right to enact law upon this subject contrary to the scripture than it has to alter the tables of the decalogue.”322 God established this ordinance prior to the church and the state. Thus, God’s prescriptions must govern it. Grafton explained, “no human legislature state or church can rise above this fountain of law and make one solitary enactment that shall bind or loose the conscience of any man.”323

Grafton understood and taught marriage to be an ancient and unchanging divine institution. But he was concerned that alternative conceptions of marriage were beginning to proliferate. “It is indeed one of the dark omens that threaten the future peace and happiness of our own great republic that rampant infidelity and atheistical progressivists are aiming blows at the very basis of human society when they make marriage a mere contract to be broken at pleasure at the consent of the parties. And we need not snuff at this evil as one that is far away. The facilities of travel and communication are so perfect that our Country is like one great body

and an ulcer in one part unless speedily thrown off or checked will scatter its virus through the whole body.”

He explained how one could easily take a train to a place where one could end a marriage “for any and all causes.” He concluded, “Our only safeguard therefore from all these evils whose name is legion is to hold to the great truth that the relation of husband and wife is a sacred relation and binding for life until sundered according to God’s ordinance.”

Christian duties went beyond the husband and wife and extended to the children. Grafton believed that the family was a covenantal unit, with each of the members in it, regardless of age, belonging to the church. In a July 1881 sermon, Grafton preached on infant church membership from Romans 11:16. He explained that children of Christian believers were members of the Church because they were federally holy, being the fruit of a holy root. He noted, “the principles of all the evangelical churches except one [presumably Baptists] in accordance with this view.” He understood himself to be following in the footsteps of the protestant reformers, “Calvin Knox and Luther and hundreds besides them have esteemed it their highest privilege to minister to God’s little ones the bread of life.”

Since, in Presbyterian theology, the children of believers were considered members of the church, their parents had certain God-given responsibilities. Preaching in June 1879 on the parental relation, Grafton described unconsecrated parents as obstacles to their children’s conversion. “But let us look a little farther into the reasons why so many of our children are not converted. And first of all the reason which lies mainly at the bottom of all the trouble is that

---

327 Romans 11:16 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 2-3, July 1881, box 4, folder 27, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
328 Romans 11:16 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 3, Grafton Papers.
329 Matthew 10:42 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 8, February 1883, box 5, folder 30, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
parents by their unbelief dishonor the very covenant by which the child’s salvation is promised to the father.”

He lamented that parents gave little consideration to preparing for the baptism of their children.

How often is the preparation for that ordinance confined to the needle, that the little child arrayed in embroidered linen may appear well. This is what the parents are thinking about, forgetting that they are about to stand in the presence of God that appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and who has kept the covenant for thousands of years with his people; forgetting that they are now about to ratify that covenant as Abraham and all the fathers did; that they are now through the divine seal of baptism setting the names of their children upon the charter of redemption. Oh what a mockery, what a meaningless form does baptism sometimes become, whether it be a child or an adult that is baptized.

While some cheapened or sentimentalized baptism, others dishonored baptism by neglecting it altogether. Finally, many Christian parents neglected God’s covenant by failing to teach their children. He continued boldly,

But further, 4/5ths of our families dishonor their obligations by making no attempt at all to perform them, over whose houses ‘no God’ could be written as over any idol temple. Could anything be a greater violation of the laws of reason than for a man to expect God’s blessing upon his children when he has violated every condition on which that blessing has been promised? He does not instruct his children, he does not pray with them, he does not pray for them. What can he expect but that coldness in religious matters which every body seems to lament. The wonder is that any one under such circumstances is ever converted.

There was little room for excuse for a parent to neglect his child’s soul. “Let the grand aim in all your instruction be the conversion of your children.”

Beyond his pulpit instruction on family duties, Grafton sought to shape Union Church’s children through the Sunday school and the local town school. Grafton believed that the Sunday schools played a significant role in Christian discipleship. At the Mississippi Synod’s November

---

330 Judges 13:12 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 15-16, June 1879, box 4, folder 22, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
331 Judges 13:12 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 16-17, Grafton Papers.
1881 meeting in Vicksburg, he authored a resolution recommending that presbyteries “take a
more careful supervision of the Sunday-schoo ls within their bounds.” He was especially
concerned that the Sunday schools prove to be “a help to the parent and a nursery for the Church,
and a means of adding to the ranks of the living ministry in the house of God,” under the
direction and supervision of the church courts, rather than merely promoting education
generally. “To accomplish these ends, let the Presbyteries appoint a day, during their annual
sessions, if the way be clear, to consider and discuss this whole matter, to awaken a deeper
interest in the right direction, and thus make the Sunday-school what it ought to be.” The
Synod adopted his resolution.

In 1883, Grafton added schoolroom instruction to his list of responsibilities, becoming
the principal of the Union Church School. He “secured an old storehouse, and rooms were added
from time to time until there were seven recitation rooms. About four hundred children were
trained here through a period of ten years. At the end of that time, in 1894, the school had gotten
so large that the minister had definitely to choose between the pulpit and the schoolroom; he
turned it over to the county to become the Jefferson County Agricultural High School.”
Grafton oversaw the teaching of Latin, Greek, mathematics, and English, also subjects like
spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history, physiology, and civil government.
“The day began and ended with religious devotions. Discipline was strict, but the children were
urged to do their schoolwork for the glory of God.” Cabaniss believed that “it was by means of

---

336 Resolution by Cornelius W. Grafton “Sunday Schools,” in Minutes of the Synod of Mississippi (Jackson, MS: Clarion Steam Publishing House, November 16-19, 1881), 15, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/590be125ff7c502a07752a5b/t/5ec72ec8ba11af05a70c8ea1/1590111944770/Gr
afton%2C+Cornelius+Washington%2C+Resolution+on+Sunday+Schoo ls.pdf.
337 Resolution by Cornelius W. Grafton “Sunday Schools.”
338 Resolution by Cornelius W. Grafton “Sunday Schools.”
339 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a County Preacher, 53.
340 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a County Preacher, 53.
341 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a County Preacher, 53.
the schoolroom that Grafton’s fame really passed beyond the tiny village of his pastorate, for the students went forth to serve society in all walks of life.”342 J. B. Cain agreed, writing, “His ten years in the classroom added immeasurably to his influence.”343 The Union Church School was advertised regionally by Thomas Markham in the *Southwestern Presbyterian.*344 Henry McLaughlin reported that “his graduates were eagerly sought after and through them came the hardest temptations of his whole life, for large institutions made constant and sustained efforts to secure him as president.”345 His teaching did provide a small addition to his income, but even “at the time of its [the Union Church School’s] greatest prosperity and popularity under him, he got only ten dollars a month.”346

Grafton’s work in the schoolroom restricted his pastoral visitation among the flock. The Union Church session reported in 1887,

> It would be unreasonable on us to ask more at the hands of our Pastor then we receive. He is regular and faithful in this administration of the word and in the discharge of other pastoral duty. True, we miss in a measure his pastoral visits to our houses, which we formerly enjoyed so much. And which he is now prevented from making by reason of his engagement in the school room. But our blessings largely outweigh our privations and fall richly compensated for this one where in we reflect that instead of visiting us occasionally at our homes that our children are now under his daily supervision and instruction.347

These educational efforts in Union Church, combined with Sunday schools and preaching, were part of a broader effort among evangelicals in the period to maintain a stable civilization in a period of change. George Marsden observes that “education…broadly conceived as education in Christian morality, stood next to preaching the Gospel itself as an answer to the

---

342 Cabaniss, *Life and Thought of a County Preacher*, 53.
346 Cabaniss, *Life and Thought of a County Preacher*, 54.
347 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 201.
new industrial and urban problems.” He continues, “for Victorian evangelicals, orthodox piety and theological dogmatism, combined with a classical curriculum, still provided the basis for an education that would sustain a stable civilization.”

Grafton’s care for local children and families, both from the pulpit and the schoolroom, did not eliminate the needs of his own family. His wife Sue gave birth to seven children from 1874 to 1882, two of whom died in infancy (Carrie in 1879 and Maggie in 1883). And then, on June 18, 1885, in the midst of his full preaching and teaching duties, tragedy struck. His wife Sue died, leaving him to care for five children between the ages 5 and 10 years old by himself. He described her death as his first dark shadow,

speaking of shadows…when the preacher came to Union Church he brought as his companion, the youngest daughter of an old Presbyterian preacher, Rev. D. G. Doak. And the first dark shadow fell on the preacher’s home when a long procession of mourning friends carried her remains to our cemetery. Two precious young flowers had already been transplanted to the King’s garden from our home, and five orphan children, bowed down with the first great grief of childhood, stood at the open grave where wife and mother was laid away.

He remained single for six more years until he remarried in 1891. Family members recall from those intervening years that, for some time after Sue’s death, the Grafton family walked to the sanctuary from the manse each Sunday morning, single file, purposely leaving the gap in their procession where their departed wife and mother had once stood.

In the throes of this deep sorrow, Grafton did for himself what he often did for others. He engaged his circumstances with Scriptural preaching. Of his hundreds of extant sermon manuscripts, only two survive from the year of Sue’s death (1885), one preached in September.

---

and the other in November. Both sermons were enclosed in one notebook cover labelled, “walking through the valley of the shadow of death.”\(^{354}\) The first was based on John 4:34, “Jesus saith unto them, my meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work.”\(^{355}\) He began,

Some time since an afflicted man was pondering upon God’s dealings with him. The burdens of life were accumulating upon his shoulders and the faith and hope of his soul were struggling for existence. While travelling along with a heavy heart the above passage of Scripture came into his mind. He was impressed with the wonderful idea contained in the text. Did my Lord indeed rejoice so greatly in his work, his mission, his allotment, his awful work; while I am repining and groaning over mine? That man rose up and went to his work with new zeal.\(^{356}\)

Grafton found in Jesus Christ a model of doing the will of God, a model fit for him in his grief, and for his congregation as well.

He explained that Jesus did not do his Father’s will in a perfunctory way, but that he loved to do it. Jesus was able to do the Father’s will with joy, deep trials notwithstanding, because he looked towards the future, when, as Isaiah prophesied, the effects of the curse would be no more and “all vestiges of death and the grave removed.” Grafton wanted Christians, himself included, to do the same, to imitate Christ, finding present contentment in God’s will by looking heavenward. This contentment, in Jesus and in his followers, would not be sorrowless. He said, “this does not imply that a man shall never weep. Nay for Jesus wept. Jesus sanctified tears…a divine Christ in tears surpasses all beauty.”\(^{357}\)

In light of the real prospect of joy in trial, he asked his congregation, “now then does any servant of God repine or murmur or grumble at God’s will? Then that one must be sick.”\(^{358}\)

---

\(^{354}\) John 4:34 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, September 1885, box 5, folder 32, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

\(^{355}\) John 4:34 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.


\(^{357}\) John 4:34 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 4, 8, 11, “to face page 16” insert, Grafton Papers.

\(^{358}\) John 4:34 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 15-16, Grafton Papers.
Grumbling against God will, even when his will included the loss of a spouse, was symptomatic of spiritual ill health. He illustrated his point with a child. “If a child sits down and refuses to eat its mother knows that it is sick…It is only when meat is eaten with relish that vigorous health is indicated…That man only is in a state of vigorous soul-health, who can upon all occasions count it all joy when he falls into divers temptations. Let us then go forth as Christian men and make it our meat to do God’s will…let us keep our eye upon the recompense of reward.” He concluded, “this passage has been the means of inspiring me with good resolutions. May the Holy Spirit so fill you with his grace that the Master’s will may be to you as heavenly manna.”

While the preacher preached to his congregation, he also preached to himself. The difficulties Grafton endured in 1885 were compounded by incomplete salary payments. His grandson, Thomas H. Grafton, recalled that his grandfather “received only $356 the year that his wife died.” Earlier that year the session noted, “our Pastor’s salary has not been paid in full and failure is due to the negligence of some of our members who have paid nothing and the illiberality of others who have paid too little.” Times were difficult beyond Union Church. Less than a decade earlier, the 1878 yellow fever epidemic cost Mississippi $40 million in lost economic activity. The value of cotton and farms in general plummeted between the end of Reconstruction and 1890, and Grafton noted the adverse effects of the depression and the boll weevil on the agricultural Union Church community. Under these circumstances, Biblical commands and pressing needs moved him to preach repeatedly on his church members’ duty to give to the work of the church.

---

360 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), third page.
361 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 193.
362 Mitchell, A New History of Mississippi, 225.
In multiple years, Grafton used the early Sundays in January to preach on giving. A January 1879 sermon compared some of his members to a man with arms of different lengths. “Should you see a man with two arms one of the usual length the other only an inch you would be struck with the lack of proportion and you would urge him to do what he could to bring out the short arm. Some Xians are disproportionate in their graces… the grace of liberality is like the short arm. Possibly this is so in your case.”364 But wasn’t the lack of giving due to the tight financial times? The pastor did not think so. He said of the one who did not contribute, “his failure in liberality not attributable to poverty. Poverty has not this effect. Instance the poor woman.”365 Then he moved from the general principle to his own congregants. “This church in its poverty doing more than in years before the war.”366 He named (in the manuscript, at least) a particular member as a negative example, “illustrate by John Buie et al who were noted for faith etc but not for liberality…Union Church no 1 in numbers in pres[bytery] no 9 in liberality.”367

While lamenting the lack of liberality among his members, he also warned of various financial schemes that threatened to ruin them. “The miserable system of mortgage security et al. I dare not mortgage my brother’s money. So of my Lord’s money.”368 The problem with debt and mortgage was that it could become first priority. “But you are in debt? And under mortgage?...mortgage No 1 claims first payment.”369 With a mortgage, one might forget that “God holds No 1.”370 He concluded the sermon by saying “if you don’t pay this amount willingly

---

364 Deuteronomy 10:14 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.
365 Deuteronomy 10:14 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.
366 Deuteronomy 10:14 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.
367 Deuteronomy 10:14 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.
368 Deuteronomy 10:14 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.
369 Deuteronomy 10:14 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.
370 Deuteronomy 10:14 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.
(presumably the tithe) God will take it,” adding an ominous comment in his notes about how God might take it, “Yellow fever.”371

In the early 1870s, the denomination raised sustentation funds to supplement the income pastors received from their congregations and bring their salaries up to the designated denominational minimums, “at first, $600, then $750, then $800 (in 1872)—in order that the minister might not be compelled to seek secular employment to support his family.”372 E. T. Thompson observed that “in 1870 the committee estimated that a full third of the effective ministerial force had of necessity been driven to the schoolroom, to the farm, or to something of the kind, in order to obtain the means of support for themselves and their families.”373 Beyond the presbyterian church, the average ministerial salary in the United states was $574 between 1890 and 1900, with many rural clergy taking salary “in kind” with other goods.374 Grafton was no different, testifying how he had received non-monetary compensation. “Some will send in a load of hay, and during all the winter now passed, the preacher’s table has been supplied with meat which comes in through the kindness of neighbors.”375 Caring neighbors provided these gifts while the Graftons pursued a simple lifestyle. “The ease of living in the county is readily explained. Your wife and children don’t dress in the height of fashion. Seal-skin coats and other costly fabrics and thirty-dollar hats are luxuries never indulged in. The country preacher’s wife and girls learn to gauge their wants by the amount of cash on hand.”376 While Grafton’s salary of $400 from Union Church, plus the $100 or so from the school, was less than the denominational

---

371 Deuteronomy 10:14 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.
372 Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:272.
373 Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 2:272.
374 Holifield, God’s Ambassadors, 150.
375 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 16-17.
376 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 17.
minimum, he was not terribly far from many of his clerical peers, nor was he unique in his dual employment and his reception of payment in goods rather than cash.

To summarize, his sermons evidence the priority Grafton placed on conversion and Christian living. His goal in preaching was to help his hearers to believe and obey the Bible with greater faith and faithfulness. While he did reference reform movements, the Civil War, and various social ills, he did so to illustrate the doctrinal or practical point he sought to make in the sermon. Criminality serves as one example. In an 1876 sermon, he explained that God’s justice must be satisfied for sinful man to be right with God. Earthly justice, he lamented, often fell short of just satisfaction for crimes committed. “If the law condemns the thief to ten years imprisonment, how often through unwise clemency and disregard to justice, does he escape with five, perhaps with two or three. The law condemns the murderer to death, under the divine sanction ‘whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.’ But do not nine tenths of the murderers slip through the hands of justice and walk abroad unfettered and free?”

While laxity may afflict human justice, he warned, “God’s law never comes down on e jot from its demands.” He continued, “We are precisely in the condition of the worthless criminal who owes death to his country’s laws and a thousand talents to his fellow man.” In addition to reminding people of God’s justice, criminals also depicted what it was like to be unreconciled with God. “Would you see the consequences of war with God, look at the criminal face furrowed with sin, the home in which happiness is an entire stranger, look at the speechless despair of the dying impenitent and see the smoke of his torment ascending to God forever and ever.” He reminded his congregation of “the statue of the weeping woman at the state prison” in a sermon.

377 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 6, Grafton Papers.
378 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 6, Grafton Papers.
379 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 6, Grafton Papers.
380 Romans 5:1 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 2-3, Grafton Papers.
from John 11:35, to illustrate that man was affected by another man’s weeping.\textsuperscript{381} In each case, his references to criminals either illustrated religious principles or appeared as symptoms of deeper spiritual ills, not as starting points for political action.

Around this time, the prohibition movement began to develop in Mississippi.\textsuperscript{382} Grafton’s friend from university days, Methodist clergyman Charles Galloway, successfully lobbied for a local option law, which passed in 1886.\textsuperscript{383} Despite a presumed connection between alcohol and crime, and Grafton’s friendship with Galloway, his sermons bear no evidence of engagement for or against prohibition.

In addition to criminality, Grafton often used martial illustrations in his sermons, especially stories about Napoleon. He also illustrated sermon points using Civil War experiences. In a 1876 sermon from Matthew 16:26 he said, “Richmond in the late war the theatre of contending armies. The blood shed around it the proof of its importance. See the blood of Christ around the soul of man.”\textsuperscript{384} Expounding on the text, “though he slay me, yet I will trust in him” (Job 13:15) in 1879, he illustrated Job’s faith with, “the wounded soldier at Resaca [Georgia] trusted the surgeon to amputate his arm though it should kill him.”\textsuperscript{385} In these sermons, Grafton did not use his pulpit to defend the Southern cause in the Civil War, but to illustrate spiritual truths about the blood of Christ and Job-like faith in the face of death. Nor did his sermons invoke a theology of divine chastisement—God testing, rebuking, and sanctifying the South through defeat—as many contemporaries did.\textsuperscript{386} At other points, the Confederate veteran even

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{381} John 11:35 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, June 1875, box 2, folder 13, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
\item \textsuperscript{382} Mitchell, A New History of Mississippi, 241ff.
\item \textsuperscript{383} Mitchell, A New History of Mississippi, 242f.
\item \textsuperscript{384} Matthew 16:26 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 2, February 1876, box 3, folder 14, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
\item \textsuperscript{385} Job 13:15 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, box 4, folder 21, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
\item \textsuperscript{386} Harvey, Freedom’s Coming, 19-23.
\end{itemize}
criticized the Southern war effort, attributing its demise to its disunity.\textsuperscript{387} Dennis Mitchell suggests that “rednecks” made a crack in the civil religion, since Confederate lost cause civil religion was fundamentally a “bourbon” phenomenon, which may have contributed to Grafton’s reluctance to use his pulpit to rehash the war.\textsuperscript{388} However, as his assessment of John L. Girardeau revealed, his avoidance of such themes was also theological, believing that he should not use his pulpit for political purposes.

As with the Civil War, Grafton maintained relative quiet from the pulpit on the subject of race. Milton Winter wrote, “Southern Christians and Presbyterian theologians helped lay the intellectual framework for segregation, just as they had for slavery.”\textsuperscript{389} E. T. Thompson argued that Southern Presbyterians generally believed, “it was also the fact—accepted by Southerners generally as beyond dispute—that Negroes were inherently inferior to white men and that therefore they could never aspire to a position of equality, much less of rule, in Southern society.”\textsuperscript{390} Quoting a 1867 \textit{Southern Presbyterian Review} article as representative of the Southern Presbyterian mindset, he continued, “The elevation of the black people to a positive political and social equality with the whites, is simply an impossibility. Vain must be every effort to resist the decrees of God.”\textsuperscript{391} Thompson continued, “The inherent inferiority of the Negro being accepted, it followed that social equality must be rejected as leading inevitably to intermarriage and the eventual ruin of the white man and of his culture and civilization.”\textsuperscript{392}

\textsuperscript{387} Nehemiah 4:6 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 1, Grafton Papers.
\textsuperscript{388} Mitchell, \textit{A New History of Mississippi}, 245.
\textsuperscript{389} Winter, \textit{Citadels of Zion}, 1:62.
\textsuperscript{390} Thompson, \textit{Presbyterians in the South}, 2:198.
\textsuperscript{392} Thompson, \textit{Presbyterians in the South}, 2:198-199.
Grafton seems to have shared this view, commenting in a 1916 address that it was a “moral certainty” that Reconstruction-era black rule come to an end.393 In 1872, his most famous colleague, B. M. Palmer of New Orleans, insisted that “it is indispensable that the purity of the race shall be preserved on either side; for it is the condition of life to the one, as much as to the other. The argument for this I base upon the declared policy of the Divine Administration from the days of Noah until now.”394 But Grafton’s extant sermons reveal no evidence that he even preached on the curse of Ham, the text to which Palmer referred that was often used to support segregation and white supremacy.395 He even wrote in his *History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi*, “The institution of slavery as it existed in the South was blighted with the curse handed down from the slave raider and pirate: and so in the providence of God was doomed to destruction.”396 The absence of such themes should not suggest that Grafton disagreed with Palmer, or with broader white feelings of racial superiority. In fact, their absence may suggest consensus on racial views among his congregants and their pastor, a consensus they had yet to achieve on matters of piety. Regardless, it does indicate that Grafton did not make race or its corresponding social structures a focus of his pulpit ministry.

IV. How did the congregation receive his preaching?

While Grafton’s sermons provide a good sense of his understanding of the needs of his people and the priorities of his ministry, it is more difficult to assess how the church received and implemented his pulpit instruction. On October 12, 1879, the Union Church session ordered “that

---

394 Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 2:199.
395 He did write about the curse of Ham as the source of the division of the races. “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, C. Benton Kline, Jr. Special Collections and Archives, John Bulow Campbell Library, Columbia Theological Seminary, 427.
396 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 94.
the Pastor be requested at his discretion to deliver again the sermon preached by him in April last from 1st Corinthians 11th chapter and 29th verse.” 397 That verse read, “For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” This at least suggests the elders appreciation for that particular message, as well as their sense of the congregation’s need for self-examination before participating in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. In 1887, the elders reported to their presbytery that, “He is regular and faithful in this administration of the word and in the discharge of other pastoral duty.” 398 Grafton himself believed that the congregation appreciated his ministry. After surveying the doctrinal content of his sermons, he said, “these are sometimes called the dry bones of theology, but our people have not found it so.” 399 He continued, “country people love these great truths, and it would do you good to hear them discuss these great themes.” 400 However, he did admit in his Forty-Three Year Pastorate that some hearers who visited from city churches shrugged their shoulders at the length of his sermons.

While he and his fellow elders often lamented poor attendance and commitment among the Union Church membership, Grafton did receive tokens of encouragement. “In 1879, as a gesture of appreciation, the trustees of Union Church transferred title to the manse to their esteemed pastor.” 401 And on October 21, 1887, Rev. Grafton’s daughter Nellie, aged about 12 years, “presented herself and was received into full communion of the church on profession of faith.” 402 Her older brother Henry followed suit two days later, on October 23. 403

397 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 174.
398 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 201.
399 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 6-7.
400 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 7.
402 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 204.
403 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 205.
The broader church too began to recognize Grafton’s ministry. In 1878, Mississippi presbytery, the regional presbyterian church court for Southwestern Mississippi, elected Grafton as its Moderator. In addition to the honor of being elected by colleagues, the Moderator of the presbytery—or of any other church court—presided over the body’s meetings and occasionally sat on and appointed committees. It did so again in 1884. In 1895, Southwestern Presbyterian University in Clarksville, Tennessee conferred on him an honorary doctorate. Mississippi Synod, the body representing all Mississippi Presbyterians, elected Dr. Grafton as its Moderator in 1896.

V. Conclusions

C. W. Grafton spent the two decades after Reconstruction preaching sermons from the Bible. Each Sunday, he sought to shape the beliefs and behaviors of his Union Church or Ben Salem congregations through the preached word, a word, he believed, that possessed divine authority. His sermons reveal the primarily spiritual aims of his ministry. He preached “with all the heart,” to see men and women, boys and girls, converted to living Christian faith. From that conversion, he sought to disciple church members into a self-sacrificial lifestyle oriented around strict Sabbath observance and lived out in pious family life. When he addressed social ills

404 Cabaniss, *Life and Thought of a County Preacher*, 52.
405 The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America (The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2022) Rules of Assembly Operations 7-4. This book of church order draws heavily from the Presbyterian Church, U.S. book and its description of the Moderator is consistent with the expectations for that office in Grafton’s time.
406 Union Church Presbyterian Church Session Records, transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd, 192.
408 Cabaniss, *Life and Thought of a County Preacher*, 57.
409 Romans 8:8 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, Grafton Papers.
or current events, he did so to illustrate spiritual truths, press spiritual duties, and demonstrate spiritual needs.

The themes of right doctrine and practice in Grafton’s ministry in these years ran parallel to key themes in the emerging fundamentalist movement. George Marsden summarizes fundamentalism as “militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism. Fundamentalists were evangelical Christians, close to the traditions of the dominant American revivalist establishment of the nineteenth century, who in the twentieth century militantly opposed both modernism in theology and the cultural changes that modernism endorsed.”410 Marsden distinguishes fundamentalism from other closely related traditions, including reformed confessionalism, arguing that fundamentalism was a movement “that gradually took on its own identity as a patchwork coalition of representatives from other movements.”411 It was as a reformed confessionalist, a minister in the reformed tradition who taught in conformity to the Westminster Confession of Faith, that Grafton evidenced both continuity and difference with Fundamentalism.

Grafton’s sermons have significant discontinuities with the American revivalist tradition, especially the Wesleyan Arminian theology of some of its Baptist and Methodist proponents. However, in other ways, Grafton’s emphases overlapped with those of the Fundamentalists. He shared fundamentalism’s anti-modernist Protestant evangelical emphases. He also showed a certain ambivalence to American culture from the pulpit, a trait Marsden identifies in D. L. Moody.412 Marsden observes, “When the battles against modernism arose, fundamentalism always retained a tension between an exclusivist militancy and an irenic spirit concerned with

holiness and saving souls." Grafton’s sermons show a similar ambivalence and tension in the interest of his spiritual aims. Also like Moody, Grafton preached that social change could occur only through spiritual reformation in the family. Marsden writes, “The emphasis on motherhood and domesticity in Moody’s preaching was part of the widespread evangelical conviction that stability in the home was the key to the resolution of other social problems.” According to one family member, Grafton even took an interest in Moody himself. When friends raised money to send him to the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, he skipped out on exhibitors to hear Moody preach.

Occasionally, Dr. Grafton’s sermons moved beyond cultural ambivalence to take direct aim at agents of cultural change. “Atheistical progressivists” threatened the foundations of American and even human society by reducing marriage to a mere contract, breakable at will. Political reform movements insufficiently pursued social change through the ballot while neglecting deeper issues in the home which could only ultimately be solved through Christian spiritual reformation. While infrequent, his critiques of progressivism and reform suggest a shift from his more optimistic outlook on cultural and intellectual progress in his college valedictory towards a posture of concern over what he believed to be destructive trends in society and church. Grafton was not alone. Holifield describes the six decades after 1865 as a period of religious tension, “tensions between liberals and conservatives [and] conflicts between social gospel and otherworldly faith.” Through his preaching, Grafton advocated the conservative pole and, while longing and laboring for changed lives, homes, and communities, rejected as insufficient attempts to reform that did not address the spiritual root.

415 John Pope interview by David T. Irving. Mr. Pope is the great-grandson of Dr. C. W. Grafton.
416 Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 146.
CHAPTER THREE

PROTESTING: GRAFTON AGAINST LYNCHING, 1880-1918

C. W. Grafton’s ministry at Union Church and Ben Salem corresponded almost exactly with a period of widespread lynching in Mississippi. By multiple accounts, more black people were lynched in Mississippi than in any other state in the Union. While the exact number cannot be known for certain, Terence Finnegan writes, “from 1881 to 1940, Mississippi had more lynching incidents, 572, than any other state.”\(^\text{417}\) Julius Thompson counted 540 lynchings of blacks in Mississippi between 1882 and 1966 and 350 between 1889 and 1918.\(^\text{418}\) More Mississippi blacks were lynched in the Yazoo Delta region than in any other region in the state. The old Natchez region, where Grafton lived and served, recorded the second most lynchings; 105 between 1881 and 1940.\(^\text{419}\) It experienced more lynching incidents than any other region in Mississippi between 1880 and 1900.\(^\text{420}\) Of the 105 killings between 1881 and 1940, church records and sermons show three cases that Grafton addressed explicitly; the 1882 murder of teenager Dock Gordon in Lincoln County, the 1899 murder of an unnamed man in Port Gibson, and the 1918 murder of Will Reed in Union Church.\(^\text{421}\)

This chapter examines Grafton’s life from 1882 through 1919 with a particular focus on his engagement with the three lynchings noted above. Grafton unequivocally condemned each of

\(^{417}\) Terrence Finnegan, *A Deed So Accursed: Lynching in Mississippi and South Carolina, 1881-1940* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 4.


\(^{419}\) Finnegan, *A Deed So Accursed*, 21-22, 28.

\(^{420}\) Finnegan, *A Deed So Accursed*, 22.

\(^{421}\) Finnegan, *A Deed So Accursed*, 28.
these lynchings as sin against God. But, he did so within the framework and in support of the prevailing race-based social hierarchy. This chapter offers a window into one white Protestant minister’s understanding of lynching and the way he sought to shape his congregation’s response to it. The chapter further seeks to situate Grafton’s response to lynching within a wider context of Christian responses to lynching in the South.

By the summer of 1882, Grafton had been serving his two rural congregations—Union Church and Ben Salem—for nine years. He was thirty-five years old. Grafton lived in Union Church with his wife Sue and their five children. About once each month, Grafton rode his horse roughly nine miles east to the Caseyville community to preach at the Ben Salem church. The congregation had 88 communicant members and 19 baptized non-communicants, along with 50 scholars in Sabbath and Bible classes. He likely made the trip on Saturdays and returned Mondays. This schedule kept his horse from working on Sundays, which he believed would violate the fourth commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy. It was a busy time for the Grafton family, and a challenging one. Cornelius and Sue had buried two infants since their marriage in 1873, the second of whom, Maggie, may have died only months before a black teenager was killed in Caseyville.

When the Ben Salem congregation gathered for worship on August 20, word had spread that one of the church’s ruling elders, John McCallum, had shot and killed a black teenager Dock Gordon only days earlier. With public knowledge of the murder hanging in the air, the congregation gathered for its Sunday worship service. Grafton led his flock through the

---

422 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, 1881-1947, microfilm, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, April 15, 1883.
423 This author believes he read this somewhere but cannot find the source. Such a practice would be consistent with his view of the Sabbath Day.
424 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 52.
425 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, August 20, 1882.
customary songs and prayers, methodically progressing towards the sermon. For his text, the preacher chose Mark 9:44, where Jesus described hell as a place, “Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”426 He made no explicit reference to McCallum or Gordon, but given how Grafton would later describe the punishment of murderers, one struggles not to connect the sermon’s text to the circumstances surrounding its delivery.

Grafton took his hearers back to the Valley of Hinnom outside the gates of Jerusalem where, he said, “all the carcasses found in the gutters and streets of the city were thrown.”427 Worms bred in this awful place “and a fire was kept burning in this valley” for purification.428 But the worms and fires in the Valley of Hinnom would eventually die out. Jesus referenced this historic valley, Grafton said, to assure “his people that there is a Gehenna beyond where the worm don’t die, and the fire is not quenched.”429 The undying worm “is an expression which sets forth the everlasting corruption of the lost soul,” “uncleanness of sin or the lost soul,” and “the everlasting repugnance to the sinner of all holy things.”430 “If we can imagine,” he preached, “ten thousand volcanoes emitting their unclean deadly vapors upon a doomed world, we will have but a slight conception of that world of woe where millions of immoral spirits are breathing forth the venom of uncleanness and death.”431 The unquenchable fire in Jesus’ teaching means, “God’s everlasting abhorrence of all sin; such an abhorrence that can make no compromise with sin,” and, “the divine pledge that sin shall be forever kept within due bounds; that it shall not spread its poison and extend the empire of death beyond its own domains.”432 Grafton finished this

---

426 Mark 9:44 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, August 20, 1882, box 4, folder 28, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
430 Mark 9:44 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 3, 5-6, Grafton Papers. Underlining original.
431 Mark 9:44 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 3, 5-6, Grafton Papers.
432 Mark 9:44 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 7-9, Grafton Papers.
sermon with an illustration and an invitation. His notes prompted him to show his congregation “the dreadful possibilities of sin. The fearful possibilities of one, ten, a hundred bad men.” He concluded with an invitation. “Ere you are cut off with the undying worm and unquenchable fire come to the fountain and be cleansed from all uncleanness.”

With threats of eternal torment, reminders of God’s hatred of sin, and warnings of the danger of even one bad man fresh on their minds, the Ben Salem elders gathered for a session meeting that very same day. “Session met and opened with prayer. Present Rev. C W Grafton, J E McCallum, A Baker, John Gilchrist.” That the elders met after a worship service was not unusual. But the reason for their meeting certainly was. The meeting minutes recorded, “The session having knowledge of the fact that our Brother J E McCallum had within a few days past shot and killed a certain Negro in the neighborhood.” McCallum was the Ben Salem session clerk, responsible for keeping the session minutes and overseeing communications to and from the elders. His fellow elders immediately acted to begin an ecclesiastical trial in response to the killing. “Resolved to institute process in the case. John Gilchrist was appointed prosecutor and was directed to prepare the indictment and conduct the case.” In doing so, the Ben Salem elders were following the presbyterian church constitution. They believed that Christ, as the Head of the Church, had revealed in Scripture both their responsibility to deal with scandal and the process by which to deal with it. With instructions given to Mr. Gilchrist, “The Session, deeming it prudent, elected Calum Blue, Clerk for the present and directed J E McCallum to

---

433 Mark 9:44 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 9, Grafton Papers.
434 Mark 9:44 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 9-10, Grafton Papers.
435 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, August 20, 1882.
436 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, August 20, 1882.
437 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, August 20, 1882.
place the Book of Record in his hands."  

The elders adjourned and closed with prayer, to gather again on Saturday, September 2 when they would hear the indictment given by Mr. Gilchrist.  

The Ben Salem elders met as scheduled on September 2. After opening with prayer, “the indictment against J E McCallum with the names of the witnesses known to support it was placed in the hands of the accused [and] the clerk was directed to [illegible] all parties to appear before the session.” The elders met again the following day, presumably after the morning worship service, but only to receive new members into the church, not to deal with anything pertaining to Mr. McCallum’s case. McCallum was present for the meeting, which shows that he continued in his function as an elder at Ben Salem during his case, just not as the session clerk.  

The session met again on September 16 to try the McCallum case. Following the church constitution, Grafton “charged the members of the Session to remember the high character as judges of a Court of Jesus Christ, and the solemn duty in which they were about to engage.” Then the prosecutor, John Gilcrest, read the indictment. “In the name of the Presbyterian Church in the United States I John Gilchrist do hereby charge J E McCallum with a violation of the (6)th Commandment under the following specifications. Said J E McCallum did on the 14th day of the present month [August] at a certain house belonging to Dr. A. Baker in the County of Copiah and the State of Mississippi shoot and kill one Negro man known as Dock Gordon. Said killing I charge to be a violation of the moral law and against the peace and unity and purity of the Church and the honor and majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the King and Head thereof.” The accusation of violating the moral law in the sixth commandment against murder is clear. The
second aspect, that his actions compromised the peace and unity and purity of the church, amounted to an accusation that his actions violated the vows he had taken as a church member and especially as an officer. Gilchrist’s indictment named two witnesses, Dr. A. Baker, a fellow elder who owned the house mentioned, and Lawson Boothe.

According to presbyterian historian R. Milton Winter, Dock Gordon was born around 1865, making him around sixteen or seventeen years old when he died. Two years before his death, the 1880 census recorded him as living with his mother Charlotte and siblings. The family lived near the home of Dr. Baker, a Ben Salem ruling elder and witness in the case, which was close to the site where Gordon was killed.

With the indictment read and the witnesses named, John McCallum then had the opportunity to answer the charge against him. The session minutes recorded his plea as, “of the Specifications; ‘Guilty [and] of the charge not guilty’.” The record continued, “By this answer he explained that he admitted the killing but denied that it was a breach of the moral law. The killing being admitted the prosecutor claimed that he had not need of the witnesses and they were not examined.” McCallum, having admitted the killing, then proceeded to explain why he thought he was justified in the act, thereby making it no violation of God’s moral law. First, he said that “the evidence was clear to his mind that the negro in question had attempted an atrocious crime on a female relative.” Second, he argued that, “acting as a civil officer he was endeavoring to arrest him.” Third, “The Negro attempted to make his escape.” In sum,

---

446 The vow asks, “Do you promise to study the peace, unity, edification and purity of the Church?” *Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.* (1879) VI.4.2., p. 34.
447 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, September 16, 1882.
449 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, September 16, 1882.
450 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, September 16, 1882.
451 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, September 16, 1882.
452 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, September 16, 1882. Underlining original.
McCallum argued that he had not broken the moral law of God in this case because he used lethal force only when Dock Gordon attempted to escape a lawful arrest for a heinous crime.

The session discussed the matter, with each elder given an opportunity to express his opinion. When the elders finished deliberations, they passed their resolution. “Resolved: That it is our beleafe [sic] that the attempt to commit an atrocious crime is as culpable in the sight of God as the act itself. The Session then being satisfied from the statement of Dr. * S Baker and Mr. Boothe, the negro had attempted a fearful assault on female virtue—Rendered the following decision: the killing justifiable, therefore the charge is not sustained.” 453 The minutes recorded nothing of the substance of Dr. Baker’s or Mr. Boothe’s statements. The session adjourned with prayer and Mr. Blue, the temporary clerk, “was directed to furnish the record of this case—and return the Book to J. E. McCallum.” 454

The next day, Sunday September 17, the session met again, this time without McCallum. The only item of business concerned a paper, written by Rev. Grafton, which was read and admitted to the record. Grafton said, “I concur with all my brethren who hold the following principles. 1st the civil officer is God’s minister appointed to execute wrath upon [an] offender. II# a divine law clothes with the right and duty to use force where ever necessary in the arrest of a criminal, force that will lead to the shedding of blood, or the destruction of life if the case demands. III# that the criminal who resist the operations of the law by attempting to escape or otherwise is resisting the ordinance of God and does it at his own peril.” 455 On these foundational principles, Grafton agreed with his fellow elders. “But,” he continued, “it does not seem clear to my mind that our brother used the necessary ca[illegible] to prevent the effusion of blood in the

453 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, September 16, 1882.
454 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, September 16, 1882.
455 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, September 16, 1882.
above case. Such precaussion [sic] I think is required by the moral law, and therefore I do not agree with my brethren in their decision rendered yesterday." Having received and recorded Grafton’s dissent, the session closed with prayer. The minutes contain no further discussion of the matter. For the next recorded session meeting, April 1, 1883, J E McCallum signed the minutes as clerk.

McCallum’s defense before the Ben Salem session, which proved successful, relied on common themes used to justify extra-legal killings in the period. In his study of the different types of violence carried out in lynching in Arkansas, Guy Lancaster observes that, “allegations of interracial rape tended to dominate lynching discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.” Commenting on mob violence in lynching, Lancaster further shows that lynching was sometimes an act of violence, “motivated by a sense of morality.” In other words, people believed themselves obligated to hurt or kill another person to maintain moral and social order. In some cases, such behavior is even praised and admired. Amy Louise Wood comes to a similar conclusion, writing, “defenders of lynching commonly represented the violence as a terrifying retribution, ordained and consecrated by God, against the black man’s transgressions.” McCallum’s testimony before the session showed exactly this sense of responsibility, killing Gordon to maintain civil order and in some way defend the honor of his female relative.

---

456 Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm, September 16, 1882.
458 Lancaster, American Atrocity, 102.
McCallum’s response to Dock Gordon’s death evidenced certain widely held assumptions about gender, specifically that white men were responsible for protecting white women from dangerous blacks. Crystal Feimster argues that this male-dominated opposition to rape which sometimes resulted in lynching could be used to reinforce women’s second-class status.\textsuperscript{461} The traditional narrative ran, “lynching black men would protect white womanhood and keep blacks in their place.”\textsuperscript{462} Feimster shows that opposition to interracial rape in the post-Reconstruction South did not just come from patriarchal white males. Instead, women like Rebecca Felton “demanded protection that did not require dependency on fathers and husbands, and that insisted on women’s ability as well as their right to participate in their own protection.”\textsuperscript{463} Feimster concludes that white women, even those like Felton who supported the racial status quo, “actively tried to manipulate the rape hysteria and the language of lynching in their struggle for women’s rights.”\textsuperscript{464}

The conclusion of the McCallum trial did not lead Grafton to pivot towards lighter subjects in the pulpit. Rather, he kept themes of life, death, earthly justice, and eternal consequences at the forefront of his preaching to the Ben Salem congregation. Again, without explicitly connecting his message to the murder, in September, Grafton preached a sermon from Job 21:7 titled, “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea are mighty in power.”\textsuperscript{465} In this sermon, he sought to explain why the wicked sometimes prosper and attain old age. He said that God ordained such situations for many reasons; to give the wicked opportunity to repent, to discipline the righteous, to show the ungovernable obstinacy of sin, to confirm the truth that

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{461} Crystal N. Feimster, \textit{Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 63.
\textsuperscript{462} Feimster, \textit{Southern Horrors}, 77.
\textsuperscript{463} Feimster, \textit{Southern Horrors}, 85.
\textsuperscript{464} Feimster, \textit{Southern Horrors}, 85.
\textsuperscript{465} Job 21:7 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, September 1882, box 4, folder 28, Grafton (Cornelius W.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
\end{flushright}
there is a coming day of retribution, and to vindicate God’s justice in their final awful condemnation. In a parenthetical note to himself, he wrote, “illustrate… by the poor Christian woman who suffers all her life and dies a painful death and by the vile desperado the terror of the community who lives in health and dies in a moment.” While it may be tempting to draw connections between McCallum—an older white presbyterian elder who unlawfully killed a local teenager—and the mighty and powerful wicked man of Job 21, the preacher made no such explicit link in his sermon.

As the analysis below will show, Grafton’s response to the 1882 lynching of Dock Gordon differed in some ways from the two subsequent lynchings he would address in 1899 and 1919. In the McCallum-Gordon case, he registered his disagreement with the session, choosing to submit a dissenting statement rather than explicitly preach on the subject from the pulpit. In subsequent cases, he took a more public stand, using his Sunday sermon to oppose lynching as a sinful violation of God’s moral law.

This difference notwithstanding, Grafton’s opposition to the 1882 killing also illustrates some of the theological principles that undergirded his opposition and would factor prominently again in 1899 and 1919. First, that McCallum was said to be acting as a civil officer was decisive for his interpretation of events. As Grafton’s later responses to lynching will further show, one of his primary objections to lynching was that it undermined the rule of law. In a lynching, a private citizen took into his or her own hands a duty that God had given only to the magistrate. Second, Grafton believed that civil authorities had the right to use lethal force. This was in keeping with the southern Presbyterian Church Confession of Faith, which asserted that God, “hath armed them [civil magistrates] with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them

466 Job 21:7 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, pp. 4-11, Grafton Papers.
467 Job 21:7 sermon by Cornelius W. Grafton, p. 9, Grafton Papers.
that are good, and for the punishment of evildoers.\textsuperscript{468} But that was not an issue in the Gordon case, since McCallum claimed to have acted as a civil officer with the right to arrest suspected criminals and use lethal force when necessary. Grafton objected to Gordon’s murder and to the Ben Salem elders’ exoneration of McCallum not because it was unlawful for him in principle as a civil officer, but because it was unnecessary in this particular case. Grafton believed that McCallum broke God’s moral law against murder because he failed to exercise the necessary restraint or caution towards Gordon, a failure which, in Grafton’s mind, amounted to a violation of the sixth commandment. Third, Grafton did not mention Gordon’s race in his response to the session’s decision, even though the elders explicitly identified Gordon as a “negro” at least four times in the record of the case.\textsuperscript{469} This is not to suggest that Grafton did not see lynching in racialized terms—the cases discussed below will show the opposite—but it does highlight the centrality of his theology of law and civil government in his opposition to lynching.

Following the conclusion of the Gordon-McCallum case, Grafton continued his busy ministry among his two congregations. He preached, taught school, attended meetings of Presbytery and Synod, visited congregants, and fulfilled other routine pastoral duties with the added responsibilities of family life with his wife and five children. Not long after Gordon’s death, tragedy again struck his own family. His wife Sue died in June of 1885, leaving him to parent his five living children alone for six years until he remarried in 1891.\textsuperscript{470}

Grafton’s second marriage appears to have been less idyllic than the first. His second wife, Kate Wharton of Port Gibson, MS was the daughter of a physician and presbyterian elder

\textsuperscript{468} The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as Adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America, Confession of Faith 23.1, p.116.
\textsuperscript{469} Winter, Citadels of Zion, 1:183.
\textsuperscript{470} Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 54.
in that town.\textsuperscript{471} Cabaniss wrote, “she was a forceful, intellectual woman, who was ultimately responsible for the organization of the Woman’s Auxiliary of the Presbytery of Mississippi…Interested in religion, she held certain distinctive ideas, such as faith-healing and Premillenarianism.”\textsuperscript{472} Grafton’s grandson, Thomas H. Grafton, was even more forthcoming about his step-grandmother’s idiosyncrasies. He wrote of his grandfather’s second marriage to Wharton, “This turned out to be a strange relationship. As long as I can remember they occupied separate rooms…She had her sister and brother living in the house with the family and was said to have insisted on the best things for them, sometimes at the expense of the rest of the family.”\textsuperscript{473} Thomas Grafton, himself a presbyterian minister, concluded, “She was a kind of religious crank and would occasionally claim that the devil had tried to scare her by turning a stamp upside down.”\textsuperscript{474} So, following his first wife’s death and six years of singleness, Grafton’s new wife and her two siblings joined the preacher and his five children in his home in Union Church. But death and remarriage did not end his family trials. Disaster struck his family again in 1895. His two oldest children, Nellie and Henry Doak and Nellie, died of tuberculosis in April and December of the same year.\textsuperscript{475} Nellie was 19 and Henry Doak 21.

Throughout this same period, Grafton did influential work as a schoolmaster. Between 1883 and 1895 he taught about 400 students in Union Church. He oversaw instruction in classical subjects, began and ended each day with devotions, and maintained strict discipline.\textsuperscript{476} He recalled in 1916, “Here for ten long years, boys and girls were urged to do everything in Jesus’ name: to sweep the floors, make the fires, to get the multiplication table, to study

\begin{footnotes}{471}Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 54.\protect\endfootnotes
\begin{footnotes}{472}Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 54.\protect\endfootnotes
\begin{footnotes}{473}Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), second page.\protect\endfootnotes
\begin{footnotes}{474}Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), second page.\protect\endfootnotes
\begin{footnotes}{475}Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 54-55.\protect\endfootnotes
\begin{footnotes}{476}Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 53.\protect\endfootnotes

\textbf{103}
theorems and syllogisms, and to do all other work in the King’s name and for God’s glory.”

By 1895, the school had become so large that he was forced to choose between the school and the pastorate, ultimately deciding on the latter. He then turned the school over to the country and it became Jefferson County Agricultural High School.

Grafton’s notoriety, thanks in part to his work at the school, began to grow in this period. One school catalogue advertised that, “Rev. C. W. Grafton, is one of the best known divines in the South and his influence in the school bears a great weight and is greatly appreciated by the school and community.”

The 1891 *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi* included him among its entries, calling him, “a worthy Christian gentleman...[who] has devoted his time to the spiritual and mental wants of his fellow mortals and has done far more than the ordinary man to raise the standard of morality.” Columbia Theological Seminary, his alma mater in South Carolina, asked him to fill a professorship in theology, but he declined. In 1895, he led the devotional exercises at the PCUS General Assembly in Dallas, Texas. That same year, Southwestern Presbyterian University in Clarksville, Tennessee conferred on him its honorary Doctor of Divinity degree. In 1896, the Mississippi Synod elected him Moderator.

Cabaniss believed that his increasing notoriety came, “due to the scattering of his former

---

478 Jefferson County Agricultural High School, *Catalogue and Announcements*, Session 1917-1918, p. 5, Mississippi School Catalogs, Special Collections Department, Mississippi State University, https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1015&context=mss-mississippi-school-catalogs
482 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), third page.
students over the country…[and] his faithfulness in his pastoral services and to an increasing extensiveness of preaching engagements."^486

Grafton’s longevity at Union Church was not due to a lack of interest from other fields. Cabaniss noted, “Somewhat earlier he had been called to the professorship of theology in his seminary at Columbia, South Carolina. There came to him also offers of the presidency of the two largest educational institutions in the state, as well as of the Southwestern Presbyterian University. Moreover, there came calls to larger and more remunerative congregations throughout the nation.”^487 One of his grandsons, Thomas H. Grafton, remembered that “Grandfather had many opportunities to move. He had overtures from the College for Women in Columbus, and from his Alma Mater, Ole Miss. Most tempting was the chair of theology at Southwestern Presbyterian University, vacated by Dr. R. A. Webb in 1908.”^488 Despite these offers and opportunities, he remained in Union Church. By 1900 he had served his two congregations for 27 years, and he was not even halfway through his ministry.

In 1899, twenty-six years into his pastorate, another lynching sent ripples through his congregation. A black man was killed by a mob in Port Gibson, the hometown of his second wife Kate, about 35 miles northwest of Union Church. He referenced this lynching in a sermon dated only “1899,” the original of which is now lost, but parts survive through a transcription made by Cabaniss. Grafton did not name the man, but record exists of the August 11, 1899 lynching death of William Wilson in Port Gibson, which may have been the event he described.^489 He preached

---

^488 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer).
from the Union Church pulpit on the sixth commandment, “thou shalt not murder.” He began by describing instances in which killing was lawful. “We may kill animals for food…We should be humane though and not kill in sport.” Beyond hunting, he affirmed the permissibility of killing in just and necessary wars, reasoning, “Soldiers came to Jesus and he did not rebuke them,” likely thinking of the Centurion of whom Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.” “But,” Grafton was quick to add, “most wars are unnecessary.”

Grafton then transitioned his sermon from cases of lawful killing to the unlawful taking of human life, which violated God’s moral law. “Now men just here are liable themselves to commit murder. This is done by the mob that lynches the criminal however bad he is.” Here, he unequivocally condemned the lethal mob violence of lynching as murder, a sinful violation of God’s sixth commandment. The specific circumstances concerning the identity or actions of the criminal made no difference. Mob lynching was murder, “however bad he is,” he said. For Grafton, lynching was sin.

He then moved from the general principle to the specific case at hand. He said, “in the town of Port Gibson a man committed a crime for which he deserved to die.” He conceded that whatever the man did, it was bad and worthy of capital punishment. The problem was that the mob took matters into its own hands. “A mob hanged him. Thus they gratified their

---

490 Allen Cabaniss, *Life and Thought of a Country Preacher*, 97. Winter, *Citadels of Zion*, 1:183. Winter cites Cabaniss, who refers to this sermon as one of the few instances of Dr. Grafton addressing social issues from the pulpit.


vengeance.” In killing the guilty man themselves, rather than waiting for the lawful authorities to punish the man after a judicial process, the mob broke God’s commandment.

He continued by describing a second and contrasting example of miscarried justice. “Another man committed murder and was sentenced to penitentiary for life. The same set of men in due time petitioned the Governor to pardon him. They were gratified in their sympathy.” Apparently the same group of men that lynched the one also petitioned the Governor for release of the other. Grafton brought the issue to a conclusion for his congregation, “In both cases they dishonored justice.” In the case of the first man, though guilty, the mob acted unjustly because only the civil authority could lawfully execute a criminal. In the case of the second man, the mob acted unjustly by using its influence to lessen the just sentence of a convicted murderer. He gave his congregation a very practical exhortation from these injustices. “Never join a band to lynch a criminal and don’t ordinarily petition for the release of the criminal.”

According to Amy Wood, Grafton’s public opposition to this killing was unusual for its time, calling it “exceptional.” She continues, “during lynching’s peak at the turn of the century, most southern churches were resoundingly silent on the issue. In places where lynchings had occurred, available church records made no mention of lynching, nor did preachers mention them in their Sunday sermons.” Clearly, Grafton did not fit this norm. It was not until the 1910s and 1920s, Wood observes, that ministers began to speak out against lynching more vocally.

---


107
Grafton’s response to the 1899 lynching in Port Gibson paralleled his response to the 1882 Caseyville lynching in several ways. First, he again defended the permissibility of taking life under certain circumstances. He clearly believed that the lynched man deserved capital punishment for his crime. Second, Grafton’s sermon assumed that the civil magistrate alone had the right to use lethal force in response to the crime. And third, Grafton preached that the mob sinned by taking matters into its own hands, rather than allowing the civil authority to execute justice. His sermon argued that citizens should not circumvent or unduly influence the civil courts, whether to punish one supposed criminal or to lobby amnesty for another. Both, he argued, were sin.

The 1882 Dock Gordon murder in Caseyville and the 1899 lynching in Port Gibson did differ slightly, and that in at least three ways. First, the victims were killed in different ways; Dock Gordon died by shooting and the man from Port Gibson by hanging. Grafton did not address the method of execution and it does not seem to have impacted his response in any way. Second, Gordon was killed by a single individual whereas a mob hanged the man in Port Gibson. Third, the individuals he considered responsible for the crime were different in each case. In the case of the 1882 Dock Gordon murder, Grafton agreed in principle that McCallum had the lawful authority as a civil official but argued that he violated the sixth commandment in practice, by failing to exercise necessary restraint. In the 1899 Port Gibson lynching, he argued that the mob had no such right in principle to take the man’s life, even though, in his mind, he deserved death. The lynch mob “dishonored justice” and committed the sin of murder.503

This lynching in Port Gibson and Grafton’s response to it unfolded in a period of a heightened national awareness of extrajudicial killings of black people in the United States. Five

503 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 97-98.
years later in 1904, Luther Holbert and an unnamed black woman were killed by the Eastlands in Dodsville, Mississippi, before hundreds of spectators.\textsuperscript{504} Even more significant to this national awareness was the 1899 lynching of Sam Hose. Hose was brutally lynched in the spring of 1899 near Atlanta, GA following accusations of murder and rape. Hose’s gruesome death garnered national attention, especially from white evangelical clergy in the South.

Donald Mathews studied white clergymen’s reactions to the Hose murder, most of whom opposed lynching. For example, W. W. Landrum, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Atlanta, rejected lynching by defending the humanity and loyalty of blacks and insisting that the civil government, not the mob, was responsible to uphold justice.\textsuperscript{505} His response emphasized the importance of maintaining the rule of law and assumed a framework of white supremacy, arguing that most blacks—those Landrum viewed as loyal—respected the hierarchical race-based status quo.

Dr. Len Broughton of the Atlanta Baptist Tabernacle, a physician and evangelist, responded to Hose’s death in a similar way. While he believed that Hose deserved to die, he argued that the mob sinned by taking matters into its own hands.\textsuperscript{506} Broughton and Landrum shared the conviction that formal judicial procedures must be followed. Even if Hose deserved death, as Landrum believed, the judicial system, not the mob, was responsible for carrying out the appropriate legal processes and penalty. Broughton added to this rejection of mob violence a sense of corporate guilt and responsibility. Those who participated, cheered, or just simply observed without intervening were accomplices to murder.\textsuperscript{507}

\textsuperscript{504} J. Lee Annis Jr., \textit{Big Jim Eastland: The Godfather of Mississippi} (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 18-20.
\textsuperscript{505} Donald G. Mathews, \textit{At the Altar of Lynching: Burning Same Hose in the American South} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 221.
\textsuperscript{506} Mathews, \textit{At the Altar of Lynching}, 221.
\textsuperscript{507} Mathews, \textit{At the Altar of Lynching}, 221.
A third white preacher to denounce the Hose lynching, at least initially, was Georgia evangelist Sam Jones.\textsuperscript{508} Jones was a racial paternalist who believed that racial separation and white supremacy were divinely sanctioned and should be maintained.\textsuperscript{509} Initially, he condemned the lynching on the basis of the Ten Commandments, believing it to be a violation of the sixth commandment prohibition against murder.\textsuperscript{510} He particularly decried the immoral violence enacted on Sam Hose’s corpse.\textsuperscript{511} He understood violations of the state justice system to be violations of God’s law, because the state was a divinely instituted authority.\textsuperscript{512} “A better, calmer solution, argued Jones, was legal execution through the court system.”\textsuperscript{513} Like Landrum and Broughton, Jones embraced racial hierarchy, insisted on the God-given authority of the state judiciary, and denounced the lynching as a violation of God’s law.

While Jones’ initial response to the lynching of Sam Hose condemned it as sinful, he later changed his position. He appealed to the “Sam Hose exception,” maintaining a general opposition to lynching while leaving the door open for exceptional cases of extreme clarity and heinousness, like Hose’s in Jones’ mind, in which lynching was permissible.\textsuperscript{514} Central to his shift towards a position of reluctant tolerance was the allegation of rape. “Rape,” Mathews writes, “was always available to justify lynching.”\textsuperscript{515} The fear of black men raping white women proved a powerful force in motivating and justifying lynching. A sense of defiled white female

\textsuperscript{508} Darren E. Grem, “Sam Jones, Sam Hose, and the Theology of Racial Violence,” \textit{The Georgia Historical Quarterly} 90 (Spring 2006): 45.
\textsuperscript{509} Grem, “Sam Jones, Sam Hose, and the Theology of Racial Violence,” 40.
\textsuperscript{510} Grem, “Sam Jones, Sam Hose, and the Theology of Racial Violence,” 47.
\textsuperscript{511} Mathews, \textit{At the Altar of Lynching}, 226.
\textsuperscript{512} Grem, “Sam Jones, Sam Hose, and the Theology of Racial Violence,” 50.
\textsuperscript{513} Grem, “Sam Jones, Sam Hose, and the Theology of Racial Violence,” 52.
\textsuperscript{514} Mathews, \textit{At the Altar of Lynching}, 227.
\textsuperscript{515} Mathews, \textit{At the Altar of Lynching}, 232.
honor led Jones to resign himself to Hose’s lynching. The mob had no choice, he concluded. It “had to displace human law to do the right thing.”

Some whites who, unlike Jones, stood their ground in opposition to the lynching, urged Christians to appreciate the feeling of outrage brought about by the accusation of rape. Such responses were driven by concepts of the home and manhood, especially the white man’s duty to preserve the honor of white women. While lynching should not be tolerated, they argued, white evangelicals should at least understand the outrage that precipitated it.

Other clergy thought that the consuming and enflaming fear of rape was misplaced. Andrew Sledd, a lay Methodist preacher and professor at Emory College, argued that the rape of white women by black men was a mythological pretense for lynching. Rather, in lynching, Sledd believed the white man sought to “gratify the brute in his own soul.” He viewed Hose’s death as a lesson in blatant injustice. Not only did Sledd oppose the lynching, he rejected the pretense of rape that many fellow clergyman who also opposed lynching admitted as a threat.

Of the four clergy Mathews discusses, Sledd was the first to question the legitimacy of rape accusations against black men. Landrum and Broughton rejected lynching, as did Jones in most cases, on the grounds that it was a violation of the divinely sanctioned state justice system. They did not deny the legitimacy of the claims against Hose. They did not deny that Hose deserved death. But they did deny the mob’s right to carry out a sentence that only the civil magistrate could lawfully execute. These three white evangelical leaders who opposed lynching rejected it for the sake of judicial process, which they believed to be ordained by God. Their

---

516 Mathews, At the Altar of Lynching, 227-228.
517 Mathews, At the Altar of Lynching, 231-232.
518 Mathews, At the Altar of Lynching, 252.
519 Mathews, At the Altar of Lynching, 253.
520 Mathews, At the Altar of Lynching, 253.
opposition maintained and at points depended upon and reinforced segregation, paternalism, and white rule.

While these four men did have some significant differences in their responses to Hose’s death, even the most opposite engaged the lynching on religious terms. Religious beliefs permeated the defense and support for lynching. Darren Grem observes, “both opponents of lynching and its most ardent supporters maintained a distinct, religiously informed framework for justifying or criticizing violence against blacks, a complex system of interwoven notions about the nature of God, law, sin, and judgment.” Among white evangelicals, religion was a justifying factor for both opponents and advocates of lynching.

Grafton, like these four white clergymen, understood lynching and sought to shape his congregants’ understanding of it in fundamentally theological terms. Like most of the ministers studied by Mathews and Grem, Grafton insisted that the civil magistrate alone had the right to use lethal force to punish a crime, even when the criminal clearly deserved death. However, unlike Sam Jones, he did not make an exception for extreme cases, including cases of alleged rape, as in the 1882 Dock Gordon case. But unlike Sledd, neither did he question the accusations made against the lynching victim, arguing, especially in the Port Gibson case, that the victim deserved to die.

In addition to individual preachers, religious groups and denominations also made statements in the wake of Sam Hose’s lynching. Meeting just weeks after Hose’s death, the Southern Presbyterian Church General Assembly approved a resolution condemning lynching. The Assembly expressed, “its strongest condemnation of the lawless spirit abroad in the

---

523 Winter, Citadels of Zion, 1:183.
land...notably in scenes of mob violence and the taking of human life, in cases of supposed or proven crime, without due process of law.”

524 Its resolution warned of “the awful danger of inflicting death upon an innocent person, while the real criminal goes free.”

525 The Assembly further stated that such mob violence tended, “also to cheapen human life, to unsettle the social order, and to weaken or destroy that reverence for law and constituted authority which the Scriptures require all to uphold.”

526 Northern Presbyterians passed a similar resolution. The Atlanta Evangelical Ministerial Association also discussed the issue.

527 According to Mathews, their deliberations reflected an obsession with black violence and ignorance to white terror.

528 He writes, “in professing to oppose lynching they actually defended it and resorted to scolding blacks in a ‘wise and statesmenlike’ supremacist manifesto.”

529 Like many individual clergy, these statements from evangelical institutions emphasized divinely ordained law and order. At least in the case of the Atlanta Association, such opposition was articulated within a framework of white supremacy.

Closer to home, some of Grafton’s clerical colleagues in Mississippi also preached against lynching, including his longtime friend and former schoolmate, Methodist Bishop Charles Betts Galloway. In important ways, Grafton’s responses to lynching mirrored Galloway’s. In a sermon from the 1890’s, Galloway preached, “There is no disguising the fact that there is a great unrest and growing discontent among the negroes of the South. They feel friendless and almost helpless. The lynchings that disgrace our civilization, the persistent efforts to deprive the negro of the rights of citizenship, the advocacy of some politicians of limiting the

524 Winter, Citadels of Zion, 1:183.
525 Winter, Citadels of Zion, 1:183.
526 Winter, Citadels of Zion, 1:183.
527 Mathews, At the Altar of Lynching, 223.
528 Mathews, At the Altar of Lynching, 222.
529 Mathews, At the Altar of Lynching, 223.
530 Mathews, At the Altar of Lynching, 223.
school advantages provided for them, and the widening gulf of separation between the younger generation of both races, has produced a measure of despair.”

Randy Sparks observes that “Bishop Galloway was tireless in his condemnation of lynching, both in the pulpit and in print.” Like Sledd in Atlanta, Galloway moved beyond more immediate questions of the sixth commandment, justice, and the civil magistrate, to address what he believed were the social dynamics that fueled the lynching epidemic. Specifically, he connected the failure of whites to promote citizenship rights and schooling for black people with lynching as understandable sources of unrest among southern blacks. While the Methodist Bishop “decried the denial of all rights of citizenship to blacks” he still endorsed segregation.

Mississippi’s Episcopal Bishop Theodore DuBose Bratton took a similar approach, advocating better race relations within the framework of racial hierarchy, explaining that whites had a God-given duty to “raise the level of black civilization” while keeping in mind “that there would never be ‘race equality.’”

While the presbyterian preacher certainly would have agreed with his Methodist friend that lynching was a “disgrace to our civilization,” Grafton limited his opposition to the narrower theological aspect of the question, whether and why lynching violated God’s prohibition against murder. Galloway included lynching within a broader framework of social failures on the part of whites that produced unrest and despair. Not only did lynching need to stop, but sincere efforts needed to be made towards greater social equality for blacks. Grafton made no such social applications.

---

531 Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 161-162, quoting undated and untitled sermon manuscripts by Methodist Bishop Charles B. Galloway from the 1890’s in the Galloway Papers, J. B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism, Millsaps College.

532 Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 161-162.


Another Mississippi-born Christian, and contemporary of Grafton’s, who wrote copiously on lynching was black journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Wells-Barnett documented numerous cases of lynching in the Jim Crow South, many of which she described in her pamphlets *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892) and *The Red Record* (1895). She famously charged that, “American Christians are too busy saving the souls of white Christians from burning in hell-fire to save the lives of black ones from present burning in fires kindled by white Christians.”535 In 1894, Wells estimated that since the end of slavery, “more than ten thousand Negroes have been killed in cold blood, without the formality of a judicial trial and legal execution.”536

There is no evidence that Grafton and Wells-Barnett ever met. Neither did Grafton’s sermons cite her, or any other contemporary Christian lynching opponent, in support of their arguments against the practice. But, perhaps surprisingly, Grafton, the white male Confederate veteran, and Wells-Barnett, the black female racial justice advocate, shared several common beliefs about the South’s lynching epidemic. First and foremost, both Grafton and Wells-Barnett rejected lynching in all cases as a gross injustice. Second, while Wells-Barnett did challenge the legitimacy of many justifications for lynching, including the assault of white women by black men, she agreed with Grafton that blacks who did commit such crimes deserved to be justly punished by the law. Her anti-lynching journalistic work was, “not a shield for the despoiler of virtue, nor altogether a defense for the poor blind Afro-American Sampsons who suffer themselves to be betrayed by white Delilahs.”537 She continued, “The Afro-American is not a bestial race. If this work can contribute in any way toward proving this, and at the same time

---

arouse the conscience of the American people to a demand for justice to every citizen, and punishment by law for the lawless, I shall feel I have done my race a service.”

Wells-Barnett further noted that some African Americans, on account of their own repudiation of rape, were themselves slow to challenge lynching. “Even to the better class of Afro-Americans the crime of rape is so revolting they have too often taken the white man’s word and given lynch law neither the investigation nor condemnation it deserved.” She critiqued this type of resignation by certain blacks, writing, “They forget that a concession of the right to lynch a man for a certain crime, not only concedes the right to lynch any person for any crime, but (so frequently is the cry of rape now raised) it is in a fair way to stamp us as a race of rapists and desperadoes.”

Both Grafton and Wells-Barnett rejected lynching as unjust and believed that those who violated the law must be punished by the law, rather than by a mob taking matters into its own hands.

These points of agreement notwithstanding, unlike Grafton, Wells-Barnett took her opposition far beyond her insistence on the rule of law. In the cases surveyed here, Grafton either explicitly declared that the victim in question deserved death or made no comment at all on the guilt or innocence of the victim. Wells-Barnett, however, questioned the reality of one of the main justifications for lynching, namely, the raping of white women by black men. She argued that many of the instances in which black men were lynched for supposed assaults on female virtue were in fact cases of consensual relations between black men and white women that were later misrepresented by whites to preserve the segregated and hierarchical social order. She wrote “Hundreds of such cases might be cited, but enough have been given to prove the assertion that there are white women in the South who love the African-American’s company even as there are

---

white men notorious of their preference for Afro-American women.”

Wells-Barnett lamented the hypocrisy of white lynch mobs killing black men for liaisons, even consensual ones, with white woman, while white men raped black women and girls with few or now social or legal consequences.

The journalist found further evidence of hypocrisy in the application of miscegenation laws. She wrote, “The miscegenation laws of the South only operate against the legitimate union of the races; they leave the white man free to seduce all the colored girls he can, but it is death to the colored man who yields to the force and advances of a similar attraction in white women. White men lynch the offending Afro-American, not because he is a despoiler of virtue, but because he succumbs to the smiles of white women.”

From her vantage point, white men had sexual relations with black woman without any legal repercussions, since they were not married, while black men were killed for engaging in consensual sexual relationships instigated by white women.

Wells-Barnett critiqued hypocritical responses to inter-racial sexual relations in part to promote the social uplift and equality of black Americans. Grafton critiqued such relations themselves from within the racial hierarchy, and in an effort to maintain it. He made this especially clear in a 1913 sermon in which he described mixed race sexual relations as a violation of the seventh commandment. After describing the danger of venereal disease from sexual immortality, he warned, “the great danger in the country is not the house of prostitution but the colored woman.”

His concern was not that a white man and a black woman would

---

543 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 98. Cabaniss wrote that this was from a sermon Grafton preached from 1 Corinthians 6:8 preached in 1913.
544 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 98.
marry, which would have been illegal and, in his context, virtually impossible. Rather, he was concerned with white men, married or unmarried, having extramarital sexual relations with black woman. He did not mince words. “She [the black woman] belongs to the inferior race and she can be made to pander to the worst passions of the white man and she is a perpetual menace to the rising boys and men.”545 Here, Grafton explicitly defended, in the context of a Sunday sermon, the inferiority of blacks to whites, arguing that black woman could, under certain circumstances, constitute a threat to the moral uprightness of white men and boys. For Grafton, this was one of the most serious issues facing the South in 1913. “Amalgamation is the great bane of southern life,” he preached. Citing the biblical teaching that a man and a woman who unite in sexual intercourse become one flesh, he pressed the matter even further, “It is dreadful to think that the parties of this crime are declared to be one flesh. Now think of this—one with a black woman. How shameful. Then you will possibly embarrass yourselves all through your lives.”546 Finally, he said, “That little mulatto on the streets or big road has the natural right to call you father and your own white children brother and sister.”547

Paul Harvey writes that “the fear of race mixing, particularly between white women and black men, the symbol of virginal purity encountering the black beast rapist, was a pernicious and brutally effective justification for segregation and racial violence.”548 Wells-Barnett lamented and exposed the hypocritical ways in which black men were killed for alleged interracial liaisons while white men pursued them with little consequence. But here, relations between white men and black women were Grafton’s special concern. He warned against what he saw as the temptations of black women for white men and the accompanying danger of

---

545 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 98.
546 See for example Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31.
547 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 98.
548 Harvey, Freedom’s Coming, 43-44.
mixed-race children. While Wells-Barnett perceived that white men had such relations with little consequence, Grafton preached their sinfulness and urged his members to reckon with their serious consequences.

Yet another point of difference between Wells-Barnett and Grafton came in their views of the causes behind lynching. Apart from the perpetrators’ immediate thirst for vengeance, Grafton did not opine as to why black men were lynched, and that at such high frequency, especially in his region of Mississippi. According to known records, Grafton publicly responded to only three of the 105 lynchings in his region between 1881-1940. Wells-Barnett, however, had a clear idea of lynching’s underlying cause. She believed that “lynch law [was], that last relic of the barbarism and slavery.” 549 And in the case of Southern defenses of lynching as vindication for the honor of white women, “the whole matter is explained by the well-known opposition growing out of slavery to the progress of the race.” 550 This observation is especially interesting because it shows how attempts to defend the socio-racial status quo could manifest in opposite ways. On the one hand, Wells-Barnett saw lynching as an attempt by its perpetrators to oppose the progress of blacks and reinforce the ante-bellum status quo. Grafton, on the other hand, as the case surveyed below will show, opposed lynching on the grounds that it threatened the racial status quo.

Finally, Ida B. Wells-Barnett used her columns to discuss white responses to lynching. She wrote, “The men and women of the South who disapprove of lynching and remain silent on the perpetration of such outrages, are particeps criminis, accomplices, accessories before and after the fact, equally guilty with the actual law-breakers who would not persist if they did not

know that neither the law nor militia would be employed against them." On this point of the collective guilt of those who refused to take action against lynching, she and Grafton were very similar. One consequence of this inaction was that those who did the lynching went unpunished. Wells-Barnett lamented that in some cases, while many whites willingly condemned lynching, the lynchers were not punished. Referring to the lynching of three men in Memphis, she wrote, “A meeting of white citizens in June, three months after the lynching, passed resolutions for the first time, condemning it. But they did not punish the lynchers. Every one of them was known by name, because they had been selected to do the dirty work, by some of the very citizens who passed these resolutions.” One result of this phenomena was an exodus of Memphis’ black population to the North, which, she explained, significantly impacted the local economy.

Grafton’s sermon against the 1899 Port Gibson lynching placed him somewhere in the middle of white evangelicals’ responses to lynching. On the one hand, unlike Sam Jones, he remained resolute that the mob had no right to kill, even when a criminal deserved death. He did not waver on the conviction that an individual or a mob broke God’s moral law when it took matters into its own hands and imposed lethal force. On the other hand, unlike Andrew Sledd and even his friend Charles Galloway, Grafton did not question the accusations themselves or the social structures within which they took place. In fact, as the final case will show, he understood lynching as a threat to a legitimate and desirable racial hierarchy, rather than questioning that hierarchy on account of lynching. Here, he differs dramatically from Ida B. Wells-Barnett. She opposed lynching to promote racial equality. Grafton opposed lynching to preserve racial hierarchy.

Grafton took these definitive stands on the local level at a time when his regional reputation grew significantly. While he turned down the Presidency of the University of Mississippi, it did award him an honorary Doctor of Laws degree in 1915. Larger and more remunerative churches in bigger cities sought to call him. But he remained in Union Church. His grandson said that he had learned to live on $600 a year, something he did not think younger ministers could do. Grafton later told a journalist, “I was called to be the pastor of Union Church and I have never been convinced that the Lord wanted me anywhere else…My place is where I can be of greatest service at the least recompense.” As he continued to labor in familiar territory, his son Thomas served the Presbyterian Church U. S. Mission in China. One daughter, Mary, married a local Union Church man, John Scott. And his other daughter, Susie, remained single and helped her father at home. In 1916, the PCUS General Assembly met in Orlando, FL and elected him its Moderator.

Following his year as General Assembly Moderator, the ensuing publication of his address *A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church*, and regional speaking engagements that accompanied his moderatorship, Grafton was confronted by yet another lynching, the third and final case of extant record, in 1919. The previous two occurred in nearby towns among people and places he knew. This third lynching occurred within walking distance of his home and pulpit in Union Church.

The third and final known instance of lynching Grafton addressed occurred in his home community of Union Church, MS in 1919. This lynching took place within what Finnegan identified as a period of secondary swell in statewide lynchings, from 1912-1923. During

---

553 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), second page.  
556 Finnegan, *A Deed So Accursed*, 6-7.
these 12 years, Mississippi averaged about 8 lynchings per year.\textsuperscript{557} Within this same time frame, Thompson identified 1918-1922 as a period of sustained lynchings in Mississippi. These years coincided with increased migration of blacks from the South to the North and the heightened social and political tensions that accompanied shifting demographics.\textsuperscript{558}

One outgrowth of this period of sustained lynchings was formation of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation in 1919. The CIC formed “to combat the upsurge in racial violence against returning black veterans.” The CIC also assisted in organization of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching.\textsuperscript{559}

Finnegan observes a correlation between spikes in Mississippi lynchings and social change. Finnegan argues in reference to a 1919 lynching in Ellisville, MS, “whites conceded that social changes that had coincided with World War I had heightened anxiety about the proper place of African Americans in southern society and had contributed to the lynching.”\textsuperscript{560} Rather than cementing the entrenched racial order, Finnegan argues that lynching actually contributed to its overthrow. Mississippi’s prolific lynching history served as a catalyst for the civil rights movement. “From the wonton tragedy of lynching emerged the triumph of the modern civil rights movement, which emanated from the courage and perseverance of African Americans who dared to defy the violent depredations of whites.”\textsuperscript{561} In one way, Finnegan’s analysis confirms the legitimacy of Grafton’s fear that lynching would upset the social and racial status quo in Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{557} Finnegan, \textit{A Deed So Accursed}, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{558} Thompson, \textit{Lynching in Mississippi}, 60.
\textsuperscript{559} Mitchell, \textit{A New History of Mississippi}, 345.
\textsuperscript{560} Finnegan, \textit{A Deed So Accursed}, 14.
\textsuperscript{561} Finnegan, \textit{A Deed So Accursed}, 21-22.
On Sunday, January 12, 1919, Grafton once again opened to the sixth commandment to preach to his Union Church congregation on the subject, “Thou Shalt Not Kill.”\textsuperscript{562} He kept a record of his sermons and other ministerial duties in a detailed log book. Of all the sermons recorded in his log book from 1900 to his death in 1934, this was the only sermon he marked with an asterisk.\textsuperscript{563} Grafton’s biographer, Allen Cabaniss, transcribed the sermon and included it as an appendix to his 1942 biography, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}.\textsuperscript{564}

Having sung hymns and prayed prayers, the presbyterian congregation at Union Church sat down in the pews to hear from their 72 year old minister. Grafton introduced the sixth commandment from Exodus 20:13. He began by describing the “gruesome” record of murders in the Bible, “Cain killed Abel, Levi and Simeon the Shechemites, David killed Uriah \textit{et al} (dilate on each).”\textsuperscript{565} Then he turned to recent events, “But passing by all these, consider the killing at Union Church of a negro, Will Reed, on the eve of this New Year 1919.”\textsuperscript{566}

Grafton described the lynching from the pulpit. “Certain persons went at night to the residence of Dr. Towns, in his absence, his mother and wife and child being there alone unprotected.”\textsuperscript{567} The unnumbered mob searched for Mr. Reed until they found him. A shot rang out through the town and his body was found the next morning.\textsuperscript{568} A jury of inquest then took responsibility for the body to consider the matter.\textsuperscript{569} For Grafton, this killing was an outrage.

Having described the events basic to this lynching, Grafton then explained what made it such an “outrage.” It was an outrage “on the wife and mother of Dr. Towns” in whose proximity

\textsuperscript{562} Grafton, Ministerial Log Book (1901-1920), 177.  
\textsuperscript{563} Grafton, Ministerial Log Book (1901-1920), 177.  
\textsuperscript{564} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 188-192.  
\textsuperscript{565} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 189.  
\textsuperscript{566} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 189.  
\textsuperscript{567} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 189.  
\textsuperscript{568} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 189.  
\textsuperscript{569} Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 189.
the killing occurred. It was an outrage “on every woman and child in the village” of Union Church, since the shot was heard throughout the community. It was an outrage to the churches, in whose proximity the lynching occurred. It was “an insult to the memory of the dead,” since the killing took place close to the cemetery. The killing occurred within earshot of the Agricultural High School “on which Jefferson County has expended so much money and the center of so many hopes.” It was an insult to the state of Mississippi “our own state that we are bound to love and honor and whose laws we must not violate.” It was an insult to the blood of the multitudes who died in the First World War “that the rights of man should be preserved.”

He looked over his congregation and said, “think on all these points and let us be ashamed and humiliated.” “Finally,” he said, “it was an insult to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, who shed his blood that men might live.” The lynching was an insult to the community, state, and nation. It was also a violation of God’s law against murder, a sin against Jesus Christ himself.

As he did in his 1899 lynching sermon, Grafton preached that the killing of Will Reed by a white mob was “a violation of God’s own law.” Whatever evil Reed allegedly committed, it did not justify the lynching. The mob had murdered and broken God’s commandment.

But Grafton did not stop there. He said, “it was an irreparable wrong to the negro, who they say was a bad negro, and therefore probably went at once to hell.” Grafton acknowledged and reinforced Reed’s bad reputation. He concluded that the deceased Reed was likely in hell. Even still, he accused the white mob of committing “irreparable wrong to the negro.” They

---

570 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 189-190.
571 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 190.
572 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 190.
573 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 190.
574 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 190.
unjustly hastened his arrival to condemnation, a wrong that could not be repaired. Here especially, Grafton’s theological convictions shaped his response to the lynching.

The killing was further “without excuse,” he preached, because Reed would have been tried by whites in relation to laws made by whites. “The killing was without excuse, for if the negro had committed any grievous offense here was the law prepared by white men and white men could have enforced the law against the black man.” In Grafton’s mind, the white-led legal system would have easily condemned Reed, if only given the opportunity. White control of the legal system was, for him, further evidence against the righteousness mob’s actions. For Grafton, white rule made the lynching less, not more tolerable.575

He continued his evaluation of the lynching through the lens of racial hierarchy when he addressed a potential objection from some whites in the community that “it was only a negro.”576 In other words, some whites saw no need for concern, since the victim was black. Grafton responded, “But the negro belongs to the inferior race and every dictate of Christian manhood would urge that we defend the weak.”577 Grafton used white superiority and racial paternalism to argue against the lynching. He preached that whites, whom he believed to be superior, were obliged to show extra patience and care towards the “inferior” blacks.578

By lynching Will Reed, Grafton preached, the white mob had violated God’s law and offended women, children, the dead, churches, Jefferson County, Mississippi, and much of the Western world. They had sinned against Jesus Christ and against Reed himself. The white control over the legal system and notions of white supremacy made the killing more, not less heinous. Having explored Will Reed’s murder from these numerous angles, Grafton then asked

575 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 190.
576 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 190.
577 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 190.
578 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 190.
his congregation two questions. First, “what is the penalty for murder?” And then he asked, “What is the remedy for murder can it be pardoned?”

Grafton gave five answers to the first question, moving from the least serious penalty to the weightiest. The first penalty the community faced for the lynching was the paralysis of labor. The investigation, interest, and distractions surrounding the event would slow profitable work in the community to a halt. Second, the lynching “damages the good name of our community,” impairing future investment and marring its reputation. Third, the lynching damaged the school, since fewer people would want to send their children to an environment “where lawlessness shows a hand.” Fourth, “the crime of murder is a sin against one’s own soul,” since it awakens the offended conscience, which will burn against the perpetrator for time and eternity. Fifth and most serious, “the final punishment is Hell.” Grafton quoted a series of scripture passages that describe the everlasting punishment of murderers in hell. While condemning the deceased Reed as “a bad negro” who “probably went at once to hell,” Grafton preached that those who killed him would experience the same if they did not repent of their murderous act. From the interruption of normal work to the fires of everlasting torment, Grafton preached that lynching was a crime with diverse and solemn penalties.

Having emphasized the consequences for the community as a whole and the individuals who carried out the murder, Grafton asked his next question. “What is the remedy for murder can it be pardoned?” He answered, “Jesus in infinite pity shed his blood for lost men and there is no sin known in the black calendar that his blood will not wash away. And Jesus says, ‘Come

unto me.’” Grafton’s next words were, “Repent! Repent!! Repent!!!” He continued by explaining that repentance included confession of sin. He called upon his flock, “Come then and confess your sin and God will have mercy upon you. This is the only way.” Keeping silent would only cause conscience to burn hotter. If the guilty refused to repent of their crime, they would, Grafton preached, join Reed in hell. The only way for them to be delivered was to confess their sin, repent before God, and plead for his mercy through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

At this point in the sermon, the preacher anticipated an objection that some of his hearers might have raised. “But there was only one shot fired. One person did the killing.”584 Was the shooter the only man guilty? Grafton did not think so. Those present for the lynching gave approval by their presence and were accessories to the murder. “They are all therefore partakers of the crime and are all guilty.” As such, those present needed to confess and repent of the murder. Was it only the men present at the crime who were guilty? Again, Grafton did not think so. Referring to the Old Testament example of Achan, whose sin was attributed to all Israel, Grafton called the entire congregation to account. “All then who confess this sin done among us and denounce it with grief and indignation, and promise to do all within your power to uphold the law, rise to your feet.”585 What happened next was extraordinary. Everyone stood. In a parenthetical note on his sermon manuscript, Grafton wrote, “The whole congregation arose; then prayer.” He exhorted his standing congregation, “Now if there be present any guilty person who is willing to confess his sin let him come forward openly and publicly and give me his hand while the congregation is bowed in prayer.”586 No one came forward. The congregation was willing to acknowledge some degree of corporate guilt or shame, but no one came forward to

584 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 191.
585 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 192.
586 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 192.
confess to shooting Reed. Grafton noted, “The Lord’s Supper was then administered and a sad but tender service concluded.”

When he preached this sermon in 1919, Grafton relied on the same text and similar arguments from the 1899 Port Gibson lynching. In both cases he believed that the mob violated the sixth commandment by committing murder. In both cases he identified the state’s legal system as the only rightful and divinely instituted executor of justice. In none of the three cases studied did Grafton question the guilt of the lynched man. Like the 1899 lynching, Grafton also articulated a type of corporate responsibility, certainly for those who participated, but also, to some degree, for those who looked on with apathy. Like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, he assigned culpability to the wider community for its complicity in the crime. The entire Union Church congregation needed to be shamed for the lynching in their community. But as Wells-Barnett feared, at least in the immediate aftermath of the sermon, the congregation’s recognition of corporate guilt did not result in the recognition of the killer. Grafton’s sermon against the 1919 lynching also highlighted his racial paternalism, which he mobilized to oppose the lynching. Lynching violated the established racial hierarchy, since whites, whom he viewed as superior, had a responsibility to forebear with blacks, whom he viewed as inferior. Further, it eschewed the law, with was written and administered by whites. One unique element of Grafton’s 1919 response was his focus on the white mob’s sin against Reed himself.

Dr. Grafton provided one example of a southern white evangelical clergyman’s response to lynching. Like other contemporary white clergy, he rooted his opposition in the sixth commandment prohibition of murder. He taught that lynching was murder, a violation of God’s moral law. He believed that some crimes warranted execution. However, the decision and

---

responsibility to carry out execution was exclusively the right of the civil government. And while the civil authority had the right to execute, that right in principle did not mean that a civil official could take life in any case. Grafton argued in the 1882 Ben Salem case with Mr. McCallum that, though acting as a civil agent, he failed to show sufficient restraint in the killing of Dock Gordon, and thus violated the sixth commandment himself. If the lawful authority could err in taking life, the mob certainly had no right to take matters into its own hands. To do so was to murder.

Grafton joined several other southern Christians in assigning guilt beyond the killers themselves. Like Broughton at the Atlanta Baptist Tabernacle, and like Ida Wells-Barnett, Grafton included all participants, supporters, and apathetic onlookers among the guilty. They were accomplices to the murder. The sin of lynching was an offense to the community. The community needed to stand against such violence, as he preached in 1919, and repudiate the penalty-laden crime that occurred in their midst.

Grafton articulated his opposition to lynching within the context of racial hierarchy and paternalism. He affirmed the humanity of blacks, while assuming and explicitly teaching their inferiority to whites. His sermon in response to the 1919 lynching of Will Reed in Union Church cited racial hierarchy as grounds to oppose lynching. He preached that superior white Christians had a responsibility to exercise greater patience and care when dealing with the transgressions of the inferior blacks and submit to the white led legal system.

The rule of law was central to Dr. Grafton’s opposition to lynching. He was not alone in this emphasis. Baptist Charles H. Otken’s 1894 study The Ills of the South—a book he dedicated to McComb, Mississippi presbyterian John James White, whom Grafton called “a monumental
man”—made the same point, also from the perspective of white paternalism. After advocating black colonization of Africa, Otken wrote, “In dealing with the race problem, and until it is solved, no duty is more solemnly binding upon the Southern people…than obedience to constituted legal authority….A lawless land, where every man can take his grievances…into his own hands, is an accursed land….Mob law is hateful in every way….To-day it strikes the negro; tomorrow it threatens the white man.” For Otken, like Grafton, lynching was no answer to the “race problem” in the South, but “hateful in every way.” He continued that lynching, “shames our Christianity…It proposes to correct crime with crime, and so it forms a league with guilt.” Just as Grafton preached to his Union Church congregation following the death of Will Reed, Otken concluded, “The assassin assumes the prerogative of God….Every lawless act has its penal consequences.” Otken and Grafton both insisted, from within a paternalistic framework, that lynching was wrong because it violated the rule of law and was a shame to Christianity.

His application of white superiority shows the diverse ways in which Southern honor culture responded to lynching. Some whites defended and perpetrated lynching to assuage and reassert a sense of offended white honor. Others opposed lynching as a violation of honor, arguing that the honor of the divinely instituted state justice system, and the honor of the superior white race, was denigrated through lynching. The Southern honor system could be mobilized in support of or opposition to lynching.

Grafton also engaged notions of white female purity. In the lynching of Will Reed, a wife, mother, and child were “there alone unprotected,” making the killing “an outrage on the

588 Grafton, “Presbyterian Church at McComb City,” *Mississippi Visitor* (February 1922), 8-9.
590 Otken, *The Ills of the South*, 261-262.
591 Otken, *The Ills of the South*, 262.
wife and mother of Dr. Towns.” The killing was a further “outrage on every woman and child in the village” of Union Church because the shot was heard by all. W. Fitzhugh Brundage observes that, “The defense of white feminine virtue, especially against sexual aggression by black men, was at the heart of southern honor.” Interestingly, in the case of Will Reed in 1919, Grafton argued that the lynching itself was a violation of white female honor. As with Southern honor culture more generally, female virtue could be mobilized to support or oppose lynching.

Grafton’s use of white female honor had no place for the Sam Jones exception, which excused mob violence in certain instances of rape. As the 1882 Dock Gordon case showed, even when Grafton conceded the possibility of rape, it did not, for him, constitute grounds to bypass the law and lynch someone. However, unlike Andrew Sledd of Emory, he did not, in the three cases studied here, question the legitimacy of the accusations against the lynching victim. Nor did he adopt the approach of Sledd, Bishop Galloway, or Ida B. Wells in publicly questioning the legitimacy of rape allegations or critiquing Southern social structure.

C. W. Grafton’s opposition to lynching in Southwest Mississippi reflected many white evangelical’s responses to lynching in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His interpretations of the sixth commandment, the divinely instituted authority of the state justice system, and corporate responsibility, served as the foundations for his rejection of the practice as murder. Even accusations of rape did not justify extra-judicial killing. However, his opposition to lynching both presupposed and sought to defend the status quo of white rule, racial hierarchy, and paternalism.

David Galbreath died in 1917. He was a horse. Rev. C. W. Grafton rode David Galbreath the horse, whom he named after one of his church members, for nearly twenty years.595 “He went to the burials, the weddings, the meetings of presbytery, the preaching services all around, and never failed his master by night or day.”596 Writing in Mississippi’s presbyterian newspaper, Grafton reminded his readers that, “so many knew this horse,” which, on account of its fidelity, “must stand high in the ranks of the noble.”597 For the aging presbyterian minister, now almost 71 years old, Dave Galbreath’s death marked not merely the passing of a beloved companion, but the passing of an era. “We can never forget the days of romance when with horse and buggy we travelled over the long roads, crossing creeks and rivers and through paths winding through the woods where the auto cars can never go.”598 Like David Galbreath the horse, those romantic days were passing away.

Dr. Grafton watched Mississippi move from the antebellum years of his childhood, through Reconstruction and redemption in the early days of his pastorate, to the Progressive Era, and beyond. From 1915 through 1928, he wrote a monthly column titled “Dr. Grafton’s Message” in the statewide Presbyterian newspaper, The Mississippi Visitor. This chapter studies

Grafton’s monthly column to understand the ways he sought to cultivate a lived theology—behaviors shaped by beliefs—among Mississippi’s Presbyterians in the Progressive Era. Through these columns, Grafton engaged some of the period’s most pressing and contentious topics, including World War I, religion and science, women, children, urbanization, and race. His engagement with these subjects represents an archetypical fundamentalist conservative response to the Progressive Era. However, as his columns will show, he did so primarily by casting a positive vision for a world that modernism yearned to leave behind; a world of large families, Biblical authority, rural communities, and conservative Christian piety in the presbyterian tradition.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, America experienced economic growth, especially through industrial factory work, that fueled a population shift from rural areas towards towns and cities. Progressive reform movements responded by advocating fuller rights for workers including unionization, protections for women and children, and trust-busting. While widespread, these reforms did little to undermine the racial inequalities of Jim Crow, and sometimes even reinforced them. Southern presbyterian Woodrow Wilson, whose father and uncle taught Grafton at Columbia Seminary, embodied the dissonant relationship between social progressivism and racial conservatism. With the rise in industry came a corresponding interest in administration and efficiency in various sectors of American life.

Churches both participated in and responded to progressive era reform movements. Erskine Clarke describes a “quest for efficiency” in the Southern Presbyterian church that was especially apparent in organized women’s work. Clarke, To Count Our Days, 137.

---

599 This approach parallels that used and defined in Ansley L. Quiros, God With Us: Lived Theology and the Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1942-1976 (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 3, 6, 8.
600 Clarke, To Count Our Days, 137.
discovery of administration in churches, with pastors expected to find work for each member of
the church and organize their efforts.\textsuperscript{601} The social gospel movement swept through American
religious life, exemplified in Charles Sheldon’s question from his 1896 novel \textit{In His Steps}, “what
would Jesus do?,” which attempted to mobilize the teachings of Christ to reform social ills of the
day. The Federal Council of Churches was founded in 1908 with a “statement of social
principles” which “committed the new organization to a program of social reform.”\textsuperscript{602} Other
Christians, Grafton among them, responded to progressive-era reforms with a biblical critique of
their modernizing tendencies.

A subset of evangelical Christians rejected the cultural changes brought about by
progressivism and modernism, especially Darwinism, in what in the 1920’s became
fundamentalism. George Marsden defines fundamentalism as “militantly antimodernist
evangelicalism.”\textsuperscript{603} He continues, “fundamentalists were evangelical Christians, close to the
traditions of the dominant American revivalist establishment of the nineteenth century, who in
the twentieth century opposed both modernism in theology and the cultural changes that
modernism endorsed.”\textsuperscript{604}

While Marsden distinguishes Fundamentalism from the Reformed confessionalism
embraced by many Presbyterians, he observes that Presbyterian confessionalists participated in
the “patchwork coalition” of fundamentalism, which was united by “fierce opposition to
modernist attempts to bring Christianity in line with modern thought.”\textsuperscript{605} The movement
certainly extended beyond denominational and geographic boundaries, as evidenced by the

\textsuperscript{601} Holifield, \textit{God’s Ambassadors}, 159.
\textsuperscript{602} Holifield, \textit{God’s Ambassadors}, 167.
\textsuperscript{603} Marsden, \textit{Fundamentalism and American Culture}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed., 2.
\textsuperscript{604} Marsden, \textit{Fundamentalism and American Culture}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed., 2.
\textsuperscript{605} Marsden, \textit{Fundamentalism and American Culture}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed., 2.
formation of the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association in 1919. But many of Grafton’s fellow Presbyterians played central roles in it. Presbyterian oil magnate and philanthropist Lyman Stewart led the publication of *The Fundamentals*, a twelve volume paperback series published over 6 years, beginning in 1910. Two of fundamentalism’s best-known leaders—J. Gresham Machen and William Jennings Bryan—were Presbyterians.

Mississippi was especially primed for the fundamentalist movement. Randy Sparks writes that in Mississippi after World War I, “the state’s economic system, grounded in plantation agriculture and sharecropping and tenancy, was revolutionized. That system had helped buttress the system of white supremacy, which would also be shaken to its very foundations during these years. For many white Mississippians in particular, the decline of these institutions must have seemed like a rotting of wreckage, and religious fundamentalism was one response to the rapid social changes.”

C. W. Grafton typified the religious fundamentalism Marsden describes. While his personal and ecclesiastical associations were firmly rooted in the reformed confessional tradition of the Southern Presbyterian church, he certainly opposed modernism in theology and the cultural changes it promoted. He did so in a context of rapid social and demographic change that transformed Union Church. In keeping with fundamentalist critiques, he opposed what he understood to be unbiblical cultural expressions of the progressive era. But he did not limit his response to criticism. Rather, he offered a positive response, an alternative vision, for life in the early twentieth century that emphasized traditional family structures and adherence to Scriptural doctrine and piety as outlined in the presbyterian confession.

---

606 Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 170.
608 Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 169.
It was in this context of progressive era reforms and fundamentalist responses that the Presbytery of Mississippi, which oversaw presbyterian churches in southern part of the state, published the first edition of The Mississippi Visitor in October, 1911.609 The paper described itself as a “religious newspaper for the family. Devoted to the interests of Christ’s kingdom in the Presbytery of Mississippi.”610 Its editors tapped Grafton to write the first column in the first issue to outline the Visitor’s mission.611 He described one of the paper’s primary objectives as getting members of presbytery better acquainted with one another and the work of their respective churches. “We are like a family whose members are not known to one another.”612 The Visitor contained sections on presbyterian foreign missions, Sunday schools, women’s work, notes from local congregations and schools, and even the occasional recipe. In January 1913, the paper expanded its focus to include “the interests of Mississippi Synod,” the ecclesiastical body that oversaw all the presbyteries in the state of Mississippi.613 The Visitor was printed in Brookhaven, MS, the Lincoln County seat, from its inception through April 1914, and then in Jackson, MS until its final issue in 1940.614

After his vision-casting opening article, Dr. Grafton contributed only occasionally to The Visitor throughout its first three and a half years. During these years, his regional and denominational notoriety rose and would culminate in an honorary doctorate from his alma mater the University of Mississippi in 1915 and his election as general assembly moderator in 1916. Grafton was becoming one of, if not the best known presbyterian minister in the state of Mississippi. His initial sporadic participation in the Visitor blossomed into a regular column in

609 The Mississippi Visitor 1, no.1 (October 1911), 1.
610 The Mississippi Visitor 1, no.1 (October 1911), 1.
611 The Mississippi Visitor 1, no.1 (October 1911), 1.
612 The Mississippi Visitor 1, no.1 (October 1911), 1.
613 The Mississippi Visitor 2, no. 3 (January 1913), 1.
614 The Mississippi Visitor 3, no. 7 (May 1914), 1.
1915. That February, the paper announced that it had secured “from our good Dr. C. W. Grafton of Union Church a promise to contribute monthly to the columns of the paper.” The Visitor assured subscribers that his “ripe experience” would make his messages “worth reading.”\(^{615}\) The column, which was eventually titled “Dr. Grafton’s Message,” appeared in about 150 of The Visitor’s 164 editions published between April 1915 and December 1928.\(^{616}\)

Grafton’s first regular article, “Lessons from the Locust,” was published in the April 1915 edition of the paper and exemplified many of the major themes and applications he would make over the next 13 years.\(^ {617}\) Unfolding Solomon’s proverb “the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands,” he drew parallels to protestant Christian experience.\(^ {618}\) Like locusts, protestant Christians had no earthly king to lead them in spiritual battles. “We recognize no ruler or king upon the earth; no pope or churchy prince who lord it over our conscience.”\(^ {619}\) Rather, “the God of heaven, the God of battles, is the only king we recognize.”\(^ {620}\) But also like the locust, the Christian must march in the ranks of the church alongside other believers. “The locust that doesn’t join the band amounts to nothing.”\(^ {621}\) But when locusts swarm together, they conquer everything in their path. Christians who think they can fight spiritual battles alone must “come…and get a lesson from the locust.”\(^ {622}\) It is only in the fellowship of the church that Christians can win spiritual victories and overcome spiritual enemies, Grafton taught.

As would prove to be his usual pattern, Dr. Grafton based his message on a passage of Scripture and connected it with illustrations from nature to teach his readers the Bible and guide

---

\(^{615}\) The Mississippi Visitor 4, no. 3 (February 1915), 5.
\(^{616}\) The microfilm lacks at least one issue is blurry on others, making the exact number of columns uncertain.
\(^{618}\) Proverbs 30:27 KJV.
their lives towards Christian maturity. In this case, he pressed the importance of church membership for spiritual health. Future columns like “The Hill Tops,” “Trees of the Bible,” “Underground Streams,” “The Water Beetle,” “Fresh Blossoms from the Rose Bush,” “Fallow Ground,” and “The Juniper Tree,” similarly connected nature and Scripture to offer simple spiritual lessons about God, the human heart, and duties for Christian living to shape his readers’ beliefs and behaviors.623

Grafton’s emphasis on Christian piety, rooted in Scripture as God’s inerrant word, was consistent with the broader fundamentalist movement. He sought to apply unchanging ethical and theological truths from the infallible Bible to his contemporaries, regardless of modernizing trends. Modernity had not changed Grafton’s theology or ethics. He showed that clearly in his first regular column and he adopted that same posture towards modernity and progressivism in numerous specific cases throughout his tenure as a columnist. His discussions of World War I, religion and science, women, children, urbanization, and race and the Lost Cause show him to be a standard expositor of fundamentalist beliefs in a modernizing context. These six subjects will now be considered in turn.

I. World War I

Marsden identifies three proto-fundamentalist responses to World War I; the “patriots or super-patriots,” those “opposed to all wars,” and moderate patriots whose patriotism was “qualified by first allegiance to God.”624 Grafton’s references to the war place him firmly in the third group. He addressed the Great War sparingly. And when he did, it was to make spiritual observations and applications to those at home. His first regular column appeared less than a year after the war began.

---

623 The Mississippi Visitor 4, no. 9; 8, no. 1; 9 no. 8; 10, no. 5; 11, no.4; 12, no.4; 16, no. 9.
after World War I began in Europe. He continued his messages as the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, through Armistice, and beyond. Mississippians debated American involvement in the war in its early years and the state even tried to sell cotton to Denmark to be shipped to Germany, only to be rebuffed by the federal government, which knew the cotton would be seized by British naval blockade. Senator James K. Vardaman wanted to remain neutral, but Governor Theodore Bilbo eventually supported Wilson and the war. Grafton made no known mention of this debate. The global war, and the resultant debates in his own state, did not distract him from seeking to cultivate piety among Mississippi’s Presbyterians. When he did address the war, he did so to draw spiritual lessons or to correct deviances precipitated by the conflict, not to weigh in on policy or strategy.

In his April 1915 column, the first official “Dr. Grafton’s Message,” he again returned to the theme of church membership. He used British volunteer soldiers to illustrate the importance of belonging to a local church congregation. A British volunteer would not dream of telling English War Minister Sir Herbert Kitchener “I can be a good soldier without joining the army; I mean to shoulder my own musket and fight in my own way.” If he did, Grafton was sure that “England’s war minister might use some strong language” towards him. Just as British soldiers fought within the structure and camaraderie of the army, so Christians must not face the spiritual life alone, but within the fellowship of the church.

The United States formally entered the conflict by declaring war on Germany on April 6, 1917. From that date until the November 11, 1918 Armistice, Grafton alluded to the war only twice; once to confront the war’s negative spiritual effects, and once more to illustrate spiritual

---

truths highlighted by the war. In his June 1918 message, Dr. Grafton stressed the importance of keeping the Christian Sabbath day, Sunday, holy to God, even in wartime. Following his denomination’s *Confession of Faith*, he taught that Sunday was a holy day to rest from worldly employments and recreations for the sake of public and private worship. While he supported patriotic efforts, he lamented their encroachment on Sundays. He reported the experience of one presbyterian minister who was pressured to cancel his Sunday morning service so that congregants could hear a prominent politician address matters related to the war. The minister, to Grafton’s relief, held the service anyway. Red Cross drives, which he supported on other days, posed a similar threat to the Sabbath. Many of his contemporaries believed “that because causes are high, noble and patriotic we may properly use the Sabbath day in advancing them.” But Grafton was not persuaded. “The student of history knows that this is the argument of the Jesuit,” he said. He then urged his readers, “Let the women quit knitting on the Lord’s Day,” and “let fathers and mothers spend the blessed Sabbath evenings with their children teaching and training them in God’s word.” The pressing matters of the war could not be allowed to override God’s command to hallow one day each week. War required sacrifice, sacrifices Grafton commended, but not at the expense of the Sabbath Day. Quoting 1 Samuel 15:22, he concluded, “to obey is better than sacrifice.”

Grafton’s final wartime reference to the conflict came in the month of the Armistice, November 1918. His focus, however, was not on the war itself, but on the 1918 influenza epidemic. “The oriental plague, has carried away millions,” he wrote. “Nearly 20,000 of our men

---

have died in the camps out of 300,000 cases.” Grafton anticipated a scientific explanation for the epidemic. But he also identified a spiritual explanation. “The sword, famine and pestilence. God uses these three to execute judgment upon sinners and to chastise his people. It has been God’s way for all ages past.” He taught readers that an almighty God used tragedies like pestilence to carry out his plans among men. Such disease, he argued, should promote humility and reverent submission to God. Here again, Grafton drew spiritual lessons from the circumstances of the war. Christian piety remained his upmost concern.

Dr. Grafton did not linger on direct engagement with the war or the epidemic. In the December 1918 Visitor, the issue immediately after the Armistice that ended hostilities in the western theatre, he discussed “Trees in the Bible.” The column surveyed scriptural references to trees; from the garden of Eden, to the lives of Abraham and Moses, to Jesus’ cross, to healthy Christians living like fruitful trees. He made no mention of the war or the Armistice.

Close reading of “Dr. Grafton’s Message” corrects his first biographer’s assertion that, “perhaps the most amazing omission in these messages is reference to the Great War during the years the United States was engaged in it.” Grafton did not omit reference to the war entirely, but it was by no means his focus. He did not comment on the progress of the war, whether it was just, or how he expected the war to shape global relations. When he did discuss it, he did so to instruct his readers in Christian doctrine and practice. The Great War called Presbyterians to humble submission to God’s providential governance over the world in trying times, to repentance for sin, and to dutiful obedience to his commandments.

---

638 Cabaniss, The Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 125.
II. Religion and Science

Grafton’s comments on the 1918 influenza epidemic hinted at his approach to another flashpoint of the Progressive Era, the perceived conflict between science and religion. Perhaps the most noteworthy episode of this conflict was the 1925 Scopes Trial over teaching Darwinian evolution in state schools, featuring fundamentalist politician, orator, and presbyterian elder William Jennings Bryan. Mississippians wrestled over the evolution controversy. In 1925, the Mississippi state legislature rejected an anti-evolution bill, but the state’s superintendent of schools countered by banning the teaching evolution in the state. State representative L. Walter Evans introduced another similar bill in 1926, which passed despite negative recommendations from the house and senate education committees. “The Bible Crusaders of America, along with other fundamentalists, came to Jackson to lobby for [the] anti-evolution bill.” University of Mississippi Chancellor Alfred Hume unsuccessfully lobbied Governor Whitfield to veto the bill, which was signed into law in March 1926. The evolution controversy also impacted the southern presbyterian church. John L. Girardeau began his vocal opposition to the pro-evolution teachings of Professor James Woodrow in the late 1870’s. Both served on the faculty of Columbia Theological Seminary. Robert Louis Dabney of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia joined Girardeau in vocal opposition to pro-evolution teaching in the denomination. Clarke observed that the controversy tore, “the tight web of relationships that had given such social cohesion to the world of Southern Presbyterians.”

640 Sparks, Religion in Mississippi, 182.
641 Sparks, Religion in Mississippi, 182.
642 Mitchell, A New History of Mississippi, 322-323.
643 Sparks, Religion in Mississippi, 182.
644 Clarke, To Count Our Days, 127.
Grafton did not discuss Bryan or the Scopes trial explicitly, though other sections of *The Mississippi Visitor* did refer to Bryan in multiple issues.

While Grafton remained silent on Bryan and the Scopes trial in his column, he did engage the larger debate surrounding science and religion. When discussing the 1918 influenza pandemic, for example, Grafton hypothesized about its biological cause, very possibly “a living organism of the class of bacteria.” The extent of the pandemic meant that “science has a big job to account for this terrific malady. We trust that human learning will go to the bottom of the disease and account for its origin if it is possible to do so.”

Grafton’s positive and hopeful posture towards a scientific remedy did not, however, keep him from asking, “What is God’s relation to the plague?” Scripture provided the answer. Like the Egyptian plagues in Moses’ day, the 1918 pandemic was chastisement for human sin by a sovereign and unchanging God. Thus, whatever the scientific remedy, he counseled Mississippians, “meekly and patiently let us bow to our Father’s will.”

Grafton did not demean or reject science. To the contrary, he expressed confidence that it would get to the bottom of the flu. That said, his confidence in scientific inquiry did not lead him to question the existence, rule, or righteousness of God. Rather, the pandemic served as a clear reminder that God governed all things, even the plague, in part so that people would turn from sin to God. He viewed science and religion as complementary, not mutually exclusive. And he wanted his readers to think about the pandemic with like complementarity.

---

Grafton took a similar approach in his March 1924 article, “the Arnabeth.” The title was a transliteration of a Hebrew word from the Old Testament, a word that had become a sticking point in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy over the inerrancy of the Bible. From December 1923 through May 1924, John Roach Stratton, a fundamentalist Baptist, and Charles Francis Potter, a modernist unitarian minister, held a series of debates in New York City. Grafton summarized Potter’s position, writing, “The Modernist held the bible to be fallible.” To argue his point, Potter referenced Leviticus 11:6, which identifies the hare as an unclean animal because it chews the cud. He asserted that science had proven that hares do not chew the cud, thus refuting the infallibility of Scripture. Grafton disagreed, arguing, with reference to the Greek Septuagint, that the Hebrew word “Arnabeth” might be translated “porcupine” instead of “hare.” He said, “Now we are ready to concede that the animal that we know as a hare possibly does not chew the cud, but science has never identified with certainty the animal that Moses calls the Arnabeth.” He concluded, “true science is based on known facts, and in our present state of knowledge…cannot overthrow the Bible.” While the Modernist Potter sought to pit the discoveries of science against the Bible, thereby overthrowing the inerrancy of the latter, Grafton believed that the two, when rightly understood, harmonized completely. He ended the article by reassuring his readers, “Do not be afraid of the Modernist. They are not strong enough to pull down the mountain.”

Grafton’s response to the Stratton-Potter debates was consistent with his fundamentalist contemporaries. William Jennings Bryan insisted that “it is not scientific truth to which

650 Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 3rd ed., 221.
Christians object.” According to Marsden, fundamentalism was not, “opposed to science as such.” Rather, it rejected evolution as unscientific and exclusionary towards the facts of Biblical revelation.

One final example of Grafton’s bible-centered approach to scientific questions of the day came in June 1922, when he wrote to address “the Blues.” “Lowness of spirits” or “the blues,” was a common affliction of the human race touching all classes of men including, he suggested, the 75-year-old minister himself. A man might come home from work looking friendless. He sits with a long face, ignoring the children and eating his dinner in silence at the table. “He has the blues.” Grafton and his contemporaries were not alone, he assured his readers. Men as great as Elijah the prophet and Martin Luther the German reformer endured the blues. What caused this widespread affliction? Grafton said, “the selfishness of human nature.” One feels that everything is crumbling around him no matter his best efforts and begins to become self-absorbed. Grafton knew that the blues could get serious. “If it lasts too long I could not predict where it would land you.” Before matters reached such a point, Grafton prescribed a threefold remedy: sleep, prayer, and work. “Try the remedy, friends,” he urged.

Grafton’s discussion of mental health and depression, what he called “the blues,” echoed his response to the influenza pandemic from a few years prior. He acknowledged the reality of the blues and even normalized and sought helpfully to engage mental health. He admitted to

---

struggling with “the blues” himself. This revered minister, General Assembly Moderator, and religious teacher was not immune from the lowness of spirits that, he sensed, several of his readers endured. He believed that part of the remedy, as with the flu, would be physiological. But he also believed that such experiences revealed essential spiritual truths about the sinfulness of human beings and the necessity of divine assistance through prayer. He viewed science and religion as complementary, within a fundamentalist framework that refused to concede ground to science at any point that might undermine the teachings of the Bible. He hoped his readers would do the same.

III. Women

In addition to religion and science, gender roles were a significant locus of debate in the Progressive Era. More than before, women, including married women, worked for wages outside of the home in factories, offices, farms, and others’ homes. Early expressions of feminism began to grow, as did interest in and access to birth control.\textsuperscript{666} Women increasingly participated in public life in the first decades of the twentieth century. In Mississippi, Nellie Nugent Somerville and Belle Kearney lobbied for suffrage rights along with other reforms in public health and prohibition, both citing their Christian faith as an inspiration for their advocacy.\textsuperscript{667} Advocacy for women’s suffrage led to the ratification of the nineteenth amendment in 1920, signed into law by the son and nephew of two of Grafton’s seminary professors, Woodrow Wilson. Mississippi approved women’s suffrage in 1923.\textsuperscript{668}

\textsuperscript{667} Mitchell, \textit{A New History of Mississippi}, 318.
\textsuperscript{668} Mitchell, \textit{A New History of Mississippi}, 318.
Many in the period questioned traditional gender norms for women. These shifting attitudes towards gender were of special interest to churches, since “the average person of faith was female.” Women made up over 56% of religiously affiliated Americans. Changing gender expectations and female church attendance notwithstanding, C. W. Grafton’s view of femininity aligned with a conservative vision for women in the Progressive Era. Kristin Olsen, citing progressive-era physician Mary Meledny, described “maidenhood, wifehood, and motherhood” as the focuses of traditional femininity in the period, focusses Grafton shared. For the average American woman of the Progressive Era, the essence of a woman’s life was shaping the home and “guiding children into virtuous adulthood.” While the Progressive Era was a period of shifting expectations and experiences, those shifts “arrived against a background of fundamentally conservative and traditional values and ideologies.” Through his “Message,” Dr. Grafton reinforced and lauded those traditional values and ideologies of womanhood.

Dancing became a symbol of female liberation and autonomy in this period. Kristen Olsen observes that, “questions related to women and dancing received a great deal of attention in the Progressive Era.” This development attracted the ire of moralists who denounced the close physical contact and what they perceived to be the sexualized body movements of the dance. Ted Ownby observes that many evangelicals objected to dancing because it was simply too much fun, promoted sexual promiscuity, was associated with luxury and self-indulgence, and often involved men being drunk in the presence of women. Opposition to dancing was part of

672 Olsen, Daily Life of Women in the Progressive Era, xiii.
676 Ownby, Subduing Satan, 118-119.
a larger fundamentalist critique of Progressive Era society. Fundamentalist debater J. R. Stratton was representative on this point, “for his fierce attacks on the dance, theaters, and other worldly amusements,” which made him feel like Christian America was losing touch with “its foundation in biblical teaching.”

Dr. Grafton joined the chorus of fundamentalist opposition to dancing in his September 1925 column, “Why Don’t You Dance Rebecca?” Rebecca was 16 years old, baptized in infancy, raised in a Christian home, and a professing Christian believer. What made her worthy of consideration? “Rebecca would not dance! And why? Because she was a Christian and dancing belongs to the world.” For Grafton, there was no question that dancing was inappropriate for Christians. “If there is any amusement that belongs wholly to the world it is dancing,” he wrote. Dancing could neither promote Christian faith among Rebecca’s young Sunday school pupils nor comfort her in the face of grief, Grafton argued. He cited a number of voices to reinforce his point, including a book by a former dance instructor named Mr. Faulkner who repudiated his past profession in an exposé From the Ballroom to Hell. The southern presbyterian church constitution viewed, “lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays,” as violations of the seventh commandment. He also quoted official statements of the Presbyterian Church U.S. General Assembly, the Mississippi Presbytery, and the Mississippi Synod. He concluded by urging his readers, “Therefore stand with Rebecca, the daughter of

677 Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 3rd ed., 204.
678 Cornelius W. Grafton, “Why Don’t You Dance Rebecca?,” The Mississippi Visitor 14, no. 10 (September 1925), 4.
681 T. A. Faulkner, From the Ball-Room to Hell (R. F. Henry, 1894).
682 The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as Adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America, Larger Catechism #139, p. 280-282.
the covenant, who would not dance.” That Dr. Grafton, along with other authors, felt the need to address dancing suggests its proliferation and acceptance, even among religious people. Grafton labored to infuse Mississippi’s presbyterian girls with theological convictions that would lead them to stand with Rebecca against the dance. When it came to dancing, Grafton wrote, “we want the boys and girls of Mississippi to learn how to say NO.”

Dr. Grafton coupled his opposition to dancing with support for a domestic-centered vision of femininity along conservative and traditional lines. His August 1920 article “Big Sister,” began by describing the father as “the head man” and the mother whose “voice is tender with love’s sweet music” and draws smiles from her seven adoring children. Big sister is “the second mother in the home.” She cooks when mother is too tired and “she is happy because she is always helping somebody.” Grafton concluded, “forward march, little girl! Your mission is great. Your responsibility is second only to your mother.” Mississippi girls were to seek purpose and happiness through service in their parents’ homes, until they found husbands and homes of their own.

Grafton also addressed motherhood itself. A good mother, Dr. Grafton wrote in November of 1919, was like an underground stream, “the world is not aware of its presence, but it does work of great value.” The unselfish mother, “hides herself completely in her husband and children,” not caring for the applause of the world but laboring to “mold the men of this world.” The ideal mother devoted herself to the needs for her husband and children, especially

---

691 Grafton, “Good Mothers,” 3.
the male children, doing important work behind the scenes without need for applause. He pled, “come to the rescue, mothers! The restless, groaning, broken world needs you!”692 And he charged, “Toil on ye faithful toilers…God sees and God approves.”693 Grafton assured that women who labored domestically would one day receive their children’s praise.694

Dr. Grafton suggested ideals not only for the ordering of the home, but also for the size of the household. The Progressive Era witnessed increased advocacy and availability of various forms of birth control. Social reformers argued for smaller families, especially among the working class.695 Grafton disagreed, casting a vision for large and traditionally ordered families. While never explicitly lobbying for families to have a specific number of children, his references to ideal family life regularly included large numbers of children. In a 1914 lesson for the Mississippi Synod’s Training School, he wrote, “One essential of the true home is monogamy. The woman of the home must be as a fruitful vine, and the children as olive plants must sit around the table…In the home of Obededom, the ancient Levite, there were 62 children and grandchildren that made up the membership of that happy home.”696 In multiple publications, not just in the Visitor, Grafton extolled the virtues of former Union Church member Mary McDougald McEachern. Mrs. McEachern was the grandmother of Mississippi governor Earl Brewer. But perhaps more importantly to Grafton, she embodied his ideal of Christian womanhood. Following her childhood in a Christian home, she married and moved to Carroll County, MS. “Being herself the precious product of a Christian home she with her loyal husband established another Christian home; Bible, catechism, worship, Sabbath day, God, in all his

694 Cornelius W. Grafton, “The Woman of Canaan,” The Mississippi Visitor 12, no. 7 (June 1923), 8.
695 Olsen, Daily Life of Women in the Progressive Era, 42.
ordinances were recognized. She stood unswerving in the doctrines she had imbibed in her childhood days, and when she died in 1903, 92 years of age, she left behind her 121 children, grand children, and great grandchildren, nearly every one…being the subject of renewing grace." He held up the example of Susannah Wesley, a mother of 19 children, including the famous English Methodist pioneers John and Charles. In addition to Mrs. Wesley, Grafton praised, “a mother with ten children” who was unknown to the world but fulfilling an important calling. He referenced a mother with “seven children” in June 1923, who could expect future praise for her domestic labors. He attributed the ongoing health and existence of his rural Union Church congregation to large families. While many people who grew up in his congregation moved away to urban areas, he was pleased to report that “our old country church grows from within.” Grafton himself fathered seven children, though only three survived to adulthood. He believed that large families could save country churches, which would otherwise decline without children.

Grafton extolled the virtues of large families at a time when Presbyterians debated the propriety of birth control. In 1921, one southern presbyterian periodical asserted, “the matter of birth control is only another phase of modernism,” and pled, “May God spare our communion the mess of divorce, free love, neglected children, and the murder of unborn children which birth control means.” The Federal Council of Churches, to which the PCUS initially belonged,

---

698 Grafton, “Good Mothers,” 3.
700 Cornelius W. Grafton, “The Woman of Canaan,” The Mississippi Visitor 12, no. 7 (June 1923), 8.
702 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 52.
703 Cornelius W. Grafton, “George A McGehee,” The Mississippi Visitor 13, no. 3 (February 1924), 13.
704 Winter, Citadels of Zion, 1:124, quoting The Presbyterian Standard (April 29, 1931).
published a report approving certain forms of birth control in specific cases. Many presbyteries in the Southern church responded with overtures to the General Assembly to withdraw from the council, which the PCUS eventually did in 1931. Earnest Trice Thompson wrote, “In the debate over the Federal Council it was the birth control issue which proved to be the decisive issue, and which in the judgment of those present explained the final vote, reversing the trend of previous years.”

Grafton had a clear vision for the ordering of large Christian families. They were led by the husband and father. He recalled Obed-Edom, the biblical character in whose house King David temporarily left the ark of the covenant (see 2 Samuel 6), in a 1914 lesson. “He did not have to consult wife and children about it, for they were all sure that husband and father would do the right thing.” The father’s headship would be especially expressed, Grafton believed, through leading the family worship and prayer each day, and in leading the household in worshipful rest on the Sabbath day.

While maintaining and defending a conservative understanding of gender roles, Grafton, and the Southern Presbyterian church more broadly, did embrace new developments in women’s work. His second wife, Kate Wharton Grafton, the daughter of a prominent doctor and presbyterian ruling elder in Port Gibson, is credited with being “ultimately responsible for the organization of the Women’s Auxiliary of the Presbytery of Mississippi.” In 1917, the PCUS General Assembly adopted the “circle plan,” bringing prevailing interests in efficiency and administration to bear on congregational Woman’s Auxiliaries by dividing them into small

---

705 Ernest Trice Thompson, _Presbyterians in the South_, vol. 3 (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1973), 272-273. For this paragraph see also Winter, _Citadels of Zion, Volume 1_ (1st ed.), 124.
708 Cabaniss, _Life and Thought of a Country Preacher_, 54.
groups, each with its own circle leader. These circles gathered for study and prayer, raised funds for missionaries and benevolences, wrote congregational histories, and facilitated a space of relative independence for presbyterian women.

Some PCUS women used teaching opportunities in the local church to challenge the cultural status quo. Mary Wharton, niece of Grafton’s wife Kate, served as “choir director, organist, pianist, and Sunday School and Bible class teacher” at the First Presbyterian Church of Port Gibson, where she “promoted the concerns of the Social Gospel movement, particularly in the areas of prohibition, child labor, education, and race relations.” She taught her class that Mississippi’s race problem stemmed from the fact that “one race feels superior to another.” In particular, she criticized the funding disparity between black and white schools in Mississippi. Randy Sparks observes, “Her views on racial justice, grounded simply but firmly in the most basic tenets of her faith were hardly exceptional for religious white women of her status. Like many ‘conservative liberals’ in the South, Wharton made general pleas for racial justice and equality that were restrained and tempered.”

While women organized in the Southern Presbyterian church, in other quarters of American Christianity, they lobbied for a place in the pulpit. E. Brooks Holifield notes that the number of American denominations willing to ordain women increased from 7 percent in 1890 to 25 percent in 1900. Advocacy for women’s ordination paralleled advocacy for women’s suffrage. Despite these efforts, by 1910, only one percent of American ministers were female.

---

709 Winter, *Citadels of Zion*, 1:124.
712 Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 194.
713 Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 176.
714 Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 176.
By the 1916 PCUS General Assembly, which Grafton moderated, the Southern Presbyterian church had not proceeded so far as to debate women’s ordination to the office of minister or elder, but it did debate the role of women in the ministries of the church. Some debated whether women could teach, exhort, or lead in prayer in mixed assemblies of both men and women. Others debated whether Scripture gave any warrant to women serving in the ordained office of deacon. The Assembly concluded these debates, with Grafton presiding, by referring to a previous action from 1880, which declared that “the public preaching of the Gospel is a branch of the ministerial office…the assumption of this sacred office by women is opposed to the advancement of true piety and to the promotion of peace in the Church, and this to such an extent as to make the introduction of women into our pulpits, for the purpose of publicly expounding God’s Word, an irregularity not to be tolerated.”\(^{715}\) The Assembly then concluded by leaving “other services of Christian women” to the discretion of sessions and the consciences of Christian women themselves, encouraging sessions to appoint godly women to diaconal ministry in their congregations, and reminding church members of the opportunities for women at the denominational Training School in Richmond, VA.\(^{716}\) The first women would not be ordained in the PCUS until 1965, when Rachel Henderlite was ordained in All Souls Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA.\(^{717}\)

In the age of the flappers, birth control, and burgeoning women’s rights, Grafton portrayed a distinctly traditional and conservative alternative for twentieth century American life.

He directed women of the Progressive Era to the domestic sphere, conservative morals, child rearing, and service. These virtues, as Grafton understood them, not only promised happiness and praise for women themselves, but also hope for rural communities and churches facing the uncertainties brought by shifting morals, beliefs, and populations.

IV. Children

Progressive Era tensions regarding gender were connected to new conceptions and challenges related to children and family life. Marsden described the years immediately after the war as “an overwhelming atmosphere of crisis,” caused by demobilization, economic adjustments, labor disputes, strikes, terrorism, changing morals, and suspicion of foreign influence. This atmosphere of unrest also manifested itself in the home. From 1890-1920 instances of divorce almost tripled, from 3 per thousand to nearly 8 per thousand. Grafton’s solution for the perceived moral decay, especially among young people, was reconsecration to the traditional Christian home.

Grafton engaged the “atmosphere of crisis” outright in his March 1919 message titled “Juvenile Criminals.” In it, he provided both diagnosis and prescription for the dangerous ills facing Southern youth. He began by recounting the “startling” reports from sheriffs in Mississippi and Louisiana “of the number of mere lads [ages 9-18] that have been engaged in house breaking and stealing and public lying.” In addition to law enforcement, Mississippi’s Governor Theodore Bilbo reported that “the State Reformatory at Columbia is full to overflowing and that one hundred juveniles are waiting to be received when there is more

---

719 Olsen, Daily Life of Women in the Progressive Era, 68.
The Russell Sage Foundation, Dr. Grafton reported, had 750 children in its care in Mississippi alone, “whom they are trying to save from wreck and ruin.” In his mind, these were unprecedented times with potentially devastating consequences for the future.

What remedy did the minister propose? While acknowledging room for “the widest charity,” he insisted “the divine remedy is the home…Home teaching, home training, home religion.” Three times in all capital letters he urged, “BACK TO THE HOME.” The home, he argued, was the spring of society. The lake of society could not be clean unless the springs of the home gave clean water. Contrasting a godly home with an ungodly one, he asked, “with the picture of the bright stream flowing from one, and the black current of home bred vice pouring forth from the other, are you not stirred from your hearts with a longing for the Christian home?”

This home-oriented response to vice reflected a broader impulse among evangelicals to identify “the home as a counterpoint to and rejection of the aggressive, self-indulgent pleasure seeking of male recreation.” Evangelicals viewed their homes as sacred institutions with religious qualities and rituals. The Christian home, they believed, was a place of prayerful family worship, quiet Sunday Sabbath rest, harmony, and the self-control so obviously absent from male vice and rising imprisonment. Life in individual evangelical homes complimented the rhythms and expectations of corporate church life.

In keeping with this complementary relationship, Grafton taught that churches played an important role in purifying the home. However, many churches had made themselves impotent...
by deviating from robust scriptural teaching, especially during the war years. He lamented, “Last year we had many sermons on patriotic themes. Fine topics these were, but they could not cleanse the springs.”

The war distracted the church from its central task of teaching the Bible, which alone could change and sustain families. Patriotic sermons could not strengthen or cleanse homes. Grafton further lamented that the end of the war did not bring an end to the church’s distraction. “We are now preaching many sermons on church benevolence but will these reach the juveniles and purify the homes.”

A church distracted by current events and fundraising campaigns could not fulfill its role in promoting healthy families. Grafton concluded, “In behalf of all the future let us pay more attentions to the fountains. BACK TO THE HOME and pour salt into the springs.”

Dr. Grafton’s trumpet call “back to the home” resonated beyond the pages of the Mississippi Visitor. The Port Gibson Reveille in Claiborne County, MS reprinted the column on May 8, 1919, calling it “too valuable and timely to receive merely casual attention.” In the mind of the paper, “it ought to be memorized by every parent in the state.”

The Okolona Messenger in Chickasaw County, MS also ran Dr. Grafton’s column in its May 29, 1919 newspaper with the same prescript, noting its value and urgency for Mississippians.

Grafton devoted his columns from September through December 1919 to discuss home life. He wrote about children. And he also wrote to them. He used simple language and accessible themes to mold the beliefs and behaviors presbyterian youth. He likely envisioned

families receiving their monthly copies of The Visitor and sitting down together to read them aloud. Thus, charges and applications for “the boys and girls of Mississippi” abound throughout his messages. He sought to inspire Mississippi’s young Presbyterians to live lives of devotion to the doctrines and principles he deemed essential to their flourishing. In May 1916, he told the story of a girl named Margaret Steen. Her pastor, possibly Dr. Grafton himself, once asked her what would happen “if God should break his word?” She answered, “In that event I would certainly be lost, but God would be the greater loser, for he would lose his honor.” Grafton held Margaret up as an example of “faith sweet and strong.”

Dr. Grafton and other religious conservatives and fundamentalists were not the only voices advocating moral reform and increased attention to children in the Progressive Era. Social progressives did as well. This period saw the launch of child sciences. Americans increasingly recognized childhood as a distinct stage of life, a stage with its own rights to be protected. David Macleod describes a shift from a fundamentally economic view of childhood to a concept of “sheltered childhood” rooted in scientific approaches to child development. Under the sheltered childhood model, mothers would raise children, relieving them of the usual pressure of wage earning.

While he shared with his progressive contemporaries a concern for children, he did not lobby for widespread social reforms. This was typical, according to Erskine Clarke, of his

---

734 Cornelius W. Grafton, “Margaret Steen,” The Mississippi Visitor 5, no. 6 (May 1916), 3.
735 Grafton, “Margaret Steen,” 3.
736 Grafton, “Margaret Steen,” 3.
740 Herndon, review of The Age of the Child, 1804.
clerical contemporaries in the Southern Presbyterian church. “Most Columbia faculty and graduates had little to do with the great campaigns that occupied many protestants in the early years of the century—temperance, child labor laws, women rights, and the fight for anti-lynching laws. Even the ‘Make the World Safe for Democracy’ campaign of Columbia’s own Woodrow Wilson drew only a few Columbia students to the battlefields of France.” Instead, Grafton championed old moral, domestic, and theological paths, as the answer. Believing that all human beings fell in Adam’s sin in the garden, Grafton taught that children were by nature unregenerate and in need of spiritual new birth though faith in Jesus Christ. Bible reading and discipline within the context of a traditionally ordered home could shape children who might otherwise cascade into immorality and disorder. Grafton’s hopes for the boys and girls of Mississippi in the Progressive Era were deeply theological, hopes that presbyterian beliefs would shape children’s behavior and serve as a means to deliver them from earthly and eternal ruin.

V. Urbanization

Dr. Grafton championed a traditional Christian view of the home at a time when many families were leaving rural areas like Union Church to live in larger towns. The Progressive Era brought sweeping urbanization. With that sweeping urbanization came a concern for the health of rural communities. President Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission reported to congress in 1909 that rural communities were failing to support the social and intellectual interests of

---

741 Clarke, To Count Our Days, 146.
742 Cornelius W. Grafton, “What is In the Marble?,” The Mississippi Visitor 7, no. 11 (October 1918), 7.
progressive-era Americans. Fears that rural depopulation and stagnation would harm the entire country catalyzed renewed interest in revitalizing country life.

E. Brooks Holifield describes a “rural church reforming movement” in the first decades of the twentieth century that sought to revitalize interest in places where people had become indifferent to the church. Grafton’s Southern Presbyterian church was no exception. The PCUS designated its 1916 General Assembly in Orlando, FL a “Country Church Assembly.” Ordinarily, the assembly elected well-known ministers from prominent churches to moderate the assembly. But the focus on the country church led presbyteries to send “an unusual number of men from smaller and Country Churches” and opened the door for Grafton, perhaps the denomination’s best known country preacher, to serve as moderator. The assembly scheduled two evening presentations and another on Sunday afternoon to focus on the country church. Grafton delivered the address that became his pamphlet, *A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church* at this assembly. Some sensed that neglect of the rural churches harmed both those congregations and the city congregations, since those who moved to urban areas from rural ones had not been reached by Presbyterians when they lived in the country. Thus, E. T. Thompson believed, “Surely this is a timely topic for presbyterian people…Now that the cry is ‘Back to the Country’ let the Presbyterian Church prove its adaptability by going with its best men and its best efforts to the country to enter into the life of the people in every way that shall best promote their temporal and spiritual welfare.”

---

745 Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 149.
746 Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 149-150.
While the PCUS may have issued the cry “Back to the Country” in 1916, the problem was not that they had no ministers in rural areas. Holifield observes, “By 1920, more than half of Americans lived in towns and cities, but more than 65 percent of the clergy still preached in the country. The majority of these rural ministers served two or more congregations with an average membership of forty-six. Only 35 percent of the white protestant country churches had a full-time, or even part-time, resident pastor, and many of the preachers supported themselves through other occupations.”

Holifield further describes the circumstances of the average rural ministry,

For most rural pastors, clerical duties consisted of preaching, visiting whenever possible, and presiding at baptisms, communion, marriage, and burial. Normally, the churches were one- and two-room buildings with bare floors, wooden seats, and a pine pulpit. By 1925, about 80 percent of the congregations had Sunday schools, but barely half of the rural ministers had the time to attend, let alone teach, and more than a third of the preachers, rushing from one congregation to another on Sunday mornings, had almost nothing to do with the Sunday school programs.

He continues,

In the rural South, half the clergy in 1920 were part-time preachers, supporting themselves with outside jobs, and most of them served two or three churches. Only 20 percent of the churches had a resident pastor, and only 16 percent had a preaching service each Sunday. The typical Southern rural pastor preached in a one-room wooden church, lighted by oil lamps, administered baptism and communion, visited whatever members were reachable, and held a yearly revival…The average pastorate lasted only two years, so most had little opportunity to build long-term relationships.

Low ministerial salaries undoubtedly contributed to short pastorates and employment outside of the pulpit. “By the late 1920s, salaries in the countryside averaged only $1,063, considerably less than the national average for ministers, which was about $1,407. Urban factory workers made around $1,600 a year, textile workers $1,151, and farm laborers $587. In real dollars, clerical salaries between 1890 and 1928 declined slightly, and the rural clergy were the main losers.

---

751 Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 149.
752 Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 150.
753 Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 153.
More than a third of them earned extra money by taking a second job.”\textsuperscript{754} Grafton made even less than this low average for country ministers. He was considered paid-in-full if he received $600 annually. His grandson, Thomas H. Grafton, recalled, “he really lived in relative poverty. A wealthy friend would buy him a new suit of clothes every two or three years, but the suit he would wear most of the time would be rather threadbare. But he never complained.”\textsuperscript{755}

Grafton fit the mold of a pastor serving multiple congregations, though Union Church and Ben Salem had more on their rolls than the average membership of forty-six. And after finishing his schoolroom duties in the 1894, he did not take on a second vocation in addition to his pastoral work. Holifield continues, “Any analyst who counted clergy in the mid-1920’s would have found ministry still a rural vocation, but by then there were two distinct styles of Protestant ministry, one shaped by the pressures of urbanization and modern thought, the other more isolated from those pressures and more continuous with the Protestant past in a rural society.”\textsuperscript{756} Grafton was not entirely isolated from the pressures of urbanization and modern thought, but he certainly operated in continuity with the protestant past.

Urbanization was especially relevant for Union Church, which, for most of Grafton’s life, was accessible only by a horse drawn buggy on a dirt road to railroad stations over 15 miles away. The dirt roads had their downsides, including making church attendance difficult.\textsuperscript{757} Grafton recalled wearing out “three fine horses and two or three buggies” over the years of his ministry as he visited church members across 400 square miles of territory using often difficult country roads.\textsuperscript{758} While he understood the inevitability of change, and even received “a Ford

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{754} Holifield, \textit{God’s Ambassadors}, 150. \\
\footnote{755} Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), third page. \\
\footnote{756} Holifield, \textit{God’s Ambassadors}, 146. \\
\footnote{757} Cornelius W. Grafton, “The Country Church and Gravel Roads,” \textit{The Mississippi Visitor} 12, no. 6 (May 1923), 8. \\
\footnote{758} Grafton, \textit{A Forty-Three Year Pastorate}, 9.
\end{footnotes}
touring car” as a gift from former students, he was skeptical of the benefits of gravel roads and easy transportation.\textsuperscript{759} He was grateful have his “faithful Ford.”\textsuperscript{760} But he remembered fondly the days of riding his horse and buggy, “nobody was in hurry in those days.”\textsuperscript{761}

The new gravel roads provided rural Mississippians with easy access to towns previously inaccessible by horse. But in so doing, they also threatened strict Sabbath observance, day schools in rural communities, and even rural Sunday schools and churches, since members and their children could now easily drive to larger nearby towns.\textsuperscript{762} Grafton believed that any benefits accrued from larger Sunday schools in town were outweighed by “the evil of motor trucking the children on Sunday.”\textsuperscript{763} “Whatever we do, we must hold on to the country church,” he wrote.\textsuperscript{764} To do that, Sunday schools needed to remain in the rural communities and families needed to worship at the country church or together in their homes rather than drive into town.\textsuperscript{765}

Grafton’s anti-urban views were common in the Progressive Era. Paul Harvey writes, “The rural South proved resistant to progressivism, a movement that ultimately depended upon industrialization and urbanization.”\textsuperscript{766} Steven Conn identifies anti-urbanism as an American tradition dating back to the colonial period. After World War I, cities overtook rural areas as the nation’s majority population centers.\textsuperscript{767} While some advocates of decentralization critiqued cities on economic or social grounds, desiring to shrink their size in order to improve them, others saw in cities unchecked opportunities for abomination, vice, and moral decay.\textsuperscript{768} Grafton’s

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{759} Grafton, \textit{A Forty-Three Year Pastorate}, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{760} Cornelius W. Grafton, “Trip to Oldenburg,” \textit{The Mississippi Visitor} 9, no. 3 (February 1920), 5.
\item \textsuperscript{761} Cornelius W. Grafton, “Calvary Church,” \textit{The Mississippi Visitor} 7, no. 10 (September 1918), 3.
\item \textsuperscript{762} Grafton, “The Country Church and Gravel Roads,” 8.
\item \textsuperscript{763} Grafton, “The Country Church and Gravel Roads,” 8.
\item \textsuperscript{764} Grafton, “The Country Church and Gravel Roads,” 8.
\item \textsuperscript{765} Grafton, “The Country Church and Gravel Roads,” 8.
\item \textsuperscript{766} Harvey, \textit{Freedom’s Coming}, 48.
\item \textsuperscript{767} Conn, \textit{Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 59.
\item \textsuperscript{768} Conn, \textit{Americans Against the City}, 59-60.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
perspective aligned with the latter group. But his concerns were not merely negative. Not only did he warn against the temptations of the city, he also wanted rural communities, like the ones he served for 61 years, to flourish.

VI. Race and the Lost Cause

Perhaps the most striking absence in Grafton’s roughly 150 columns is explicit interaction with racial issues. The Confederate veteran did engage race and related subjects in varied ways in other contexts, publicly opposing multiple instances of lynching but also lamenting the dominance of “the negro race” during Reconstruction and decrying “miscegenation” as a violation of the seventh commandment.769 A 1926 column stressed the universal offer of salvation in Jesus Christ to all races. “He is like rivers of water in a dry place…And men and women come…men women and children, the white man the black man, the brown man, the yellow man sit together and joyously drink.”770

Race may not have factored prominently in Dr. Grafton’s articles, but the 1910’s and 1920’s were a significant time for American race relations, in particular, the migration of Southern blacks to Northern cities.771 Mississippi was hit hard by this exodus. “Between 1900 and 1910, 35,000 blacks left the state, which totaled just slightly more than the number of whites leaving, but in the decade 1910 to 1920, 148,500 blacks escaped north, exceeding the white exodus by around 36,000. Pushed by the injustice of the segregation system and pulled by the lure of jobs in northern cities, 100,000 blacks left Mississippi in the war years (1915-1920).”772 Mitchell goes on to note than European immigration slowed an nearly stopped with the war,

---

770 Grafton, no title, Mississippi Visitor 14, no. 4 (March 1926) 6-7.
772 Mitchell, A New History of Mississippi, 313.
leaving northern industrialists in need of labor and leading them to dispatch recruiters south for black laborers. Grafton made no explicit mention of the migration, which certainly could have impacted agriculture in southwest Mississippi where he lived and served.

Dr. Grafton’s articles occasionally drew upon themes from the Lost Cause. Lost Cause ideology overlapped with Progressive Era conservatism at key points. Matthew Bowman identified “a strict morality” that frowned “on diversions like dancing” as a key component of southern white evangelicalism, including Grafton’s southern Presbyterian Church. Bowman observed that “Christianity was deeply interwoven into the triumph of the Lost Cause.” Charles Reagan Wilson highlights the important role played by clergy in the religious myth of the Lost Cause. Ministers, he argues, described Confederate soldiers and leaders in idealized terms as “Crusading Christian Confederates” who exemplified what Southern life should be even decades after defeat. Wilson writes, “judging from the myth of the Crusading Christian Confederates, the religious version of the Lost Cause taught Southerners to crusade against evil, to bear the suffering which accompanied that struggle, and to die in Christian faith. If they did so, virtue would then be theirs.”

Grafton’s articles prove illustrative of Bowman’s and Wilson’s observations. He often drew from Confederate ranks for inspiring examples of Christian virtue. References included the South Carolina theologian and architect of the Confederate Presbyterian Church James Henley Thornwell, Confederate Captain J. J. White, New Orleans presbyterian minister B. M. Palmer,

773 Mitchell, A New History of Mississippi, 313.
776 Wilson, Baptized in Blood, 38.
777 Wilson, Baptized in Blood, 57.
Generals Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Jefferson Davis, and Confederate veteran George A. McGehee. He combined favorite themes, venerated McGehee, who had 12 children and 124 descendants, as an example worthy of emulation. He idealized the examples of Lee and Jackson. “Look at Lee and Jackson in the midst of a battle crisis. Lee stops a moment to save a falling sparrow and Jackson who knew no fear talked about the colored men of his Bible class back home.” He blamed the Civil War for the destruction of Mississippi’s schools, some of which had been started by Presbyterians. Without explicitly addressing race, he drew on themes associated with the Lost Cause, lionizing Confederate leaders who defended white rule to a white readership. These leaders showed his readers, he believed, how to live courageous and pious lives. He deployed them for primarily religious ends, seeking to inspire more consecrated Christian living rather than using them to defend the legitimacy of Confederate nationhood.

VII. Conclusions

Dr. Grafton turned 82 on December 21, 1928. His “Message” that month, titled, “Think and Thank,” began characteristically with Mississippi’s youth. “Our children all know that last Thursday was Thanksgiving day.” “When we Think,” he said, “we will be sure to Thank.” Think and thank, “the children of Mississippi must learn these words.” He went on to describe many of the world’s sins and sorrows; sickness, murder, the Armenian genocide, ancient wars between Greeks, Turks, and Romans, multitudes of orphans “in the Near East and the Far East”

---

778 The Mississippi Visitor 10, no. 11 (October, 1921); 11, no. 3 (February, 1922); 14, no. 3 (February 1925); 14, no. 12 (November 1925); 15, no. 6 (May 1926).

779 Cornelius W. Grafton, “George A. McGehee,” The Mississippi Visitor 13, no. 3 (February 1924), 13-14.


781 Cornelius W. Grafton, “Presbyterianism in Mississippi and Church Schools,” The Mississippi Visitor 14, no. 12 (November 1925), 5-7.


in his own day.\textsuperscript{785}``All over the world sin has been raging since the fall of man.''	extsuperscript{786} But, Grafton assured, Jesus Christ, ``has come to purge the world of all sickness and suffering, and we children and grown people must think of it most earnestly and as we think of it we must be thankful.''	extsuperscript{787} Mississippi’s boys and girls must, ``Think and Thank.” It was a quintessential ``Dr. Grafton’s Message.’’

Whether Dr. Grafton or The Visitor staff knew it at the time, his December 1928 message was his last. One of the sicknesses about which he wrote, a bitter fruit of the curse of Adam’s fall, as Grafton understood it, afflicted him in the new year. He began 1929 with a ``bad flu.''	extsuperscript{788} The aged presbyterian minister recorded in his log book that he “lost nearly three months in opening of year” due to a sickness that kept him in bed in Jefferson County for the month of January and hampered his clerical efforts into March. Dr. Grafton’s health eventually rallied. His 82\textsuperscript{nd} year of life and his 55\textsuperscript{th} year of ministry would not be his last. He persevered for another five and a half years until his death on August 1, 1934 at the age of 87. But, while his bad flu in 1929 did not end his life or ministry, it does appear to have ended his monthly column in the Mississippi Visitor. ``Dr. Grafton’s Message” ended without notice from the author or mention from the publisher.

Dr. C. W. Grafton’s columns in the Mississippi Visitor typified opposition to theological modernism and its cultural changes. But they did so primarily by casting a positive vision of the world that modernism yearned to leave behind; the world of large families, Biblical authority, rural communities, and conservative Christian piety. At each point studied here, Grafton aligned himself and sought to align his readers with the fundamentalist critique of the Progressive Era.

\textsuperscript{785} Grafton, “Think and Thank,” 14.
\textsuperscript{786} Grafton, “Think and Thank,” 14.
\textsuperscript{787} Grafton, “Think and Thank,” 14.
\textsuperscript{788} Cornelius W. Grafton, Ministerial Log Book (1920-1934), 34.
World War I provided spiritual lessons of human sinfulness, God’s chastisement, and the necessity of godly living. Religion and science, rightly understood, were not at odds. Rather, true science would always confirm Scripture revelation. Women and children thrived best in large families led by fathers. The blessings of rural life and church were worth protecting. Confederate heroes provided a blueprint for Christian living in the twentieth century. For C. W. Grafton, Marsden’s “first allegiance to God” approach characterized not only his engagement with the Great War, but with every aspect of life. He sought to shape the lives of his readers through his presbyterian theological beliefs. This was Grafton’s fundamentalist response to the Progressive Era.
CHAPTER FIVE

PRESERVING: GRAFTON’S UNPUBLISHED HISTORY OF PRESBYTERIANISM IN MISSISSIPPI, 1924-1934

Dr. Grafton turned 80 years old on December 21, 1926. Many of his former students gathered in Union Church to celebrate. They presented their beloved teacher with a birthday Christmas tree with $505 in dollar bills, almost the equivalent of one year’s salary. Contributions “had come in from almost every state in the Union,” for his birthday tree, which took him by surprise, “a thrilling moment in the life of this veteran teacher and preacher.”

Grafton’s eightieth year coincided with the completion of his most ambitious writing project. He had spent most of his eighty years writing—sermons for his congregation, letters to his missionary son Tom in China, monthly newspaper columns for The Visitor, moral and theological lessons for denominational training schools, and historical articles for publication. But two months after his birthday, in February 1927, he finished the biggest, and, what he surely hoped would be the most significant writing project of his life, a massive 658-page History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi. He called the project, which began in 1924, a “work of love.” He wrote to its financier in 1926, “Let me say to you confidentially that I pray every day that I

---

789 McLaughlin, The Grand Old Man of Mississippi, 304.
791 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, C. Benton Kline, Jr. Special Collections and Archives, John Bulow Campbell Library, Columbia Theological Seminary, vi.
may be enabled to finish this work.” He hoped to inspire Mississippi Presbyterians, especially the young, with heroic tales of their pioneering predecessors.

But it was not to be. Despite assurances, the manuscript was never published. Instead, it sat for decades, dog-eared, with a rusty paper clip, in his daughter’s home in Union Church, MS, until a grandson persuaded family members to send the manuscript to the Presbyterian Historical Foundation in Montreat, NC. This chapter examines the last decade of Dr. Grafton’s life, through the lens of his *History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi*. It shows how Grafton’s *History* came to be, identifies and describes some of its key themes, and asks what those themes reveal about Dr. Grafton and the perspectives and aspirations of Mississippi’s Presbyterians in the early twentieth century. The chapter also compares Dr. Grafton’s *History* to other history writing from the period.

Grafton’s unpublished *History* was not his first effort at historical writing. In fact, he had spoken and written extensively on church history, especially the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi. His colleagues in the Synod of Mississippi recognized his interest and awareness of the state’s presbyterian history in 1905, when they tapped him to serve as the first president of the Synod’s newly organized Historical Society. The Society was founded with a fivefold purpose: “the collection and preservation of all documentary evidence of Presbyterian history in the State of Mississippi, the editing of documents, the writing of biographies and historical narratives, the preparation and publication of an historical encyclopedia of Presbyterian individuals and events, and finally the publication of a history of Presbyterianism in the State of

---

792 C. W. Grafton to Judge Stone Deavours, 16 January, 1926, Eastman Memorial Foundation Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
The Society also secured a “section of the room in ‘The Department of Archives and History’ of the State of Mississippi, set apart for the use of the society by the director of the department, shall be the permanent place for the depositing all documents, etc., acquired by the society.” This purpose statement in the Society’s constitution is the first known reference to a history of Presbyterianism in Mississippi, almost twenty years before the project began in 1924.

The following year, Grafton wrote his first published historical piece for *The Mississippi Historical Society* titled, “A Sketch of the Old Scotch Settlement at Union Church.” The Society had begun printing the “Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society” in 1898 under the editorial supervision of University of Mississippi history professor Franklin L. Riley. In the “Sketch,” Grafton described the development of this section of Jefferson County by Scotch settlers from the Carolinas, some of whom spoke Gaelic, and many of whose descendants were members at Union Church. His account focused on the section’s two historic presbyterian churches, Ebenezer and Union Church. Both churches faced decline as families moved from this rural part of the state to cities and towns. “During the last thirty years more than seventy families have moved away from this community.” He mentioned talk of a railroad coming through the town, connecting Hattiesburg to Natchez which would open Union Church “up better to the commerce methods of the world.” But even if the railroad came, he assured readers that “the history of Union Church for these hundred years past is beyond the reach of change…embalmed

---

797 https://www.mississippihistory.org/brief-history
in precious memories that lie hidden away on old tombstones and in old Bibles all over the land.”

The community was not without its vices. Grafton noted that, “some of the Scotch were not averse to strong drink, and coming back [from the market in Natchez] with a jug of Scotch whisky their animal spirits would be stirred on the way and their home coming would be loudly advertised.”

“But,” he quickly explained, “such an one would unfailingly be brought before his brethren in the church and he would be certain of a reprimand and would probably be excommunicated for a while.”

Public drunkenness was not the only sin the churches addressed. He wrote, “Let a man be overtaken in a fault, such as violating the Sabbath day, or taking God’s name in vain, or becoming intoxicated and he was certain of discipline by the church.”

Dr. Grafton’s colleagues in the Presbytery of Mississippi called on him again to speak on church history in 1911, this time in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.

The denomination, organized in 1861 as the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, was colloquially known as the Southern Presbyterian Church. He addressed the Presbytery, meeting at Crystal Springs, on “The Heritage and Testimony of the Southern Presbyterian Church.”

The two great items of the church’s costly heritage, Grafton said, were the Bible and the “wonderful system of Presbyterian Church Government.”

He traced the articulation of key Christian doctrines from the earliest centuries of Christianity up through the protestant reformation, charging his colleagues, “While you quietly enjoy your

805 Cabaniss, Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 125.
806 Grafton, “Heritage and Testimony of the Southern Presbyterian Church,” in After Fifty Years, 1861-1911: Semi-Centennial of the Southern Presbyterian Church, 3.
privileges, don’t forget that to save you from papal tyranny, there were sufferings endured, throes of mortal anguish felt that shall never be revealed till the Angel opens the book at the last day.”

He then traced the development of presbyterian church government from the Reformation, through Scotland, then Ulster, to the colonies, throughout the United States, through denominational and sectional divisions, up to his own day. To match these two central aspects of the Southern Presbyterian heritage, Grafton identified as the Southern Presbyterian Church’s “central contribution” two points of testimony. These two points are the Ruling Eldership and the Spirituality of the Church.” He wanted his contemporaries to feel the weight of their heritage. “It is a consideration solemn as death, that this heritage will face us at the judgment day.” He concluded, “Our obligation lies in two directions: first, the preservation of our heritage…finally, we are responsible for giving this truth to the world.”

Grafton, along with fellow members of the Mississippi Synod, sought to preserve their heritage and propagate its truth through training church volunteers, especially Sunday school teachers. The Synod hosted a summer training school for Christian workers at Belhaven College in Jackson, MS and invited Dr. Grafton to speak in 1914 and 1915. In the second year, he introduced the training school attendees to “Pioneer Presbyterians and Their Successors in Mississippi.” He sought “to bring to mind as well as possible the labors of our fathers in the Church whose self-sacrifice and devotion made the present stage of our career a possibility.”

He began with Joseph Bullen’s 1799 mission to the Chickasaws, the founding of the first presbyterian church, named Bethel, in Mississippi Territory in 1804, and the organization of

---

813 Grafton, “Pioneer Presbyterians and Their Successors in Mississippi,” 161.
Mississippi Presbytery at Pine Ridge in 1816.\textsuperscript{814} He then gave special attention to the ministry of Sylvester Larned, who preached and served powerfully in New Orleans in his early twenties.\textsuperscript{815} Yellow fever struck New Orleans with particular severity during his tenure. But Larned remained at his post, preaching on August 27, 1820 from the first chapter of Philippians, “for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”\textsuperscript{816} The following day the fever set into him and he died on August 31 at the age of twenty four, after only three years in the ministry there.\textsuperscript{817} Grafton wanted his trainees to imitate the example of Larned and the other pioneers. He hoped they would do so not just in their courage and perseverance, but also in their moral standards. He appealed to old deliverances by the Presbytery and Synod concerning the importance of the home, exalting families that keep “the family altar,” remember the Sabbath day, and eschew card-playing and the theatre.\textsuperscript{818} He drew on one of his favorite examples to illustrate the point, Mary McDougald McEachern, who, after being reared in Union Church, went on to support seven different presbyterian congregations in north Mississippi and had 121 children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, including Governor Earl Brewer.\textsuperscript{819} Finally, he found in the pioneer Presbyterians a model for optimal race relations. “These men of a hundred years ago did a great deal to soften the lot and ameliorate the hardships of the slave. They did their best to provide him with religious instruction. Be it said to the credit of the Presbyterian Church, that to an extent beyond what any man dreams of today, the black man was looked upon as a solemn trust.”\textsuperscript{820} He

\textsuperscript{814} Grafton, “Pioneer Presbyterians and Their Successors in Mississippi,” 162-163.
\textsuperscript{815} Grafton, “Pioneer Presbyterians and Their Successors in Mississippi,” 167-168.
\textsuperscript{816} Grafton, “Pioneer Presbyterians and Their Successors in Mississippi,” 167-168.
\textsuperscript{817} Grafton, “Pioneer Presbyterians and Their Successors in Mississippi,” 169-170.
\textsuperscript{818} Grafton, “Pioneer Presbyterians and Their Successors in Mississippi,” 170-172.
\textsuperscript{819} Grafton, “Pioneer Presbyterians and Their Successors in Mississippi,” 174.
\textsuperscript{820} Grafton, “Pioneer Presbyterians and Their Successors in Mississippi,” 176.
concluded by saying, “We must never abate our testimony by one jot or tittle from the straight line of truth. To the wide open fields God calls us. In faith and hope let us follow.”\textsuperscript{821}

These three articles, along with his presidency of the Synod’s Historical Society, illustrate Dr. Grafton’s position as a \textit{de facto} historian of Mississippi Presbyterianism, with access to academic and ecclesiastical publication outlets. Works like these and his \textit{Mississippi Visitor} articles, some of which were historical, combined with his long tenure, historical interests, congregational and familial connections with the earliest generation of Mississippi Presbyterians, and educational reputation, placed him in a unique position when the time eventually came for a history of Mississippi Presbyterianism to be written. These articles also showed his understanding of history, which would reappear often in the \textit{History}, as a subject studied to inspire present generations to a faithfulness modelled after past generations, be that in doctrine, morals, or social norms.

Despite the Mississippi Synod’s stated interest in publishing a history, and despite its president’s work writing about Mississippi Presbyterian History, there is no known evidence of any attempt at the project for almost twenty years. That changed in the mid-1920s. The idea for a history of Mississippi’s Presbyterians resurfaced again at the instigation of the Eastman Memorial Foundation of Laurel, MS. The Foundation was organized by Wallace Brown Rogers and Lauren Chase Eastman in 1923 as a memorial to their son and grandson, Lauren Eastman Rogers, who died two years earlier at the age of twenty three.\textsuperscript{822} Founding families of Laurel, they began the Eastman Memorial Foundation “to promote the public welfare by founding, endowing and having maintained a public library, museum, art gallery and educational

\textsuperscript{821} Grafton, “Pioneer Presbyterians and Their Successors in Mississippi,” 177.
\textsuperscript{822} “History,” Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, accessed April 12, 2023, https://www.lrma.org/about/.
institution, within the state of Mississippi.” The Eastman Foundation also wanted to contribute “something of enduring value to the history of Mississippi.” The state’s Baptists and Methodists each had two-volume histories, but its Presbyterians lacked a definitive history. The Eastmans, being presbyterian, saw in this gap an opportunity for their first contribution to Mississippi history.

When the Mississippi Synod gathered in Hattiesburg for its annual meeting in 1924, Rev. P. W. McClintock of Laurel, MS presented a proposition from the Eastman Foundation, “that if the Synod would supervise and prepare a History of the Synod, the Foundation would pay the expenses of collecting and compiling the material and also the expense of publication.” The Synod accepted their proposal and appointed a committee of five members—one member from each of the Synod’s five regional presbyteries—to collect and prepare data: Prof. A. L. Bondurant of North Mississippi Presbytery; J. F. Frierson of East Mississippi Presbytery; W. H. McIntosh of Meridian Presbytery, J. B. Hutton of Central Mississippi Presbytery and C. W. Grafton of the Presbytery of Mississippi. The Synod’s monthly periodical, The Mississippi Visitor, reported, “Through the kindness of the Eastman Foundation which offers to finance the work, a history of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi is soon to be published.”

824 Judge Stone Deavours to C. W. Grafton, 14 January, 1926, Eastman Memorial Foundation Records, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
The Synod’s committee got to work collecting information. It distributed a circular letter throughout the state, explaining the Eastman Foundation’s proposal “and calling on all friends of the enterprise to send in material for the work.” People sent “different items of history, ancient letters and documents” to committee members. The Eastman Foundation furnished books and other source material. “Hon. Dunbar Rowland, of the department of Archives at the State Capitol at Jackson, kindly agreed to receive and take care of all such material sent to him.” Dr. Grafton wrote letters to church members he knew throughout Mississippi, asking them to write and send histories of their local congregations.

Enterprising spirit and broad support notwithstanding, the committee encountered a significant problem early in the process. It could not find an author. The Synod attempted to secure the services of the Rev. Thomas Carey Johnson, professor of Ecclesiastical History and Polity at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA. Johnson was an ideal candidate, having published multiple lengthy volumes of presbyterian history, including a 688-page biography of the Synod’s most renowned minister of the nineteenth century, Rev. Benjamin M. Palmer of New Orleans, and a 585-page biography of Virginia Presbyterian and Stonewall Jackson biographer Robert L. Dabney. The Synod committee in charge of the history had hoped that Johnson would visit the state and do research. “But,” Grafton noted, “he could not leave his business at Richmond to do this.” The committee then tried “two successive times to

833 Winter, Citadels of Zion, 1:177.
836 Grafton to Deavours, January 16, 1926, 2.
secure other men to do this work,” one of whom was, according to Grafton, “quite a distinguished man.”

Following these rejections, the task fell to one of the committee’s own members, the Synod’s elder statesman and former General Assembly Moderator, Dr. C. W. Grafton. He told an Eastman Foundation representative in 1926, “I have been left alone to do the writing up to date….I am in good health at present and am able to do good work.” While Dr. Grafton was no professional historian, that the project fell to him made sense for a number of reasons. First, he had deep roots in Mississippi Presbyterianism, including ancestors who founded Pine Ridge Presbyterian Church (1807) and Mississippi Presbytery (1816). He grew up in Madison County, MS at the Concord Presbyterian Church (organized 1853), where his father George Washington Grafton was a ruling elder and precentor. Second, he had experience writing history, including for the Mississippi Historical Society, and also had a reputation of academic capability through his educational efforts in Union Church and offers of college professorships and presidencies. Third, he had served as the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, U.S. General Assembly in 1916 and enjoyed denomination wide name recognition. And finally, he had served in the Synod of Mississippi for more than half of its existence, for 51 of its 90 years by 1924. His denominational and literary attainments, combined with his long tenure, made him the reasonable choice once other authors failed to materialize. One Eastman trustee even anticipated that his “being the author of the volume” would enhance its merit and worth to the general public.

---

840 Grafton to Deavours, January 16, 1926, 2.
841 The Synod of Mississippi was founded in 1834. Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 1:177.
842 Deavours to Grafton, 14 January, 1926, Eastman Memorial Foundation Records.
In December 1925, Grafton reported in *The Mississippi Visitor* that the book was about 300 pages long.\(^{843}\) He used his monthly column, “Dr. Grafton’s Message,” at various points to relay nuggets from his research. He professed to write about 30 pages per week.\(^ {844}\) He did the bulk of the research and dictated the text to his daughter, Mary Grafton Scott, who assisted in the research and typed every word.\(^ {845}\) Grafton wrote the material “in the block form, one subject after another,” with plans to arrange the whole in an orderly way and make appropriate connections between the sections once he had finished his research.\(^ {846}\) Some sent him sources to return and others to keep. Captain Winston of Pontotoc sent newspaper clippings and other material on early presbyterian efforts in the northeastern section of the state.\(^ {847}\) Grafton wrote to D.M. Featherstone in Holly Springs, the son of a C.S.A. comrade a friend asking him, “to help us by writing up the history of the Holly Springs Church…we owe something to our fathers who gave their lives in evangelizing our state. Will you please let me hear from you?”\(^ {848}\) The Eastman Foundation sent Grafton multiple books, including a history of Cumberland Presbyterians, to help his work.\(^ {849}\) Presbyterian churches throughout the state “sent in sketches of their history,” some of which appear to have been simply copied and included into the manuscript verbatim.\(^ {850}\)

By February 1927, Grafton had completed a massive 658-page type-written manuscript.\(^ {851}\) He was aware of the Foundation’s high hopes for the project. One trustee had stressed to Grafton that his *History* would be “the first contribution of the Eastman Foundation to

---


\(^ {844}\) Grafton to Deavours, 16 January, 1926, Eastman Memorial Foundation Records.

\(^ {845}\) Grafton to Deavours, 16 January, 1926, Eastman Memorial Foundation Records.


\(^ {848}\) Letter dated March 6, 1926, cited in Winter, *Citadels of Zion*, 1:177.

\(^ {849}\) Grafton to Deavours, 16 January, 1926, Eastman Memorial Foundation Records, 2.

\(^ {850}\) “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, vi.

\(^ {851}\) “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, vi.
the history and literature of Mississippi…its first authoritative publication of any kind.” 852 The trustee said, “by this, its first publication, the value and kind of service that the Foundation hopes in part to contribute to the advancement of learning will be judged.” 853 With his draft complete, Grafton informed the trustee, “We have presented this work to our Synod’s committee and we now give it into the hands of the Eastman Foundation for publication.” 854

What does Dr. Grafton’s History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi contain? The manuscript is divided into 50 chapters which range from less than five to more than fifty pages. The chapters proceed in loosely chronological order. Each chapter gives a self-contained description of its subject—“The Missions Among the Choctaws,” “Rev. James Smylie,” “Mississippi College,” “The Colored Presbyterian Church,”—rather than developing narratives across multiple chapters. Dr. Grafton had planned to rearrange his initial draft in a more orderly fashion before submitting it for publication. Whether he pursued a more orderly arrangement or not, the manuscript retains this block format with little evidence of a systematic chronological, geographic, or thematic order. Each chapter is, in a sense, its own miniature biography or institutional history, telling the story of a particular minister, congregation, event, school, or presbyterian institution from beginning to end. That said, the chronological order and emphasis on development over time, along with threads of pious application that weave across chapters make the book less of an encyclopedia and more of a loose narrative history of Mississippi’s Presbyterians.

Grafton initially planned to “write up the pioneer churches as well as the pioneer men.” 855 But his History moved beyond the pioneering era to discuss events, institutions, and people

852 Deavours to Grafton, 14 January, 1926, Eastman Memorial Foundation Records.
853 Deavours to Grafton. 14 January, 1926, Eastman Memorial Foundation Records.
855 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, vi.
connected to the presbyterian church into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The book swelled even larger as churches from around the state sent material.\textsuperscript{856} Grafton pasted historical sketches and articles written by others and sent to him for that purpose. One example is a history of early Protestantism in Mississippi by the Hon. Jeff Truly, who first delivered the piece he submitted to Grafton as a talk to the Daughters of the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{857} Despite reaching 658 pages, Grafton still regretted that he was not able to include “some of our very best men.”\textsuperscript{858} “We have gladly given all the space that could be allowed….But,” he wrote, “there is bound to be a limit somewhere.”\textsuperscript{859} While he could not be comprehensive, Grafton did believe that the book’s breadth would benefit a broad readership, “there is something for all in our book,” both “the boys and girls of Mississippi” and “our finest lawyers.”\textsuperscript{860}

Grafton often quoted verbatim from church minutes and other reports. His chapter on “The Colored Presbyterian Church” includes lengthy quotations pulled directly from presbytery and synod minutes and membership and ministerial statistics.\textsuperscript{861} Chapter 43 includes membership statistics from the women’s Synodical.\textsuperscript{862} He quoted Mississippi Synod deliverances on the theatre and temperance.\textsuperscript{863} He included extracts from General Assembly minutes.\textsuperscript{864} He listed Mississippi families who married native Americans.\textsuperscript{865} Chapter 47 gives a four page list of Mississippi Presbyterians who taught at the state’s colleges and universities.\textsuperscript{866}

\textsuperscript{856} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, vi.
\textsuperscript{857} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 15.
\textsuperscript{858} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, vi.
\textsuperscript{859} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, vi.
\textsuperscript{860} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 427-446.
\textsuperscript{861} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 456-465.
\textsuperscript{862} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 17-20.
\textsuperscript{863} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 32-34.
\textsuperscript{864} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 61.
\textsuperscript{865} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 484-487.
Grafton collected and wrote these diverse accounts and reports for a twofold purpose. First, his history was a type of origin story. He sought to teach Mississippi Presbyterians about the people and events that led to their present experience in the 1920s. After describing pioneer presbyterian families, he often identified their descendants among his contemporaries. He wrote, “It is the design of this history to bring to mind as far as possible the labors of our fathers, whose self sacrifice and devotion made the present stage of our career a possibility.”

In addition to teaching Mississippi Presbyterians whence they came, Grafton sought to inspire both his contemporaries and future generations to model their lives after their pioneering predecessors. The final form of the book was supposed to include over 20 photographs. He hoped “our rising generation will look on these historic pictures and let the men whose faces appear in the book look into your eyes and inspire you to nobler lives.” The eighty-year-old Grafton had a unique burden to inspire young people to dutiful service in the presbyterian church. He hoped the lives of past Presbyterians would, “peal like the ringing of a trumpet all through the bounds of the Synod of Mississippi and stir the hearts of the young men and women of this generation.” He wrote in the conclusion, “all this is written, as we trust, to encourage every boy and girl amongst us and to inspire us with a new spirit of zeal for building up the walls of the Presbyterian Zion.”

Grafton began the book by describing Mississippi’s earliest Protestants, who travelled from Northeastern colonies and settled in Natchez in the 1770s. Smiths, Ogdens, and Swayzes made arduous journeys over land and sea. When Spain took control of the region and enforced

---

867 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 2.
869 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, vi.
Roman Catholicism, Protestants like Presbyterian ruling elder John Bolls met for illegal worship services under threat of exile to the Mexican silver mines. Around 1800, Rev. Joseph Bullen moved his family from Vermont to evangelize and educate the Indians near Pontotoc. Montgomery, Hall, and Bowman of the Synod of the Carolinas nearly starved descending the old Natchez Trace in 1801 “through the territory of the Indians with possibly no chance of protection or accommodation from white settlers north of the Walnut Hills.” Pioneers “traveled over perilous routes, suffering hardships and enduring perils from wild beasts and wilder men.”

The pioneers, often but not always men, are the heroes of the History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi. Grafton wrote, “It would be exceedingly instructive for the families of our present day to make a visit to the old families of the pioneers…one would almost feel that he had gone up with Moses into the mount.” He continued, “The young families of our own day should endeavor with all the heart to catch the spirit of those former days.” Grafton saw in the pioneers models in church discipline and moral purity whose example he urged his contemporaries to follow.

The zeal and character of the pioneer missionaries continued, Grafton believed, through the work of presbyterian pastor-educators in the middle of the nineteenth century. Dr. John N. Waddel arrived in Jasper County, MS around 1841, was soon licensed to preach by the Mississippi Presbytery, led a school at Montrose while preaching throughout the region. In 1845 Waddel became professor of Latin and Greek at the University of Mississippi and served as Chancellor after the Civil War. Rev. A. R. Graves showed similar zeal in preaching and

---

874 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 16.
875 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 16.
877 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 75.
educating through his work at Zion Seminary. Graves arrived in Natchez in around 1833 and after serving in various places throughout the state, came to a small log church building called “Zion” in Covington County.878 With a burden to build up “this neglected field,” Graves oversaw construction of a brickyard, chapel, boarding house, dormitories, laboratory, and even a mill on the Okatoma river.879 “The curriculum included the languages: Greek, latin, and French; Ancient and Modern History, higher mathematics, rhetoric, science, art and music. All this was offered free to those unable to pay tuition, excepting music and art.”880 Financial ruin brought by the Civil War, along with a devastating fire after the war, brought Zion Seminary to an abrupt end.881 Grafton believed that the lives of these two presbyterian educators continued to bear fruit long after their deaths, providing examples for futures generations to follow.882

While the History does focus on men, emphasizing the work of ministers and ruling elders who were exclusively male, Grafton wanted Mississippi’s men and women to find inspiration in his book. He included stories of female piety to encourage Mississippi’s presbyterian women. One memorable example came from the Baptists. In 1795, three leaders of an early Baptist church in Jefferson County were forced into hiding on the Bayou Pierre River from Spanish officials who threatened to send them to silver mines in Mexico for participating in protestant worship. They hoped to flee to South Carolina but had no supplies for their journey. Grafton picked up the story, “Not a man was found who was willing to incur the penalty of aiding and abetting in the escape of the refugees….But again God provides. There was living in the neighborhood a courageous Christian woman, that bore the name of the ancient Chloe.”883

---

878 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 70.
882 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 76.
Chloe said, “Give me a good horse with a man’s saddle and I will go in spite of the Spaniards and they may catch me if they can.” 884 Chloe dressed in a man’s clothing, “mounted the horse in cavalier style and dashed away,” and succeeded in her quest to help the persecuted Baptists, returning home, “without a jostle or a jar.” 885 Another model woman, this time a presbyterian, was Mary Jane Stewart, the daughter Rev. Thomas Stuart, an early missionary to the Indians of Northeast Mississippi. After becoming a widow only five years into her marriage, Mary Jane attended her father in his missionary efforts, waiting on him, “in the vigor of his manhood and the weariness of old age.” 886 Grafton wrote, “we are glad to introduce Miss Mary Jane to all the young girls of Mississippi. Let no girl, young or old, say or think that there is no field open to her or she can use the talent that God has given her. The field is just at hand and all around you. It may be the flesh and blood call from those who love you most. Take heed and begin to serve while the door is open.” 887 Grafton understood the impact of devotion like Mary Jane’s firsthand. His own daughter Sue never married and stayed with him in Union Church. 888 He also devoted sections to presbyterian schools for women, including Corona College in Corinth, MS, Silliman College in Clinton, LA, Chickasaw Female College in Pontotoc, MS, Belhaven College in Jackson, MS and the Synodical College at Holly Springs, MS. 889 He named 11 women from Mississippi’s presbyterian churches who served on mission fields in Africa, China, Korea, Mexico, and Japan, including one “colored” woman, Althea Brown Edmiston, who served in Africa. 890 Grafton also included a biographical sketch of one of his favorite examples of

884 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 250.
885 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 250.
886 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 52.
887 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 52.
888 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), third page.
Mississippi presbyterian womanhood, Mary McDougald McEachern, the grandmother of Governor Earl Brewer. He had told her story in his 1915 address at the Synod Training School on Pioneer Presbyterians. This time he added even more details. He described “a great political gathering at Union Church” in which Governor Earl Brewer was to speak.\(^{891}\) He introduced Brewer by describing his grandmother, who saw seven presbyterian churches planted in north Mississippi and left behind 121 descendants.\(^{892}\) Grafton concluded his opening remarks by saying, “one of the best things that can be said about him to commend him to you is, that he is the grandson of Mary McDougald McEachern.”\(^{893}\) Brewer took the stage and voiced appreciation for Grafton’s words, but then issued a correction, “The preacher…said… ‘That my grandmother left behind 121 children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.’ The fact is there are 150 of us.”\(^{894}\) These women shared a legacy of sacrificial service to the church that Grafton hoped future Presbyterians would imitate.

Throughout the book, Grafton offered moral and theological applications from the events described. Sermonic applications are sprinkled throughout the manuscript, illustrating God’s covenant with Abraham, the importance of family worship, and the dangers of dancing, gambling, and the theatre.\(^{895}\) He saw in the Monroe Church of Northeast Mississippi an example of different types of conversions, some being brought to Christian faith later in life at an identifiable time and place, others always possessing that faith without an extraordinary experience.\(^{896}\) He also saw examples of God’s promises to the children of Christian believers, whom he called “covenant children.”\(^{897}\) He believed that the same hand of providence that

---

\(^{891}\) “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 343.

\(^{892}\) “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 342-343.

\(^{893}\) “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 343.


\(^{896}\) “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 44.

\(^{897}\) “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 45.
guided the lives of Old Testament characters like Joseph, Zerbable, and Cyrus also guided the Colbert family and the Monroe mission to the Chickasaws.\textsuperscript{898} He concluded, “Surely this sketch [is] of very great interest in the study of it will reward anyone in learning the lessons of God’s providence.”\textsuperscript{899} For Grafton, these stories were not merely about Mississippi Presbyterians, they revealed truths about God and his abiding moral order.

While Grafton’s \textit{History} studied Mississippi’s Presbyterians, he situated their growth and expansion within the broader context of Church history. The book, “shows how our own Synod of Mississippi is bound up with the whole church of God through ancient and modern days.”\textsuperscript{900} He spoke appreciatively of other protestant denominations. The Congregationalist Rev. Samuel Swayze founded the first protestant church in the Southwest, which fed into the region’s earliest presbyterian churches.\textsuperscript{901} He noted how much Mississippi owed to the Methodists.\textsuperscript{902} He even had some nice things to say about the 17th century Roman Catholic missionary Father Anthony Davion, whom he labeled a “hero of the cross.”\textsuperscript{903} While he admitted that the growth of the presbyterian church had been slow compared to other denominations, he was not discouraged. He believed that the Presbyterians were not racing the other denominations but were in their “allotted place doing the work of the king…as the rear guard of the army.”\textsuperscript{904}

Grafton’s understanding of the Presbyterians’ place among Mississippi’s Christian denominations reveals his foundational conviction about presbyterian history, and of all of life, that history is the unfolding of the providence of God. He believed that the events described in

\textsuperscript{898} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 47.
\textsuperscript{899} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 48.
\textsuperscript{900} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, viii.
\textsuperscript{901} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 3-6.
\textsuperscript{902} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 251-254.
\textsuperscript{903} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 7. See also Cabaniss, \textit{Life and Thought of a Country Preacher}, 140. Winter, \textit{Citadels of Zion}, 1:177.
\textsuperscript{904} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 493.
the *History* revealed not only people’s actions but God’s decree. The word “providence” in its various forms appears over 50 times in the manuscript. Grafton was raised on the presbyterian Westminster Shorter Catechism, which he subscribed at his ordination and taught throughout his ministry. Question 11 of that catechism asks, “What are God’s works of providence?” The answer reads, “God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.”

Without denying the agency or responsibility of the people and institutions he described, Grafton believed that their existence and actions were preserved and governed by a sovereign God. Grafton saw God’s providential hand throughout the circumstances he described in the book, those that brought great inspiration and joy as well as those he lamented.

As he surveyed the introduction and growth of the presbyterian church in Mississippi, all of which he believed to be ordered by God’s providence, Dr. Grafton told a story of measured progress. Presbyterians had not experienced a continuous ascent, “The fact however must not be forgotten that in spite of all our progress we have fallen very short of what we might have done.” Shortfalls notwithstanding, “there has been continued development in all lines. Education, Publication, Ministerial Relief, Home Missions, and Foreign Missions have one by one all received the benefactions of our people….Indeed we can scarcely imagine appreciate the magnitude of the work and the field into which the old Presbytery of Mississippi has developed.”

---

905 *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as Adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America*, Shorter Catechism #11, p. 362-363.
Grafton’s progress narrative for the presbyterian church mirrored the story one of his contemporaries, Mississippi historian Dunbar Rowland, told about the state as a whole. Rowland’s two volume, *History of Mississippi: The Heart of the South* was published in 1925. Ted Ownby writes that Rowland, “writing in the 1920s as Mississippi’s state archivist, was…optimistic about Mississippi’s history as a story of growth and various forms of improvement…he wrote as someone who believed that the majority of Mississippi history was about progress.” Like Rowland’s optimistic account of development in Mississippi, Grafton described a church that had grown substantially from its pioneer days at the turn of the nineteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth. In the book’s conclusion, Grafton wrote, “She [the old Presbytery of Mississippi] sits at the end of over a hundred years surveying with pardonable pride the children of her love.”

In addition to a narrative arc of progress and development, Grafton’s *History* shared with contemporary white historians in the South the presupposition of a racially based social hierarchy ruled by whites. Fitzugh Brundage argues that postbellum southern white historians “littered their austere monographs on legislation, legal cases, and political contests with the conventional language and assumptions of white supremacy.” The *History* evidences similar assumptions in its discussion of “The Colored Presbyterian Church”.

Grafton began this chapter by emphasizing the distinctions between the races. “From the very beginning of things, the instinct of race has kept the races apart. White, yellow, red, brown, black races do not co mingle.” While science and philosophy gave no account of the origin of

---

the races, he believed that racial divisions were introduced after the biblical flood. “When Noah and his family went into the ark, evidently, they were of one race. Not long after they came out of the ark, the curse of God came down on the family of Ham; and Canaan, his youngest son, bears the consequences.” Grafton saw God’s hand in these distinctions, which made should not oppose. “The white race should keep its own purity and so should every other race. This is the divine order.” Between these divinely ordered distinctions, Grafton also saw a divinely ordered hierarchy. “Any student of history that looks into this question, will see that the white races have a mission in this world to fulfill that has never been committed to the black races, or to the red, or to the brown.”

The two principles of distinction and hierarchy led pioneer churches in the Natchez district “to put up separate buildings for their black people.” Congregations in other parts of the state had “places in the white churches that were set apart for the blacks.” Grafton insisted that these divisions were not “done to foster the pride of white people or to humiliate the black people as if the white were better and the black the worse before God.” The pioneer preachers, “knew the scriptures too well to hold a position like that.” Instead, he believed that past generations of Presbyterians maintained these practices to honor the feelings of negro slaves who were “embarrassed when they came into the churches of the whites,” and “felt vastly more at home when they worshipped to themselves.” Grafton concluded, “clearly this was the right thing to do.”

914 Ibid.
915 Ibid.
916 Ibid.
917 Ibid.
918 Ibid.
919 Ibid.
920 Ibid.
921 Ibid.
While Grafton insisted upon distinction and hierarchy, he also believed that black and white Christians enjoyed brotherhood through their common faith. Prior to the Civil War, blacks had received the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper from white ministers. “At a communion service the elders would...serve the white people, and then the colored members at the same service with the same elements of bread and wine, out of the same plates and cups. And deep impressions were made of the undying brotherhood of men as they are united to Christ, the one living head.”

Later in the same chapter, Grafton addressed slavery in Mississippi. He wrote, “To speak of slavery in the Synod of Mississippi, we ought to know that it was an institution that was not peculiar to our state.” He described the laws that governed slavery for Hebrews in the Old Testament and then what he understood as a morally degenerate slavery among the Romans which continued “till by and by it was modified by the Christian religion.” Alluding to Deuteronomy 29:29, “the secret things belong to the LORD,” he admitted his own perplexity over the existence of slavery, writing, “Why, under the government of an Almighty God, an evil like this was allowed is one of the secret things.” And he credited Christianity with the abolition of the slave trade in Britain.

Despite this influence in Britain, slavery proliferated in the American South as “the cultivation of cotton, sugar and the rice plantations gave occupation to this pathetic race.” He described the experience of enslaved Africans in the middle passage as “attended with cruelties that were awful.” Perhaps thinking of the biblical prohibition against man-stealing, he believed

---

924 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 434.
925 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 434.
that Southern slavery “was blighted with the curse handed down from the slave raider and pirate: and so in the providence of God was doomed to destruction.”\textsuperscript{929} He went on to say, “in cases too numerous to mention the master would prove to be a cruel man and he would treat his slaves with unfeeling severity.”\textsuperscript{930} However, citing a positive description of slavery by Rev. R. Q. Mallard of Midway, Georgia, he believed that “such instances do not prove that the general treatment accorded to the black man was cruel.”\textsuperscript{931} In particular, Grafton argued that “the Presbyterian church… [was] one of the great agencies to throw light and bring some relief to the black man.”\textsuperscript{932} Wealthy presbyterian planters “endeavored to make the type of slavery as near like the patriarchal form known in the Bible as possible, and to a great extent they succeeded.”\textsuperscript{933} Grafton’s portrayed race relations before and during the war largely, though not exclusively, as harmonious and contented. “Many beautiful stories could be told of the mutual devotion of the white and his slave during all this period. A colored boy growing up with his young master could always be relied on in times of danger.”\textsuperscript{934} Grafton believed that black slaves remained largely content and obedient to white masters even during the war. As the conflict raged, “the wonder of the world was increased when they noted that the slaves, in whose behalf the war was waged, kept their mind quietly on the plow and the hoe in their masters’ plantations.”\textsuperscript{935}

Grafton approached race relations after emancipation with the same providentialist and paternalist outlook he applied to life before emancipation. When slavery was abolished, Grafton rejoiced in emancipation as “God’s great plan,” saying that it delivered the South from “a mighty

\textsuperscript{929} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 94.
\textsuperscript{930} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 435.
\textsuperscript{931} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 439.
\textsuperscript{932} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 435.
\textsuperscript{933} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 436.
\textsuperscript{934} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 436.
\textsuperscript{935} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 438.
burden” and that some “blessed fruits” of the institution remain.936 According to John David Smith, it was not uncommon after the war for Southern whites to extoll the virtues of the slave system without advocating a return to chattel slavery.937 Grafton fit this mold. Segregation was one element of slavery that he hoped and expected would continue. It would be, “false philanthropy...to try to blend the races,” which were distinct by divine order.938 He wrote, “Sure enough, there has always been a social gulf between the white race and black race, and it would be unwise for men ever to try to ignore it.”939

Honoring the “race instinct,” was, he believed, what led the Mississippi Synod to organize the Presbytery of Ethel for Mississippi’s black Presbyterians in 1890. He lamented, “it was always a matter of distress when we attended the meetings of our church court to see our colored preachers and elders away off on the back seat or congregated in little corners. They could never feel that they were on equality with one another in church rights and privileges before God. So, the time had evidently come for the colored people to stand for themselves and worship together in their own churches.”940 He saw the organization of a separate Presbytery for blacks as a divinely entrusted responsibility to the descendants of the slaves.941 The church went on to organize the General Synod of United States and Canada, comprised of five “colored presbyteries,” in 1898, which was reorganized and renamed Snedecor Memorial Synod in 1917.942 Grafton hoped that these developments would eventually lead to the organization of a “General Assembly of the negro Presbyterian Church in the United States.”943 But that was not to

942 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 432.
be. Snedecor Memorial Synod was dissolved by the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1951 in an attempt to integrate black presbyterian ministers and churches into white presbyteries.\(^\text{944}\) While acknowledging the evils of the middle passage and of some slaveholders, Grafton believed that the presbyterian church had been a positive force for good among blacks. He hoped that race-based distinctions and hierarchies, which he believed came from God, would be maintained and that Christians of both races would unite in common gospel causes as brothers without upsetting the divinely instituted order.

Grafton expressed similarly paternalistic and providentialist views when discussing Mississippi’s Indian population. Indian missions were one of two main divers that brought Presbyterianism to Mississippi territory and the natives were not always welcoming to the white missionaries. Grafton wrote that Indians’ savage attacks or unwillingness to embrace Christian missionaries continued “until they were subdued by General Andrew Jackson."\(^\text{945}\) While more than a century had passed since the pioneer Indian Missions, he felt the need to remind his readers not to “suppose that the nature of the Indian cannot be brought under the power of the principles of the gospel."\(^\text{946}\) For proof, Grafton went on to include a firsthand testimony from an Indian chief who embraced Christianity. “Let no man doubt that the gospel has power to convert the heathen. I was a heathen man and it converted me.”\(^\text{947}\) He wrote, “It is a joyous thing to any Christian man to see how the Choctaws and Chickasaws developed so impressively under the teachings of our missionaries.”\(^\text{948}\)

\(^{944}\) Winter, *Citadels of Zion*, 1:420.
\(^{945}\) “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 41.
\(^{946}\) “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 494.
\(^{947}\) “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 495.
\(^{948}\) “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 64.
His positive view of the gospel’s influence on the Indians did not keep him from supporting their expulsion.

The schoolboys nowadays debate with great fervor the justice or the injustice of removing these tribes away from their Mississippi lands. But it was the very best thing to be done. The United States government has never oppressed the Indians. On the contrary the Indians have always been regarded as the wards of the government. The Choctaws and Chickasaw saw that it was necessary for them to go. The Anglo-Saxon whites were pressing upon them from all sides and they cannot hold their place under the pressure. The civilization and habits of the white man will always drive out the Indians.\textsuperscript{949}

He continued, “The Babylonian, Greek and Roman conquerers never showed such liberality as our government did to the Red men.”\textsuperscript{950} He concluded, “So the school boys will all have to except what seems to be the proper answer to the question they discuss. It was the ordering of God’s providence and the best thing that could be done for the red man and for the white man.”\textsuperscript{951} He reiterated, “The government dealt as fairly as they could with the Indians and gave them ample renumeration for the lands which they surrendered. But the agents of the government were not always kind and carrying out the policy of the government. The Indians were very slow to move.”\textsuperscript{952}

Illuminating as Grafton’s discussions of race may be, except for his chapter on “The Colored Presbyterian Church,” they typically function as context for the main story Grafton sought to tell, which was of the leaders, churches, and institutions of Presbyterianism in Mississippi. He told these stories with the intent to inspire his readers and to shape their behavior. One noteworthy example came from Mississippi Synod’s most renowned member, the

\textsuperscript{949} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 48-49.
\textsuperscript{950} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 49.
\textsuperscript{951} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 49.
\textsuperscript{952} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 59.
minister of First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans, Benjamin Morgan Palmer. Presbyterian churches in New Orleans belonged to the Mississippi Synod until 1901. In 1891, the license for the Louisiana state lottery corporation was set to expire. “A great meeting was held in New Orleans...to stir up the heart of the people and warn them to use all efforts to arrest the spirit of public gambling.”\textsuperscript{953} B. M. Palmer, who had pastored the First Presbyterian Church since 1856, gave the “crowning address” at the meeting, which, according to Grafton, “struck the right chord at the right time and...broke the backbone of the lottery.”\textsuperscript{954} Dr. Grafton celebrated his counterpart in the Mississippi Synod at numerous points in his history, including lengthy quotations from his address on New Orleans Presbyterians in 1873 and a funeral sermon delivered in 1878.\textsuperscript{955} Grafton also devoted an entire chapter to Dr. Palmer’s call, which Palmer did not take, to serve as the Chancellor of the Southwestern Presbyterian University at Clarksville, TN in the 1870s.\textsuperscript{956} He saw in this episode the strength of the pastoral tie to a congregation and the right exercise of church authority through the presbytery. He wrote, “when a body of men filled with a sense of responsibility to God, when they solemnly call on God to be their guide and direct them in the matter before them, we are bound to conclude that their reasonings must be divinely guided and that their conclusion is the will of God. Surely God will not lead his people astray.”\textsuperscript{957} Here again, Grafton retold the past to instruct and inform his contemporaries.

In addition to great figures like Palmer, Grafton gave special attention to the educational institutions Presbyterians founded and served in Mississippi. Nine of the fifty chapter are titled

\textsuperscript{953} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 198.
\textsuperscript{954} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 198.
\textsuperscript{955} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 154-158, 166-169.
\textsuperscript{956} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 475-480.
\textsuperscript{957} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 477-478.
with reference to schools and many other chapters describe presbyterian educational efforts throughout the state. The Presbyterian Church was “on the front line in educational work,” and the support of its people had been “unstinted and generous.” He summarized, “the Presbyterian church has organized and supported quite a number of church schools. To wit, in the earlier years, Oakland College, Zion Seminary, Montrose Academy, Enon High School, Silliman Female College and Mount Salus; and then in later years, Chamberlain Hunt Academy, Holly Springs Synodical College, Chickasaw Female College, French Camp Academy and Belhaven College.”

While Dr. Grafton delighted in chronicling the growth of presbyterian institutions and the activities of great presbyterian men and women, he was not oblivious to areas of concern. In particular, as he had lamented in his “Message” in the Mississippi Visitor, he perceived a demographic shift away from the country to more developed towns that threatened the health of Presbyterianism in rural areas. He loved the old country churches. And he held up the old country schools, many of which were forced to close after the Civil War, as exemplars of academic and moral instruction and lamented their departure. He believed that the country life in which he was raised in rural Madison County and largely maintained in Union Church conducive to more robust Sabbath observance and catechesis. But things were changing. “At this late day when we hear the roar and hum of wheels on the gravel road on the Sabbath day for profit and pleasure we feel that the Fourth Commandment is woefully violated.” Grafton praised nearby Alcorn A&M for its rural environment, “away from the contaminating influences

960 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 80.
961 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 82.
of city life.”  
In 1911, he wrote that over 70 families had left the Union Church community in the last 30 years. With new environs came new religious expectation. “Our bright young girls go off now and then and attend preaching in the cities. They come back and sometimes shrug their shoulders at the long sermons, but the country preacher goes right straight ahead.”

Church statistics from Jefferson County, interestingly, do not show the population shift Grafton lamented. Jefferson County, MS reported 377 members of the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1890, 339 members in 1916, and 383 members in 1926. Church membership records are not always updated with consistency and accuracy. Nonetheless, the census shows that the Presbyterian Church maintained its numbers and even experienced some growth throughout Grafton’s ministry in the county. If many presbyterian families left the Union Church community over these years, others moved into Jefferson County replace them, if not in Union Church, then perhaps in another, more developed part of the county like Fayette, MS.

Statistics notwithstanding, Grafton wrote in a world, even in rural Jefferson County, that differed dramatically from the one in which he began his ministry. Grafton rode a horse for pastoral visits and church meetings at least until 1916, 43 years into his ministry when he was 70 years old. Shortly after his election as General Assembly Moderator in 1916, children from the Union Church High School “united and bought their teacher a Ford touring car.” This kind gift did not keep Grafton from lamenting the degenerative influence of proliferating “fine gravel

---

963 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 442.
964 Grafton, “A Sketch of the Old Scotch Settlement at Union Church,” 270.
965 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate in a Country Church, 8.
967 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate, 9.
968 Grafton, A Forty-Three Year Pastorate, 9.
roads” when he wrote in 1927. Growing towns and improving technology were a mixed blessing for him, and for Mississippi’s Presbyterians.

Beyond leaders and institutions, Grafton’s book is full of idiosyncratic anecdotes of varying relevance to the development of Presbyterianism in Mississippi. He devoted a chapter to the Revolutionary War battle of King’s Mountain in York County South Carolina, complete with an anonymous poem about the battle. Dr. Grafton concluded the chapter with apology for the “little digression from Mississippi Presbyterianism” because the Patriots described were members of the “old Synod of the Carolinas,” from whom Mississippi Presbyterianism developed. He wrote about Father Montgomery catching a raccoon on his missionary journey down the Natchez Trace in 1800. It was “the best meat he had ever tasted.” He wrote of “French Nancy” who was captured by an Italian man living among the Chickasaws whom she later married. Grafton did not make any connection to Presbyterianism, but simply noting, “the study of the nations is one of profound interest.” Grafton included a description of John A. Murrell, “one of the most noted outlaws and blood thirsty murderers that ever lived in this country.” Murrell posed as a Methodist evangelist to presbyterian missionary Father Stewart, and would have shared a series of religious meetings with Stewart if not for the objection of one suspecting ruling elder. But Murrell, after “preaching” a series of revival meetings for the Methodists, used his guise as a preacher to steal a horse that was never seen again. Another striking event occurred in Yazoo City in the 1840s, during the ministry of Dr. McInnis. The Presbyterians there did not have a building and worshipped in a carpenter’s shop. The shop

969 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 14, 80, 91.
971 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 27.
972 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 52-54.
973 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 56.
owner, Captain Hunter, kept a bear he caught in a closet in the shop, right behind McInnis’ makeshift pulpit.\textsuperscript{975} While Dr. McInnis preached about the devil, the bear loosened the lock and opened the door, bringing an abrupt end to the service.\textsuperscript{976}

The inclusion of anecdotes like these makes the exclusion of other more noteworthy events, places, and people interesting. The Civil War loomed large in Grafton’s personal experience as a soldier in the Confederacy and citizen of Mississippi. He wrote, “the darkest period in the history of Mississippi was the era of the Civil War.”\textsuperscript{977} That said, the war does not dominate the \textit{History}. The book lacks much engagement with battles or prominent generals—Robert E. Lee is named three times and Stonewall Jackson only twice. Neither did Grafton give a defense of the Southern position or devote much time to promoting a Lost Cause mythology. He most often referred to the War as a source of trials and decline for religious, academic, and economic institutions. It led to the decimation of Presbyterian churches and schools, the loss of session records, and the decline of congregations. The higher religious life of the antebellum South could have remained if not for the war.\textsuperscript{978} He said that he and his fellow Southerners fought for the defense of constitutional rights.\textsuperscript{979} He wrote admiringly of fellow confederate veterans, like the Presbyterian preacher turned confederate private Robert McLain.\textsuperscript{980} Perhaps surprisingly, the Confederate veteran did not mince words when he described the cause of the war, “the whole country knew that slavery was the occasion for the outbreak of the great war.”\textsuperscript{981}

Another surprising omission in the 658-page \textit{History} is Jackson’s First Presbyterian Church. While he made appreciative reference to various ministers, ruling elders, and citizens in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[977] “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 454.
\item[979] “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 409.
\item[981] “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 438.
\end{footnotes}
the capitol of Jackson, MS, Grafton gave no attention to the founding of the First Presbyterian Church there.\textsuperscript{982} In fact, discussion of urban areas often occurred in the context of a lament for the rural churches. Many old country churches were forced to close with the development of new roads and burgeoning town life. People moved to towns and cities to gain more advantages for their children. “It is always very saddening when the day comes that the old country church must surrender. The law is inevitable.”\textsuperscript{983} The same could be said for Meridian, which in 1920 had more residents than Jackson. Grafton simply noted, “The churches in southeast Mississippi have ordinarily been small. This has been the case until recently when the big churches of Meridian, Laurel, Hattiesburg, and the Coast churches have sprung up.”\textsuperscript{984}

Like the Civil War and Mississippi’s urban congregations, Grafton also gave sparse attention to events and people from the twentieth century. His chapter 48 discussed Palmer Orphanage, which was chartered in 1898.\textsuperscript{985} His descriptions of presbyterian synodical schools like Belhaven and catalogue of presbyterian teachers in the state schools explore events and people in the first quarter of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{986} He also received historical sketches from some congregations which were founded towards the beginning of that century, like Leland (1908), Cleveland (1915), and Rosedale (1921).\textsuperscript{987} These inclusions of twentieth century institutions and individuals certainly represent a minority of the content in Grafton’s \textit{History}. His emphasis on Mississippi Presbyterians’ earlier history was consistent his purpose from the outset of the project to “write up the pioneer churches as well as the pioneer men.”\textsuperscript{988} He primarily

\textsuperscript{982} For a history of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, MS see Sean Michael Lucas, \textit{Blessed Zion: First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi 1837-2012} (Jackson, MS: First Presbyterian Church, 2012).
\textsuperscript{983} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 68.
\textsuperscript{984} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 65.
\textsuperscript{985} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 487-489.
\textsuperscript{986} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 471-474, 484-486.
\textsuperscript{987} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 425-427.
\textsuperscript{988} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, vi.
wrote to inspire his readers to zealous Christian conviction and conduct and called upon the nineteenth century rather than the twentieth to do so.

With these subjects left unaddressed and many more given ample attention, Dr. Grafton used the last three pages of his book—chapter 50—to bring the work to a conclusion. Even though its development may have appeared slow when compared to other denominations, the Presbyterian church was standing in its God-appointed place, “going down into the root of things” to feed on the doctrines of God’s word and equip “its men and women, and boys and girls…to do anything that God commands.”\footnote{\textit{“History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,”} 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 493.} As a consequence, Presbyterians faced “the coming future better equipped for service than ever, and wiser from all the experience we have had.”\footnote{\textit{“History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,”} 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 493.} Further, even if the church’s development had been slow, “there has been continued development on all lines. Education, Publication, Ministerial Relief, Home Missions and Foreign Missions have one by one all received the benefactions of our people.”\footnote{\textit{“History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,”} 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 493.} Mississippi Presbyterians had their shortcomings too. “A great part of our natural territory we have not occupied and it would be wise for us not to say that we have done our best.”\footnote{\textit{“History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,”} 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 494.} Thus, at times they had cause to “soar in the heavens like an eagle in his glory” and at other times “sit like a drooping dove and mourn.”\footnote{\textit{“History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,”} 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 494.} But he took heart that the Presbyterian church’s “principles are solid as a rock. Its men have met opposition from the very beginning and have never given way and, please God, we never shall give up. Forward march, is the old order and we shall pursue it to the end.”\footnote{\textit{“History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,”} 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 494.} With this charge, he finished the book by quoting Henry M. Smith, a nineteenth century minister in the Synod, who wrote that Mississippi Presbyterians “may be insignificant as
the raindrop on the mountainside,” yet that drop will join others, form rivulets, and join the deep ocean, “till the grace of God will sweep over society like the tide to the ocean…till the knowledge of God shall fill and cover the earth: till the time shall come when rejoicing angels shall declare, ‘It is finished. The kingdoms of this world have become the empire of our God.”

The stories, perspectives, and interpretations woven throughout the manuscript read like a family history. In its pages, “the Grand Old Man of Mississippi,” as one biographer labelled Grafton, tells the story of his presbyterian family from his particular theological and cultural frameworks. For Grafton, the History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi, was not only a family story, but his family story. His own grandfather, Thomas Grafton, was a founding member at Pine Ridge, the oldest existing presbyterian church in Mississippi. Grafton preached to congregants at Union Church who had the pioneer Father Montgomery as their minister until 1848. Writing of Father Montgomery, he said, “He died in 1848, but his name still lives in the memory of our oldest people who speak of him with deepest admiration.”

He wrote not only as a chronicler of the pioneers, but as their living link to the present, reaching back from the 1920s to the church’s earliest foundations. He sought to relay the story of his physical and spiritual ancestors to the next generations of Mississippi Presbyterians.

Years of work, advertising, personal interest, and writing finally produced a complete draft of the History. He finished the massive 658-page type-written manuscript, divided into 50 chapters, by February 1927. He wrote in its introduction, “We have presented this work to our Synod’s committee and we now give it into the hands of the Eastman Foundation for

---

995 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, 495.
publication.” What should have been the book’s penultimate triumph proved instead to be the beginning of its descent into obscurity. Grafton’s *History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi* was never published.

None of the admittedly few authors who have written on Grafton know why his *History* was not published. Grafton appears to have been confident in February 1927 that he was giving it to the Foundation “for publication.” His biographer Allen Cabaniss wrote, “Why the History was not published by the Eastman Memorial Foundation is not exactly known. The collapse of the project was a great disappointment to Dr. Grafton, as it is a great loss to the synod and to the state.” Years later, Dr. Grafton’s grandson, Rev. Thomas H. Grafton, longtime professor at Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, VA, wrote “the only bitterness I ever saw in him was when he was invited by some wealthy person to write the history of the Synod of Mississippi, which he dictated to Aunt Mary Scott. But they never published it. I think his style was too florid and homiletical for them.” An Eastman Foundation trustee told him a year before he finished writing that by his *History*, “the value and kind of service that the Foundation hopes in part to contribute to the advancement of learning will be judged.” Perhaps Grafton’s work fell short of the Foundation’s high aspirations. In 1929, he wrote to a relative who was compiling a family history, “I myself have written a history of the Synod of Mississippi, and maybe by and by we can swap books.” When he died on August 1, 1934, the manuscript stayed behind in Union Church and remained there for decades under the care of a watchful relative.

---

998 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, vi.
999 “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, vi.
1001 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), third page.
1002 Deavours to Grafton. 14 January, 1926, Eastman Memorial Foundation Records.
1003 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), third page.
1004 C. W. Grafton letter to “Mag,” June 24, 1929. A photocopy of this letter is in this author’s possession.
Grafton’s *History* remained unpublished, but it was not totally forgotten. It seems likely that the statewide research correspondence, regular updates at Synod meetings, and articles in *The Mississippi Visitor* would have kept the work on the minds of some Mississippians. Fifteen years after the history’s completion, Allen Cabaniss, then serving as the presbyterian minister at Columbia, MS, devoted 17 pages to “The Unpublished History” in his biography of C. W. Grafton, *The Life and Thought of a Country Preacher*. Cabaniss reported that Grafton’s two daughters, Miss Susie Grafton and Mrs. J. L. Scott, had the unpublished manuscript in their possession in Union Church, MS. Grafton’s biographer lamented that the *History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi* had not been published. He wrote, “perhaps this regrettable failure may yet be remedied if the synod and other interested parties should again devote some attention to it and take steps to have it edited and sent to press. It is not likely, however, that it will ever be printed.”

The manuscript stayed at Union Church until his daughter, Mary Grafton Scott, died in 1952. Thomas H. Grafton recalled, “Aunt Mary wouldn’t let the manuscript get away from her but after her death I persuaded the family to let me send it to the Historical Foundation at Montreat where it now reposes.” After almost half a century, the History moved again. Ownership was transferred to Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA by the Presbyterian Historical Society at Montreat, NC in 2007. Columbia Seminary now possesses the only complete copy, it is typewritten copy on foolscap paper, not Grafton’s original.

---

1008 Thomas H. Grafton diary (provided by Elizabeth Greer), third page.
1010 Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, C. Benton Kline, Jr. Special Collections and Archives, John Bulow Campbell Library, Columbia Theological Seminary. “Foolscap” paper, like legal paper, is 8.5” x 13.5”.
While the *History* remained unpublished, copies were made in different forms. Rev. Al Freundt, Professor of Church History at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS, made a few photocopies of Grafton’s original manuscript. Freundt also supervised the first electronic copy, typed into a word document by his secretary.\(^{1011}\) Mississippi Department of Archives and History owns a microfilm copy of Grafton’s original manuscript. Allen Cabaniss possessed his own type-written copy which now resides in the collection of his papers at the University of Mississippi.\(^{1012}\) With the exception of the Columbia Theological Seminary manuscript, all copies, including microfilm, lack pages 422 and 433-444, which respectively contain a brief preface to the section on Pine Ridge Presbyterian Church and the Trimble Sketches, describing the prominent ancestry of a member of Ebenezer Church in Jefferson County. The whereabouts of Grafton’s original manuscript, from which the various photo and typed copies were made, are unknown.

The *History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi* has received little attention in secondary literature beyond Cabaniss’ biography. Priscilla Lowery relied heavily on the work in her 1974 Master’s Thesis *The Introduction of Presbyterianism into Mississippi*.\(^{1013}\) In acknowledging her debt to Grafton, she wrote, “Although Grafton’s history in many points is characterized by lack of objectivity, archaic expression, and sermonizing, it nevertheless contains a wealth of material taken from the primary documents and from the author’s own personal contacts with the original Presbyterian families of Mississippi.”\(^{1014}\) Milton Winter devotes an entire chapter to Grafton in

\(^{1011}\) Rev. Michael Herrin of Port Gibson, MS obtained a word document of Grafton’s manuscript, believed to be typed by Dr. Freundt’s secretary from his copies of the manuscript.

\(^{1012}\) Allen Cabaniss Collection. Archives and Special Collections. J.D. Williams Library. The University of Mississippi. Oxford, MS. Cabaniss’ typewritten copy has different pagination than Grafton’s original.


the second of his three volume history of Mississippi Presbyterians. Winter cites Grafton’s work more than any other in his thorough study. Beyond these works, only a handful of ecclesiastical and academic authors have mentioned or cited Grafton, his history, or his archived manuscripts.

While Dr. Grafton’s work has rarely been cited by historians, his approach to the History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi reflects priorities of historical scholarship that obtained prior to a significant shift in the 1960s. Ellen Fitzpatrick describes the new history as “rejecting a long tradition in American historical writing that viewed the past primarily as a story of formal politics and elites.” She continues, “it not only found a place in American history for the experience of ordinary men and women; it also stressed the centrality of previously ignored groups to the drama of the American past. Where history had once been written from the top down—that is, by focusing on the determinative behavior of elites—it would now be written from the bottom up, from a foundation built on the lives of common people.” Grafton’s History favored the old priorities for leaders and the records—in his case, session, presbytery, and synod records—left behind by those in authority. Unlike practitioners of the new history, he emphasized ideas, character, and ideals as agents of historical change more than social

---


1018 Fitzpatrick, History’s Memory, 3.
movements or economic forces.\textsuperscript{1019} That said, Fitzpatrick questions the strict division between the old and new history.\textsuperscript{1020} And Grafton’s anecdotes from other contributors throughout the state move his History beyond key ministers and church assembly deliverances to give some sense of the presbyterian experience in Mississippi from the bottom up. Finally, Grafton conforms to a trend observed by Fitzpatrick that “during the late nineteenth century, the boundary lines between amateur and professional historians proved far more porous than they would be subsequently.”\textsuperscript{1021} He was a pastor with no graduate training in history. But he also contributed to historical literature in Mississippi, even through the Historical Society’s official journal. “The work of amateur historians was thus widely known within the discipline, and it occupied a visible place among the ever growing body of literature examining the American past from fresh perspectives.”\textsuperscript{1022}

Grafton’s History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi has multiple similarities with popular histories of the United States written in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gregory Pfitzer describes some of the goals of popular histories written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in his Popular History and the Literary Marketplace. “Joel and Esther Steele in Barnes’ Popular History of the United States (1875) announced that their volume was not intended for antiquarians, students, or scholars merely but for the “general reading public” who needed guidance in the ways of patriotism and citizenship. They believed that a noteworthy “popular history” must produce a “truer reverence for the past, a purer patriotism for the present and a more hopeful outlook for the future.”\textsuperscript{1023} These goals aligned exactly with Grafton’s. After

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[1019] Fitzpatrick, History’s Memory, 4.
\item[1020] Fitzpatrick, History’s Memory, 6.
\item[1021] Fitzpatrick, History’s Memory, 29.
\item[1022] Fitzpatrick, History’s Memory, 30.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
describing the Revolutionary War Battle of King’s Mountain, he wrote, “Stories like these should stir the hearts of men. We don’t wonder for a moment at the love of these old Patriot fathers for the government which was formed as a tribute to their sufferings in flesh and blood.”1024 He continued, “All our readers will pardon this little digression from Mississippi Presbyterianism. The apology is that we are the descendants of that body of Presbyterian fathers that stood so bravely for liberty in the dark days of the Revolution.”1025 Grafton also employed the stylistic approach of popular historians. Pfitzer observes, “privileging narration and an effusive literary style over dispassionate prose, these writers possessed rhetorical gifts that were valued by many middle-class readers who viewed fiction and history as inextricably linked.”1026 While Dr. Grafton may not have shared the rhetorical gifts of some of these writers, he did share their effusive literary style and employed a homiletical tone. Further, like Grafton, popular historians sought to shape the ambitions and morality of their readers through their works.

“Popularizing in this sense meant reducing history to a moral drama through the use of various literary devices such as second-person narration or the present tense to reflect on ‘our personal destiny, our ambition, our moral worth.’”1027

Pfitzer concludes his study of popular history in 1920. He observes, “As the definition of what constituted history changed toward the end of the nineteenth century, idealistic systems gave way to a cult of objectivity that demanded adherence to uncompromising standards of truth.”1028 It is at least possible that Grafton’s History fell as a casualty to this shift towards

---

1026 Pfitzer, Popular History and the Literary Marketplace, 4.
1028 Pfitzer, Popular History and the Literary Marketplace, 333.
objectivity in history, his work being too similar to popular histories that had fallen out of favor, especially with benefactors who hoped to make an impression with their first sponsored book. But this shift renders neither Grafton’s work, nor that of popular historians, unhelpful. Pfitzer’s approach to these public histories is instructive for approaching Grafton’s work. He writes, “I hope readers who remain cynical about these texts will at least come to recognize their value for the age in which they were written. If nothing else, historians should contextualize these popular histories as a way of understanding why they were important to nineteenth-century readers.”

The years between the first and second world wars also included a shift in historical writing, according to Peter Novick. Novick described history writing in the decades leading up to World War I as a “reciprocal relationship between the process of professionalization and the goal of objectivity.” Professional historians, inspired by a scientific approach to history practiced in German universities, pursued “a wider and deeper objectivity.” The objectivist professionalizing trend broke down as “a single, integrated edifice of historical truth” failed to coalesce and a new historical relativism developed. However, this trend also “lost ground to educationalists in schools, and to amateurs with the general reading public.” Grafton’s History fits neither in the professional objectivist group nor in the burgeoning historical relativist group. Rather, he was an amateur who wrote for a general audience to inspire as much as to inform. Novick writes that professional historians “opted for an austere style which would clear distinguish professional historical work from the florid effusions of the amateur historians.” Grafton embodied the florid and effusive history such professionals hoped to replace.

1029 Pfitzer, Popular History and the Literary Marketplace, 16.
1031 Novick, That Noble Dream, 169.
1032 Novick, That Noble Dream, 206, 250.
1033 Novick, That Noble Dream, 169.
1034 Novick, That Noble Dream, 21.
“Objectivity is held to be at grave risk when history is written for utilitarian purposes,” and Dr. Grafton wrote for explicitly utilitarian purposes.\textsuperscript{1035}

Grafton’s historical writing did not mimic the professional objectivists or the relativists of the early twentieth century. But his writing did have aspects in common with some American scholars of the late nineteenth century, men like Moses Coit Tyler, Theodore Roosevelt, and Henry Adams, who were not professionals, lacked formal training, and wrote history “in the leisure afforded by their own ample financial resources.”\textsuperscript{1036} Dr. Grafton did not have their financial resources. But he did share many of their traits as historians. They were, according to John Higham, “scientific historians; for they wrote as modern men appraising the past from the outside, observing events and individuals as loosely fragments of ongoing experience.”\textsuperscript{1037} The greatest commonality Grafton shared with these historians was their relish for “making moral judgments on men and events. The office of distributing praise and blame, and pronouncing the magisterial verdict of history, was always dear to their patrician hearts.”\textsuperscript{1038} While he did issue critical judgments of some past actors and events, Grafton mainly praised the pioneers, churches, and institutions that he believed best represented Mississippi Presbyterianism. He hoped that their examples would inspire future generations of Presbyterians in the state to lives of sacrificial service for Christ.

Grafton’s \textit{History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi} describes events that in direct and distant ways shaped the development of the Presbyterian church in his state. It should be read, like other histories of the period, not only to understand the events it describes, but to understand

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1035} Novick, \textit{That Noble Dream}, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{1037} Higham, \textit{History}, 156.
  \item \textsuperscript{1038} Higham, \textit{History}, 157.
\end{itemize}
the time in which it was written.\textsuperscript{1039} It shows how Mississippi Presbyterians molded their self-understanding and articulated “their aspirations for the region they call home.”\textsuperscript{1040} Grafton wanted Montgomery, Bullen, Palmer, and McEachern to inspire people, especially young people, to live nobler lives.\textsuperscript{1041} By showing them their past, he hoped to show them who they could be in the present, and chart their course for the future.

\textsuperscript{1039} Ownby, \textit{J. F. H. Claiborne and Dunbar Rowland}, 277.
\textsuperscript{1040} Brundage, \textit{Southern Past}, 3.
\textsuperscript{1041} “History of the Presbyterian Church in Mississippi,” 1927, Cornelius Washington Grafton Papers, vi.
CONCLUSION

Few ministers influenced the Southern Presbyterian Church in the twentieth century more than Union Theological Seminary church historian Ernest Trice Thompson. Thompson’s 214-word obituary, which was printed in the *Los Angeles Times* when he died in 1985, used the word “major” three times to describe his pastoral career.\(^\text{1042}\) Grafton’s obituary was not printed in the *Los Angeles Times*, but he and Thompson had much in common. Both were born and raised in Southern states, Grafton in Mississippi and Thompson in Texas. Both served as ordained presbyterian ministers for more than six decades, Grafton from 1873 to his death in 1934 and Thompson from 1917 to his death in 1985. Both served as Moderators of the Presbyterian Church, U.S. General Assembly, Grafton in 1916 in Orlando and Thompson in 1959 in Atlanta. And both wrote large church histories, Grafton’s *History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi* (unpublished, 1927) and Thompson’s three volume *Presbyterians in the South* (John Knox Press, 1973).

In other substantial ways, Grafton and Thompson could not have been more different. Grafton opposed reunion between the Northern and Southern Presbyterian churches, while Thompson was remembered as “a major architect of the reunion.”\(^\text{1043}\) Grafton delighted in and preached the Calvinistic doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith, while Thompson


“became a major force in steering his church from its once-theologically narrow, strongly
Calvinistic and anti-ecumenical positions to a more moderate outlook.” Grafton defended the
prevailing race-based social hierarchy as a moral necessity and preached against
“miscegenation” as a sin, while Thompson “supported the 1954 Supreme Court decision
desegregating the nation’s public schools.” Grafton promoted traditional gender roles, while
Thompson was “an outspoken advocate of the ordination of women.”

Though he served in a different state and came to prominence much later than his
predecessor, Thompson knew about Dr. Grafton. He had reported on Grafton’s work as
Moderator during the 1916 General Assembly. Thirty-seven years later in 1943, he reviewed
Grafton’s biography, the Life and Thought of a Country Preacher by Allen Cabaniss, for the
Union Seminary Review. His review of emphasized Grafton’s conservative bona fides and left
little doubt of his own disagreement with “The Grand Old Man of Mississippi.” He described Dr.
Grafton as “a Presbyterian of the old school, a thorough-going Calvinist…a strict
Sabbatarian…an unyielding opponent of worldliness…as well as modernism.” He noted
Grafton’s long sermons, their “strongly theological and exegetical content,” and quotations from
Latin authors and the Greek New Testament. He reminded readers that, “he taught that Negroes
belonged to an inferior race.” Thompson’s conclusion about the book and about Grafton could
hardly have been more pointed. “This is not a distinguished biography, in its subject matter or in
its presentation.” Despite living and serving in different time periods, Grafton and Thompson
represented opposing visions for the Southern Presbyterian Church. Thompson’s vision

---

1046 Ernest Trice Thompson, review of The Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, by Allen Cabaniss, Church
History 12, no. 1 (March 1943): 73-74, 73.
1047 Thompson, review of The Life and Thought of a Country Preacher, 74.
prevailed. In the decades following Grafton’s death, the Southern Presbyterian Church permitted a diversity of views on the inerrancy of Scripture, ordained women to the ministry, and eventually reunited with Northern Presbyterians in 1983.

Cornelius W. Grafton’s hopes for his beloved Southern Presbyterian Church were not fulfilled. However, his ministerial career and its literary remains do provide a window into one expression of Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that illuminates the religious beliefs and practices of that period. Grafton’s college, seminary, and early ministry years introduced his providential outlook on life and history as governed by an omnipotent God. This providential outlook included events, but also social structures, such as the race-based social hierarchy that prevailed long after emancipation. Further, Grafton’s belief in providence made history useful for the instruction of future generations of Mississippi Presbyterians, as he interpreted the past to inspire the young to live for God in the future.

Sources from Grafton’s time at the University of Mississippi and Columbia Theological Seminary, as well as his “Dr. Grafton’s Message” articles from the *Mississippi Visitor* show that his traditional and conservative understanding of Christianity, and of society generally, included aspirations for progress. He extolled the hopes of national progress in his valedictory and preached for ecclesiastical and spiritual advance in his earliest sermons. Further, his consistency with fundamentalism on subjects like inerrancy, religion and science, women, and urbanization moved beyond mere anti-modernism. To cultural critique he added positive hopes for life in rural communities and traditional homes, infused with the scriptural theology and piety of Presbyterianism.

Finally, this study of C. W. Grafton’s 61-year pastorate has shown the fundamentally religious character of his ministry. His sermons articulate this religious character with particular
clarity. The sermon, delivered in the context of a Christian worship service, was his primary means of communication and influence. Each Sunday, a collection of individuals sat for as long as an hour to hear what Dr. Grafton would say. How did he use that time? He used it to urge conversion to faith in Jesus Christ and practical, comprehensive obedience to the commands of Scripture. When he addressed social or political subjects in his sermons, he most often did so to illustrate doctrinal or moral points. The fundamentally religious character of Grafton’s ministry also explains his opposition to lynching. He opposed lynching for theological reasons—God had only entrusted lethal force to the magistrate, mob violence violated the sixth commandment, and lynching threatened divinely instituted social norms like white rule and female virtue. His opposition to lynching, like his positions on other subjects, grew out of his theological beliefs and sought to produce holy living in his hearers.

This study of Dr. Cornelius W. Grafton shows how one conservative white Protestant minister explained and applied the Christian faith in Mississippi for more than six decades. In part, it situates specific subjects within Grafton’s overarching theological beliefs and religious goals. Scholars from Samuel Hill to Paul Harvey have helpfully shown what many conservative white Protestants in the South were not. For example, most, including Grafton, were not advocates for racial equality. Without ignoring what Grafton was not, this dissertation has sought to provide a fuller picture of what Grafton was, of his religious beliefs and goals, and of how his teaching on a range of subjects arose from them. By understanding Grafton’s ministry, readers can better understand the religious atmosphere and motivations that influenced life in the South in this period.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
Primary Sources

Archives

C. Benton Kline Archives and Special Collections, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA.
Cornelius W. Grafton Papers
C. W. Grafton lecture notebook. 1871

J. B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS.
Galloway, Charles B. Papers.

Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
Allen Cabaniss Collection.

Mississippi Department of Archives and History
Eastman Memorial Foundation records [manuscript] 1924, 1940.
Grafton, Cornelius W. Church register of the Union Presbyterian Church, Jefferson County, Mississippi, 1817-1932 / copied, recorded, and annotated by Dr. C.W. Grafton.
_____ . Papers.
_____ . Presbyterian Church, Synod of Mississippi, history [manuscript].
_____ . Subject File.
Grafton, Kate W. Subject File.

Special Collections Department, Mississippi State University
Mississippi School Catalogs

Presbyterian Church in the U.S. Presbytery of Central Mississippi minutes, 1865-1950 [microform]

Published Writings by Cornelius W. Grafton


_____ . “Dr. Grafton’s Message”. The Mississippi Visitor, from X, 1 (December 1911) to XVIII, 1 (December, 1928)


Unpublished Writings by Cornelius W. Grafton

*Concord Church*. 1920.

*History of Presbyterianism in Mississippi*. 1927.

Ministerial Log Books. 1900-1919 and 1920-1934. Union Church Presbyterian Church. Union Church, MS.

Unpublished Sources Related to Cornelius W. Grafton

Grafton, Thomas H. Diary. Thomas H. Grafton Diary. In the possession of his daughter Elizabeth Greer.


Church Records

Ben Salem Church (Presbyterian) records, 1881-1947, microfilm.
Minutes of the Concord Church (Presbyterian)
Minutes of the Presbytery of Mississippi [microform]
Minutes of the Central Mississippi Presbytery [microform]
Minutes of the Synod of Mississippi [microform]
Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.
Union Church (Presbyterian) records, microfilm. Transcribed by Linda Durr Rudd.
Periodicals

The Christian Observer.

The Clarion Ledger (Jackson, Mississippi)

The Los Angeles Times

The Mississippi Visitor (Publication of the Synod of Mississippi, Presbyterian Church, U.S.)

The Okolona Messenger (Mississippi)

The Port Gibson Reveille (Mississippi)

The Union Seminary Review

Government Records


Jefferson County Agricultural High School, Catalogue and Announcements, Session 1917-1918.
https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1015&context=mss-mississippi-school-catalogs.

https://books.google.com/books?id=3IYYxQEACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

Secondary Sources

Secondary Sources that Discuss Grafton Directly


Secondary Sources (Alphabetical)


Faulkner, T.A. *From the Ball-Room to Hell*. R. F. Henry, 1894.


Smith, Morton H. *How Is The Gold Become Dim: The Decline of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., As Reflected in its Assembly Actions*, 2nd ed. (Jackson, MS: The Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church, 1973).


*The Holy Bible*. King James Version.


Figure 1. Cornelius W. Grafton Seminary Graduation Photo (1873)

Figure 2. Cornelius W. Grafton photo from *Life and Thought of a Country Preacher*
Figure 3. Cornelius W. Grafton photo #3
Figure 4. Cornelius W. Grafton photo # 4
Figure 5. Cornelius W. Grafton photo #5
VITA

2011  Bachelor of Arts, Dartmouth College (Hanover, NH)

2015  Master of Divinity, Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, MS)