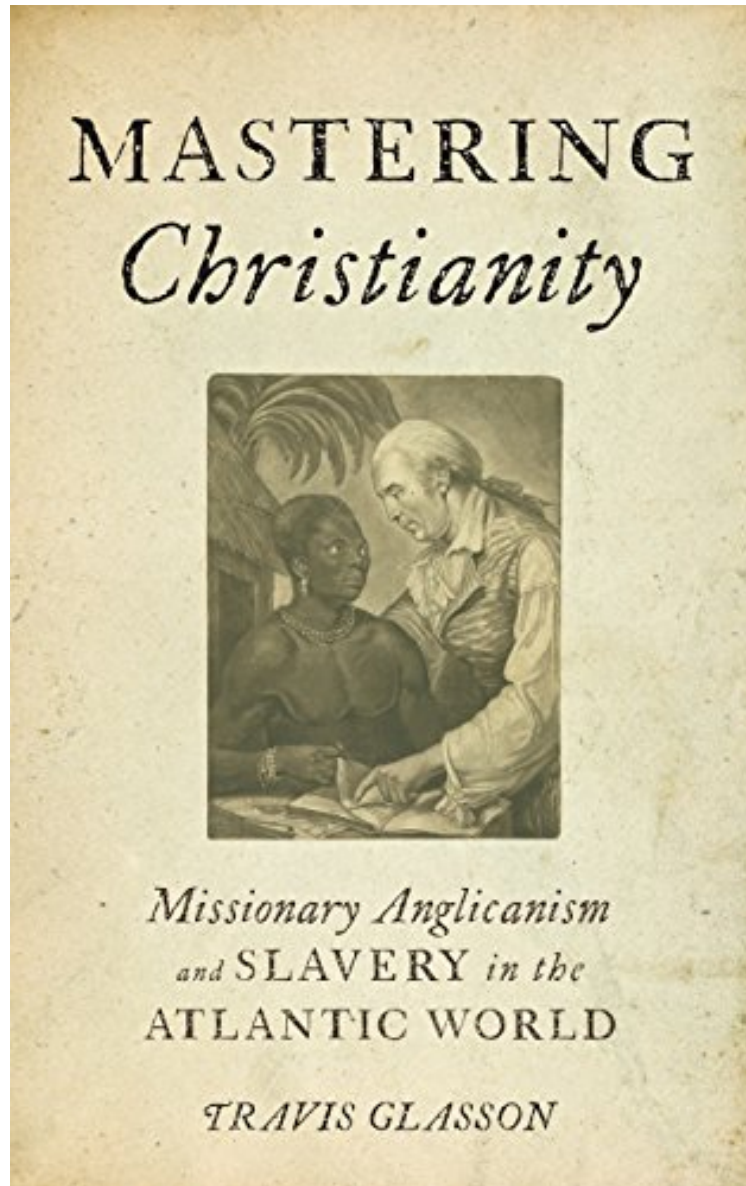


# Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World

Travis Glasson

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Travis Glasson : Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent, Dispassionate Treatment of a Difficult (Uncomfortable) Subject  
By Timothy Scott  
Travis Glasson has produced a work that is scholarly and fair. Naturally the connection between Christianity and slavery is a sensitive social subject and should be handled with great care. Glasson does an excellent job of writing as a dispassionate historian (as much as this is possible to do) and allows the various individuals of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) to speak for themselves. Glasson does well to demonstrate that the SPG was always committed to the evangelization of Native Americans and African-American slaves. However, the Society's commitments to a close Church-State relationship in the British Empire, the status quo of the English social order, and to slavery itself created difficulties for its evangelistic goals. In some cases, the SPG actually strengthened the institution of slavery through advocating the idea that Christian baptism did not result in a change in a slave's social situation (i.e., emancipation). Many members of the SPG defended slavery, and the society owned Codrington, a slave plantation in Barbados. Though the society was a slave owning institution itself, it did appeal to slave owners to treat their slaves humanely and to teach them Christianity. However, these efforts were, by and large, unsatisfactory in their execution. Glasson also shows that there were members of the society who were committed to the abolition cause, but they were a minority. Sadly, the SPG did not free its slaves until it was forced to by government legislation.  
Mastering Christianity is well-researched and well-written. Glasson avoids presenting the reader with his own opinion of the rightness or wrongness of the people he treats. He simply records what they said. The potential reader should recognize that this book is an academic rather than popular treatment of the subject and reads as such (I do not say this as a negative but to let the potential buyer know what they are getting). Good book. Worth the read.  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars  
By Rev. Fr. K.N. Ellis  
New helpful details on the ministry of The Rev'd Philip Quaque

Beginning in 1701, missionary-minded Anglicans launched one of the earliest and most sustained efforts to Christianize the enslaved people of Britain's colonies. Hundreds of clergy traveled to widely-dispersed posts in North America, the Caribbean, and West Africa under the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) and undertook this work. Based on a belief in the essential unity of humankind, the Society's missionaries advocated for the conversion and better treatment of enslaved people. Yet, only a minority of enslaved people embraced Anglicanism, while a majority rejected it. *Mastering Christianity* closely explores these missionary encounters. The Society hoped to make slavery less cruel and more paternalistic but it came to stress the ideas that chattel slavery and Christianity were entirely compatible and could even be mutually beneficial. While important early figures saw slavery as troubling, over time the Society accommodated its message to slaveholders, advocated for laws that tightened colonial slave codes, and embraced slavery as a missionary tool. The SPG owned hundreds of enslaved people on its Codrington plantation in Barbados, where it hoped to simultaneously make profits and save souls. In Africa, the Society cooperated with English slave traders in establishing a mission at Cape Coast Castle, at the heart of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The SPG helped lay the foundation for black Protestantism but pessimism about the project grew internally and black people's frequent skepticism about Anglicanism was construed as evidence of the inherent inferiority of African people and their American descendants. Through its texts and practices, the SPG provided important intellectual, political, and moral support for slaveholding around the British empire. The rise of antislavery sentiment challenged the principles that had long underpinned missionary Anglicanism's program, however, and abolitionists viewed the SPG as a significant institutional opponent to their agenda. In this work, Travis Glasson provides a unique perspective on the development and entrenchment of a pro-slavery ideology by showing how English religious thinking furthered the development of slavery and supported the institution around the Atlantic world.

"While the book is constructed largely as a study of the eighteenth-century Atlantic World, religion, race, and the institution of slavery, it also has broader importance to the study of the often surprisingly complex and multifaceted world of imperial and colonial society where religion functioned with a motivational power only misleadingly reduced to material or social forces. Nevertheless, Glasson also impressively demonstrates the degree to which economic, worldly realities forged the environment of empire and influenced religious beliefs, often in ways that contradicted and corroded Christian ethical precept, and in the eighteenth century, reinforced the emergence of new racial hierarchies while providing support for the institution of slavery."--Steven S. Maughan, *Journal of Early Modern History*"This important book by Travis Glasson extends and deepens our understanding of the earliest English Protestant missionary society, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel...To read Glasson's book is to glimpse an age when Anglicans sought to forge a new, expansive imperial identity, but also struggled to square their commitment to maintaining social order with supporting the radical Christian notion of the equality of souls...*Mastering Christianity* represents an important addition to our knowledge of the spread of multiple, competitive forms of Christianity in the developing British imperial framework. With a sure command of the historiography and sources, Glasson's careful scholarship has produced the first full history of one of the most important institutional forces in the British Empire in the eighteenth century in its relationship to slavery."--*Journal of Early Modern History*"*Mastering Christianity* is a welcome addition

to the burgeoning historical literature on slavery and the Atlantic world...[It] provides a rich if sobering introduction to how a Christian organization dedicated to the salvation of 'heathen' servants became a servant to the status quo, supporting slavery and its perpetual extension...His book provides a compelling explanation for that wavering trajectory."--Journal of American History

"Travis Glasson's marvelous new study of the SPG's operations among African slave populations in the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Atlantic world is such a welcome addition to our understanding of the dynamics of imperial Christianity. Deeply researched and thoroughly engaging Glasson's thesis is an original and compelling one."--Brent S. Sirota, Journal of British Studies

"Over the years the tangled story of the changing relationship of the Anglican Church with the institution of slavery between the late seventeenth century and the eventual ending of that institution by the British in 1838 has received its fair share of scholarly attention. This ambitious study fully succeeds in its objective of casting the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, its activities and shifting perceptions of slavery and African peoples, in an entirely fresh light. It is scholarship of the very highest quality, of immense intellectual power and authority, and promises to stand as the definitive study for many years to come."--Betty Wood, Girton College, Cambridge

"At last we have a history of the Anglican missions that appreciates the scale and impact of their religious enterprise. Mastering Christianity provides the best analysis yet of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, a crucial instrument in the cultivation of a British Atlantic world made possible by enslaved laborers. By closely examining the entanglement of Anglicanism and slavery, rather than skipping forward to the evangelical revivals, Glasson offers fresh insight into why so many black people joined the Church of England--and why most did not."--Vincent Brown, author of *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*

"Travis Glasson's pioneering and revisionist *Mastering Christianity* reconstructs the always vexed and increasingly corrosive relationship between the evangelical agenda of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and the reality of its economic and ideological involvement with black chattel slavery. *Mastering Christianity* is a significant contribution to studies of race, religion, slavery, and abolition in the British circum-Atlantic empire."--Vincent Carretta, co-editor of *The Life and Letters of Philip Quaque, the First African Anglican Missionary*

"Travis Glasson has written the definitive history of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel's evangelization mission to enslaved Africans and their descendants in the British Atlantic World. Brilliantly conceived and exhaustively researched, *Mastering Christianity* explores the intellectual and practical evolutions of the SPG mission from the dawn of the eighteenth century to the abolition of British West Indian slavery in 1838. Glasson's readable prose yields fresh insights about the work of Anglican missionaries, the people they sought to convert, and the impact these missions had upon the struggles over Atlantic slavery's future."--Edward B. Rugemer, author of *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War*

"*Mastering Christianity* is an important reconsideration of the intersection of religion, race and slavery in the eighteenth-century Atlantic. Like few others, Glasson takes us inside the complex world of missions to enslaved people and of Christianity's complicity in slavery and racial hierarchies."--Jon F. Sensbach, author of *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World*

"We can be very grateful to Travis Glasson for showing us what can happen when we turn our voices from the service of our Lord to the service of our own corps and ourselves."--Anglican Theological

About the Author  
Travis Glasson is Assistant Professor of History, Temple University.