

<sup>62</sup> Sherwood, *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years*, 114–16; Michael J. Curley, C.S.S.R., *Venerable John Neumann, C.S.S.R.: Fourth Bishop of Philadelphia* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 134.

<sup>63</sup> Deluol's Diary, 7 October 1847; Willigman, "A Few Facts," 6–7, 3; Reilly, "A Famous Convent of Colored Sisters," 111; Spalding, *The Premier See*, 149.

<sup>64</sup> Sherwood, *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years*, 112–14.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

## Chapter 3

# Henriette Delille

## *Servant of Slaves, Witness to the Poor*

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Henriette Delille was born in 1812 in New Orleans. She was born into a city that Gwendolyn Midlo Hall called the most African city in America.<sup>1</sup> We could also call New Orleans a Latin city, a Catholic city, a slave center, and a city of easy virtue. Founded in 1718, New Orleans was named in honor of Philippe, the duke of Orléans. The city was begun by the Company of the Indies, which was the commercial organization that owned and exploited the territory of Louisiana. Pierre LeMoynes and Jean-Baptiste LeMoynes were the two Canadian adventurers and explorers who helped create both the Louisiana Colony and the city of New Orleans. Pierre is better known by the patent of nobility that made him the Sieur d'Iberville and his brother, Jean-Baptiste, who was also ennobled, was better known as the Sieur de Bienville.

Both the colony and New Orleans itself were a financial headache for France. Compelled to search for settlers, the French government was reduced to rounding up criminals and prostitutes from Paris and elsewhere to be sent to populate both the colony and the city of New Orleans. Although in the beginning many Native Americans were reduced to slavery for the colonists, it was the importation of African slaves, beginning in 1717, that grew in number and extent as the agricultural demands increased.<sup>2</sup>

France lost its colony to Spain at the close of the Seven Years' War (1756–63) and Louisiana passed to Spanish control. Although the population remained French speaking, the governing council was the *cabildo*, the officials were Spanish, and the legal system was Spanish. The Spanish left their mark, especially regarding the church. In 1801 Spain returned Louisiana to France. Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, wanted the port of New Orleans, one of the largest in the

South, for the United States. Napoleon realized that he could not defend New Orleans against the British, and in 1803 he sold Louisiana to the United States for almost fifteen million dollars.

When Henriette Delille was born, New Orleans had been American for almost a decade. At the time of the purchase Louisiana had a total of approximately thirty-six thousand people: thirteen thousand slaves, seventeen hundred free blacks, and twenty-one thousand whites. Henriette was born a free woman of color. Thanks to the extensive paper trail left by the bureaucracy of French and Spanish officialdom, combined with the sacramental registers of the Catholic Church, we are able to trace the lineage of at least one-half of the genealogy of Henriette Delille. Notaries in eighteenth-century Europe were lawyers who registered a wide variety of legal acts, both financial and commercial. To buy or sell land, to buy and sell slaves, to draw up the provisions of a will, and to witness contractual arrangements, one had to appear and register the action before a notary. The record was placed within the notarial bindings according to dates and names; these are now kept in the notarial archives both in the city of New Orleans and in the provincial archives. Thanks to the extensive array of legal papers pertaining to the life and activity of Henriette Delille, the details of her life and works can be pieced together.

### THE FAMILY

Henriette Delille was the great-great-granddaughter of an African slave woman whose name was Nanette. Nanette had three children by her owner, Claude Joseph Villars Dubreuil. He was one of the richest landowners in Louisiana. Much of his land later became part of the city of New Orleans. Originally from Dijon in France, he arrived in Louisiana in 1718 and received a concession of land from Bienville.

Dubreuil, who was also an engineer, was responsible for digging the first canals and the construction of levees as well as the construction of the third convent for the Ursuline nuns, which in time was converted into the bishop's residence and now houses the present-day ecclesiastical archives. He was one of the first to cultivate indigo, plant sugar cane, and raise tobacco. When Dubreuil died in 1757, he had become one of the most important figures in early New Orleans history.<sup>3</sup>

On October 1, 1770, Nanette came before the notary, Andres Almonaster y Roxas. She had in her hand a piece of paper, known as the *carta de libertad*. This piece of paper—the certificate of freedom—showed that she had been freed from slavery in 1763 by Claude Joseph Villars

Dubreuil, the son of Claude senior, the father of Nanette's children. The act drawn up before the notary Andres Almonaster announced that she was buying her daughter, named Cécile, and Cécile's children, Henriette and Narcisse. Legally, they would still be slaves until she could free them.<sup>4</sup>

Under Spanish law a slave could avail himself or herself of a provision known as *coartación*, meaning that the slave had the right to ask the owner for a price for his or her freedom. If the owner refused, the court could order a third party to make the assessment. Once the price for freedom was obtained, the slave could work to raise the funds for the *carta de libertad* or borrow money to pay the price.<sup>5</sup> This is what Nanette had done. Once freed, Nanette raised twenty-eight hundred livres (two thousand and some dollars) for her daughter and two of her grandchildren. She was a very resourceful woman.

Cécile was the great-grandmother of Henriette Delille. She died in 1815, when Henriette was two or three years old. Her grandmother, the daughter of Cécile, was Henriette Laveau. Some have suggested that she was related to the famous Marie Laveau. Marie Josephe or Josephine was the mother of Henriette, one of eight children born to Henriette Laveau.

The family of Henriette Delille belonged to that section of the Louisiana population known as the free people of color. These were the descendants of black slaves and white slave owners. The slave owners very often freed their children or enabled them to obtain their freedom. Many of these children were light skinned. In a city like New Orleans the movement from bondage to freedom was as simple as crossing a very narrow line. In other words, one could speak of a kind of twilight zone in which those in servitude lived very much like those already freed. These slaves who lived on their own with or without permission simply passed over into the world of freedom.

The free people of color formed a group among themselves. They were often entrepreneurs, shop owners, craftsmen, tavern keepers, tailors, musicians, morticians, hunters, and sailors. Many free women of color were peddlers, cooks, laundry women, dressmakers, housekeepers, and also prostitutes. In a sense they were the backbone of the local economy, and many owned land. Henriette Delille's family owned a large amount of property in the French Quarter. Not a few free people of color were wealthy. Thomy Lafon, one of the best-known philanthropists in the nineteenth century, was a good example of a free man of color who gave much of his money to charity, including to the Sisters of the Holy Family. Finally, the free people of color often owned slaves, that is, one or two domestics or servants.<sup>6</sup>

It is strange to talk about blacks owning slaves or even freed slaves being slave owners. The recent novel *The Known World* by Edward Jones gives us a picture of slaveholding blacks and their mentality.<sup>7</sup> Historians have noted that slaveholding by free blacks was often the result of one of three factors: First, free blacks sought to purchase the freedom of their children or grandchildren, as was the case with Nanette. As will be explained later, it was not easy to manumit a slave. Often enough a man or woman who was free would purchase a spouse from the slave owner. Legally, the spouse became the slave of the future bride or groom but also a wife or a husband with whom they could marry and raise a family. Oftentimes the legal condition of the husband or wife might not be generally known.

Another reason for free blacks to own slaves was that from time to time when difficult situations developed with white slave owners, slaves sought a black person to purchase them in order to improve their condition. Finally, it was also the case that blacks owned slaves for the same reason that whites owned slaves: they used them, they exploited their labor; they purchased them for a price and improved them physically and sold them for a higher price. This was speculation in human merchandise.

Many free women of color had an alliance with well-to-do white men. In Louisiana the system was known as *plaçage*. An arrangement was made between a young woman of color—beautiful and perhaps very cultured—and a white gentleman. Although marriage was legally prohibited, this arrangement or alliance was more than a casual affair. The young woman and the children sometimes lived with the white gentleman. There was no recognition by law or blessing by the church, but in this Catholic city the situation was not considered either immoral or shameful.<sup>8</sup>

This was the situation of practically all of Henriette Delille's male ancestors in each generation. It was the case of Cécile Bonille, Henriette Delille's sister. Cécile had an alliance with Samuel Hart, a wealthy Jewish merchant in New Orleans. She was eighteen when she began life together with Samuel Hart, who was then fifty-three. He had four children by Cécile. He died in 1832, leaving a large amount of money to Cécile. Although the law recognized the right of natural children to have some claim on the inheritance of their father, the woman did not necessarily have this right. Samuel Hart's family in Europe contested the will successfully, but Cécile was able to win a comfortable settlement, thanks to the effort of her attorney, John Slidell, the future Confederate statesman.

Marie Joseph (also known as Josephine) had three children by different fathers. Clever and resourceful, despite the fact that she could not write, she bought and sold several slaves. At one point she was declared insane and given a guardian but was later released. She died in 1848. Her illiteracy did not prevent her from owning property and profiting therefrom.

Juan Bonille, the father of Cécile, was living in Cuba when she drew up her will in 1841, just before she died about the age of twenty-eight. Marie Joseph had a son, named Jean Delille, Henriette's older brother, who lived much of his life as a planter in St. Martinville. About all that is known about the father of Jean Delille and Henriette Delille is that he was named Jean Delille. Who was he? Was he white? Why does he not figure in all of the legal papers drawn up before the notaries that present a picture of Henriette's family? He appears only once, and that is on the marriage record of Jean Delille, who was married in St. Martinville on December 28, 1830.<sup>9</sup>

There is good reason to believe that Jean Delille, the father of Jean and Henriette, was Jean-Baptiste Delille-Sarpy, from a well-known family of merchants in the Louisiana colony who were originally from southern France near the Spanish frontier. The Sarpy family had many brothers, and many were named John. The Sarpy family also used many variations of Delille-Sarpy. All were involved in some business venture. Some were wealthy; others were not very well off. What is certain is that Henriette Delille did know who her father was, but that her father played no real part in the life of the family.

Henriette Delille's family was typical of a family of free people of color. They were not poor, and they owned and perhaps trafficked in the buying and selling of slaves. They were related in one way or another to most of the extended families of the free people of color throughout New Orleans. From all indications they were not deeply religious. The notarial archives are filled with extensive legal papers listing the names of Henriette Delille, her immediate family, and the large extended family who signed and counter-signed the documents and gradually revealed the outlines of this rather unusual extensive family.

## THE VOCATION

In 1836, when Henriette was in her twenty-fifth year, she evidently had some kind of religious experience. She wrote in French on the fly leaf of one of the small book of devotions that she had in her possession a fervent declaration of her relationship to God. First there is the statement

that the book was hers and then the date: "This book belongs to henriette [sic] Delille. May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1836." Then she continues in French: "I hope in God. I love. I wish to live and to die for God." It does not seem that this is simply a pious thought or a short pious prayer. The statements are not balanced but are short, concise declarations about life and death. If one believes in God and then hopes in God, the next statement would logically read "I love God," but it does not; it is simply "I love."

There is a tear in the fly leaf. Part of the verb "to wish" is illegible. The presumption is that the verb is "to wish" because the text has *je v—*. The likely word is *veux*; however, it could just as well be *je vais*, that is, "I am going to. . . ." Thus, the text could read, "I wish to love and die for God." It could also be "I am going to live and die for God." In other words, it could be a statement of intent. In my opinion there is reason enough to see a young woman almost twenty-five years old declaring her undying love for God and the intention to give her life and to love unto death. It is now her vocation. This written statement could very well be a written covenant with God and the result of a mystical experience. Written into her book of meditations, she would have before her this written covenant, this statement of undying love for God and her experience of God.

We know little about the early years of Henriette Delille. The notarial acts give some idea of the family's financial and real-estate transactions. We do know that she was the youngest of the family of Marie Josephe Dias, and that she was close to her half-sister, Cécile, who died in 1841. Henriette's mother died in 1848.

It is not clear where Henriette received her education, as education for young people of color was uncertain and informal in pre-Civil War New Orleans. At the end of the eighteenth century the Ursuline nuns permitted girls of color to receive religious instruction in their school as long as they were taught separately from the white students. They even went so far as to permit legitimate daughters of a white father and a quadroon mother to receive an education in their school. Michael Portier, who became bishop of Mobile in 1826, reported back to France that he gave religious instruction to young people of color. A certain Sister Ste-Marthe Fontière, a religious sister from a community known as Les Dames Hospitalières from Belley in France, came to New Orleans with eight other women in 1823. Sister Ste-Marthe began a school on St. Claude Street for young girls of color that same year. In the beginning she had as many as eighty pupils. By 1826, the St. Claude School was in financial difficulty, and by 1831 Sister Ste-Marthe returned to France. She came back to New Orleans the following year. It is not clear whether she gave the school to the bishop of New Orleans or sold it. What is clear is that

another remarkable woman, Marie Jeanne Aliquot, a recent arrival from a rather well-known family from the south of France, acquired another building known as the Collège of Orléans, which was turned into the new St. Claude School. She had a sister who was a member of the Ursuline nuns. A determined woman, at times a difficult woman, and a controversial figure, but totally devoted to black people, both slave and free, she acquired the college and opened another school for young girls of color. Mlle. Aliquot sold the school to the Ursuline nuns, who in turn sold it to the Sisters of Mount Carmel, also originally from France. By 1839, although the St. Claude School was the object of discord and anger among Aliquot, the Ursulines, and the Carmelite Sisters, there were still nearly eighty students in the school. At that time Henriette Delille was twenty-nine years old. More than likely, she had been a student at the St. Claude School, and, in fact, she may have been teaching at the school.

When in 1836 Henriette Delille inscribed a dedication in one of her books, she may not have realized that she had started on the road of her lifelong vocation. The book she inscribed was a work in French by the Countess de Carcado, a very devout noblewoman who had written many works of devotion. The work entitled *The Soul United to Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar*, first published in Paris in 1830, was typical of the devotional literature of the time.<sup>10</sup> It is also a reminder that in this period most people did not receive communion daily. Thus they visited the Blessed Sacrament and adored Christ in the Eucharist. Seemingly, at this time the young Henriette Delille was living a life of greater devotion and deeper prayer.

Another written text reveals the increasing devotion of this young woman. The earliest document in the archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family is a notebook in French containing the list of names and donors. The year 1859 has been placed at the beginning of the list. The purpose of the list of names is not clear. Certainly these are names of those who gave offerings of money. Some of the names are of persons we recognize. This list, however, is not as important as another text written in the middle of this little notebook. This text, also written in French and in the handwriting of Henriette Delille, follows here:

The Rules and Regulations

For the Congregation of the Sisters

Of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin

Mary under the invocation of Mary V.S.P.

Founded in New Orleans

The 21<sup>st</sup> of November 1836.

For the purpose

1. to care for the sick
2. to succor the poor
3. to instruct the ignorant.

There are three chapters; "chapter two" as a heading is omitted by inadvertence. The first chapter lists the officials who form the council. The second chapter describes the spirit of the community and its purpose, and the third chapter describes the religious practices. The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin is a devotion based on an apocryphal biblical text widespread in eighteenth-century piety. As a child Mary was supposed to have been given over to be raised in the Temple in Jerusalem where she lived and prayed during her girlhood. These sisters renewed their consecration every year on November 24, the Feast of the Presentation.

At first glance this would seem to be the rules for a community of religious sisters. Further examination makes it clear that this is the description of a community of pious women who did not live together, had no religious vows, and were often married with a family. They were laywomen who gathered together on specific occasions, who ministered to the poor, and who supported one another.

The *Catholic Directory* of 1850 documents the existence of three charitable associations of laypersons in New Orleans: the society of the Ladies of Providence (*les dames de providence*), the young Ladies of Providence (*les demoiselles de providence*), and finally, "an association of colored persons, for the nursing of the sick and destitute."<sup>11</sup> This unnamed charitable association was the Sisters of the Presentation. In 1836, in the same year in which Henriette made known her desire to give herself totally to God, she began not a religious community but a society of pious women, the first of its kind among black people in Louisiana. The two white communities of pious laywomen, the Ladies of Providence, had a structure that was almost identical to the structure and activity of the Sisters of the Presentation.

Two years after the commencement of the Sisters of the Presentation, Henriette Delille appears in three records related to the sacraments and the instruction of slaves and former slaves. In January 1838, in St. Mary's Church, she signed the register as witness to the marriage of Jean Garièhr, a free black, and Loiza, the slave of a Monsieur Latour. Two months later, in March, Henriette witnessed a marriage between a French national, born in Le Havre, France, and a native of New Orleans whose mother was named Gaudin and was born in Haiti. The entry indicates that the marriage was between a French man who was white and a

woman of color of Haitian origin. The priest who witnessed it was a P. Amand. For reasons that are not quite clear, these records signed by P. Amand were kept separate from the others. This suggests that the records dealt with delicate matters such as the marriage between a white person (in this instance a French man) and a person of color (in this instance a woman named Gaudin originally from Haiti). Juliette Gaudin, whose mother was originally from Haiti, was a constant companion of Henriette when she began the religious community.<sup>12</sup>

The following month Henriette acted as the sponsor of Marie Thérèse Dagon, who had been baptized by Père Rousselon, who also acted as godfather. Henriette signed as godmother. The baptism took place in the chapel of the St. Claude Convent, the house of the Carmelite sisters and the school. Marie Thérèse was fifteen years old.<sup>13</sup> Presumably, Henriette had instructed her. Moreover, she was perhaps a student at the school where Henriette was teaching and where Rousselon was at the time the chaplain. What we have here is the certitude that Henriette Delille was working as a witness for the baptism and the marriage of slaves and people of color. This would be her future ministry. It is also clear that Henriette was already working with Père Rousselon.

### THE BEGINNING OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Etienne Rousselon was originally from Lyons in southern France. Born in 1800, he was ordained a priest in 1827. He was rector in the minor seminary in Lyons and a close friend of Antoine Blanc (who later was named bishop of New Orleans), whom he served as vicar general.<sup>14</sup> Rousselon came to the United States in 1837, and in 1841 Bishop Blanc began plans to build the church of St. Augustine in the Trémé neighborhood just outside the French Quarter. It was an area that was growing in numbers. Here Henriette Delille and her constant companion, Juliette Gaudin, and later Josephine Charles, would begin their religious life not far from the church, which opened its doors in 1842.

In the meantime, Antoine Blanc, now bishop of New Orleans, had written to the Congregation of the Propaganda requesting that Henriette and the Sisters of the Presentation, a "certain group of pious women, called to works of piety, in serving the sick, assisting the dying, and teaching adolescent girls, etc., under the title of the Congregation of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary . . . be affiliated to the congregation which exists in Rome . . . under the title of the Annunciation." This group of pious women was thereby affiliated with the Sodality of the

Annunciation in Rome. In this way the status of the sodality was placed on solid ground as one of the oldest sodalities in Louisiana.<sup>15</sup>

The Sisters of the Holy Family would always look to the year 1842 as the date of its foundation as a religious community, according to oral tradition. Even though there seems to be no documentary evidence that points to a beginning in the year 1842, it is clearly evident that between 1842 and 1851 there was a gradual development from a group of pious women to the creation of a religious congregation. The movement from a group of pious women to a religious congregation is the trajectory of many religious orders of women.

Henriette and Juliette began their religious life with a small dwelling on St. Bernard Street but quickly moved to a provisional dwelling on Hospital Street, which would later be called Bayou Road. Juliette Gaudin, born in Cuba in 1808, was four years older than Henriette. Her mother, Marie Thérèse Lacardonie, a free woman of color, was born in Haiti and died in New Orleans in 1837. Juliette's father, Pierre Gaudin, born in the southwest of France, was a schoolteacher in New Orleans. Her parents were not married. Juliette was well educated and was a faithful friend of Henriette. Josephine Charles, a free woman of color from New Orleans, joined the foundation house on Bayou Road in 1843. She would be the organizer of the Sisters of the Holy Family after the death of Henriette.<sup>16</sup>

From 1845 to 1860 the names of the three women, Henriette, Juliette, and Josephine, began to appear as sponsors for slaves of all ages, for free people of color, and as witnesses to marriages of slaves at St. Augustine, St. Mary's, and also the cathedral. By 1847 the charitable work of these three women was backed by an organization of men and women who would be known as the Association of the Holy Family. In the beginning Henriette Delille served as president. The organization opened a building known as the Hospice of the Society of the Holy Family. While the existence of the association raises questions that at present cannot be answered, the documents seem to indicate that the management of the association moved away from control by Henriette Delille. It seems that the Sisters of the Presentation might have developed into the association and have become more than a group of pious women.

### THE CONSTITUTIONS AND RULES

The earliest printed text in the archives of the Holy Family is a leaflet entitled "Provisional Constitutions of the Sisters of the Holy Family."<sup>17</sup> This text was approved in 1876 by Archbishop Perché and signed by

Gilbert Raymond, the vicar general, as administrator. What is important about this printed text is that it gives the earliest definite date for the foundation of the Sisters of the Holy Family. The text reads:

They [the sisters] shall have a total devotion for the Sovereign Pontiff; and they shall recognize after the Sovereign Pontiff, Monseigneur Blanc, archbishop of New Orleans and their venerated Vicar General, Monsieur Rousselon, as the beloved founders of their little community nearly 25 years ago.<sup>18</sup>

Twenty-five years earlier would have been 1851. Thus in 1851 the Sisters of the Holy Family were founded by Bishop Blanc and Père Rousselon. One might wish that the name of Henriette Delille had been added to that of the bishop and the vicar general, but her will states clearly her position in the foundation of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

One of the troubling issues in this foundation has been the question of novitiate and vows. The earliest histories of the Sisters of the Holy Family state that Henriette made her novitiate with the Religious of the Sacred Heart in St. James Parish. Unfortunately, there are no documents to corroborate this assertion. Although the sisters had many slaves, it would be unlikely that Henriette would have been placed in the community itself. It is possible that the community created an informal situation that could have served as a novitiate and that Henriette returned to New Orleans to make her vows. The earliest histories recount that both Juliette and Josephine made their vows with Henriette. It is more likely that the three women made their vows as private vows and that they were repeated later as public religious vows.

There is no question, however, that by 1851 these three women were living in a convent as religious women. Unfortunately, there are no documents that describe the details of their religious life. We have no sense of a horarium or of common prayer, or even of a habit. In fact, we know that the black sisters wore no religious habit on the streets of New Orleans until the 1870s. What we do have is a collection of about seventy-four books published between 1807 and 1859 that are now in the archives, books that seemingly were part of the original library of the nascent community in the time of Henriette Delille. Some of the books have the names of either Henriette Delille (about four) or Juliette Gaudin (about twenty). No books bear the name of Josephine Charles. All are in French with the exception of two liturgical books. A large folio-size bible written in the classical French of the seventeenth century (the translation of Isaac Le Maistre de Sacy) was probably used for oral reading for common prayer and at table. A small copy of the New

Testament in Latin, bound with a Latin translation of *The Imitation of Christ* with no name inscribed therein, may very well have been a personal copy belonging to Juliette. Many of the works of spirituality, including those by St. Teresa of Avila and St. Francis de Sales, have the name of Juliette on the inside cover. At some time or another the books with the name of Père Rousselon became part of the original collection. What is most important is that the collection of books that seemed to have been part of the original library collection before the Civil War reveals a level of spirituality and education equal to the collection of any other French-speaking community in pre-Civil War New Orleans.

### THE THREE WILLS OF HENRIETTE DELILLE

In May 1851 Henriette Delille lay ill in the provisional convent located at the time on Condé Street (Chartres Street today). The notary, Octave de Armas, arrived at her bedside accompanied by several male witnesses to draw up a will. Henriette bequeathed all of the property on Bayou Road, that is, the convent, which was in her name, to Antoine Blanc, the archbishop of New Orleans, and to his successors. She declared that this property was for the religious instruction of “the poor and the ignorant,” a work known as “the Children of the Holy Family.” She bequeathed to her brother, Jean Delille, living at St. Martinville, her slave named Betsy along with the sum of \$867. She left her linens, household furnishings, and other items to Juliette Gaudin.

This first will drawn up by Henriette reveals three important facts. First, she was the leader in whose name the convent on Bayou Road was constructed. Second, the work for the poor and the ignorant was begun by her initiative and was to continue under the authority of the archbishop. Finally, and perhaps most surprising, Henriette owned a slave named Betsy. This is the first indication that she owned a slave. It seems certain that Betsy did not live on Bayou Road. Either she lived on her own or was already in St. Martinville.<sup>19</sup>

A year and a half later, in 1852, Henriette drew up a second will. Once again she bequeathed to Archbishop Blanc the property on Bayou Road and the work that she had founded for the poor and the ignorant of “population of color.” She stipulated that Juliette Gaudin was to have the right to live there for the rest of her life. She again made mention of linens and other furnishings, which were to go to Juliette. She made her brother “her sole heir and universal legatee.” She granted liberty to Betsy; nevertheless, Betsy was to remain in the service of Jean, Henriette’s

brother, “up to the day when she could be freed without being bound to leave Louisiana.”<sup>20</sup>

Although Betsy had been freed by Henriette, this could not go into effect because by 1852 freed slaves in Louisiana had to leave the state under penalty of being re-enslaved. There is no evidence as to the identity of Betsy; more than likely, Betsy was a slave that Henriette acquired, perhaps at the request of Betsy herself. By this time Louisiana, like many other Southern states, wished to curtail the number of freed slaves in order to minimize their influence on the slave population in the state. As elsewhere, Louisiana introduced several measures to drive out the freed black population. If Betsy was a woman of considerable age or with a number of dependents, the prospect of pulling up stakes and leaving Louisiana might have been a considerable burden. Henriette’s stipulation regarding the status of Betsy was more than likely in keeping with the desire of Betsy herself.

In 1860 Henriette drew up her last will on December 10. In less than two weeks South Carolina would secede from the Union and the nation would move into the Civil War. Archbishop Blanc had died, and his successor had not yet been named. Still, Henriette confirmed the fact that she had founded her work, and she mentioned again the personal linens and furnishings to be left to Juliette; there was no mention of Josephine. Finally, she left instructions that Jean was to free her slave Betsy. At this time it was no longer possible to manumit a slave. It may be that Henriette felt that at this critical juncture, on the verge of war, slavery would not last. Can one say that this third will, drawn up by a woman who was in very bad health, was most of all a statement of hope?

In the census of 1850 the records indicate that two persons lived on Bayou Road: Henriette and Juliette. Within ten years the scene had changed completely. The census for 1860 names seven persons living on Bayou Road. The list with the names spelled by the census takers follows:

Juliette Godin	49	Sisters of Charity
Henriette De Lyle	60	Superior
Josephine Charles	36	Sisters of Charity
Josephine Vecque	57	
Suzanne Navarre	27	
Henriette Fazende	57	
Orfise Romain	46	

In the left margin is written: “Asylum for blind and Destitute Negroes. By the Sisters of Charity.” Juliette’s birthplace is given as Cuba; for

Henriette, Josephine Charles, Josephine Vecque, Henriette Fazende, and Orfise Romain, Louisiana; finally, for Suzanne Navarre, New York. The age of Henriette was given as sixty; in fact, she was fifty, but her state of health had aged her considerably. Juliette's age was given as forty-nine, although she was fifty-two. Josephine Charles was listed as thirty-six years old, but in reality she was about fifty.

Four black women who were ex-slaves under the care of the women identified as Sisters of Charity were listed as living in the house next door.

Name	Age	Race	Origin
Ant_I_zette	60	Black	St. Domingue
Julie Beau_ois	40	Black	St. Domingue
Marianne	90	Black	Louisiana
Charlotte	115	Black	Guinea

The census records of 1860 provide a concrete example of the ministry that Henriette had begun and had fought so hard to maintain. Here, less than a year before the Civil War, there were four new members of a religious community, already named the Sisters of Charity by the people themselves. Later the title would be Sisters of the Holy Family.

In many ways Henriette Delille is an elusive figure. We have no letters from her, no written notes or memos, nothing of flesh and blood to reveal her humanity, her feelings, or her intimate thoughts. Only two letters remain from her very young niece, living at the time in Chicago. The first was written in the summer of 1860 and the second in January of 1861. She mentions the imminent war and the call for peace, the desire to see Henriette, who was both cousin and godmother, whose wisdom and advice she so badly needed. Her name was Ella Bell. Her grandmother was the half-sister of Henriette Delille's mother.

To the surprise of many, the port of New Orleans was captured by the Union Navy in April 1862, and as a result, New Orleans became an occupied city. The reaction of whites was consternation, bitterness, and dismay. They were faced with economic ruin and social catastrophe. On the other hand, the slaves very quickly rallied to the Union cause. The more radical shift among the free people of color developed more slowly. Rousselon wrote lurid accounts of how the whites were suffering in his letters to Jean-Marie Odin, the newly appointed archbishop of New Orleans, who was in Europe at the beginning of the Civil War. He predicted that the slaves would rise up and massacre their former masters. His attitude was typical of the feeling of the white Catholics and the Catholic clergy. There was seemingly no sympathy for or interest in the plight of

the slaves or the feelings of the free people of color. At this time only one priest championed the cause of the black population. This was Claude Pascal Maistre (1820-75), the pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church. Maistre would later be suspended by Archbishop Odin.

There is no indication of how the fledgling community of Henriette Delille reacted during this time, whether or not it was in solidarity with the cause of the blacks of New Orleans. Nor do its members emerge as sympathizers with the white population. More than likely they passed over to the cause of the free people of color. Growing more radical every day, aligning themselves with the Union army quartered in the city, the former Louisiana National Guard became an all-black regiment under General Butler. These soldiers were from the same milieu as were the sisters and their pupils.

It was in the midst of turmoil, confusion, and bitterness that Henriette Delille slipped quietly away on November 17, 1862. Her death was not recorded in the municipal records, but the register of the cemetery indicated that she died of tuberculosis. Her obituary did appear in the Catholic newspapers. It was duly noted that she had begun her work about 1850.

Henriette Delille lived and died in a time of trial and trouble, of poverty and pain. In a time when human dignity and human freedom were sacrificed in the slave market, she made her choices. From the time of her youth she recognized where God was calling her, and she chose not to follow the moral ambivalence chosen by women of her race and class. In a world where life was cheap and success was material advancement, she chose the gospel values of charity and justice. At the end of her short life she made it clear that the religious family that became the Sisters of the Holy Family was her idea, her work, and her inspiration. As she said, "I am going to live and die for God." And so she did.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, "The Formation of Afro-Creole Culture," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 58.

<sup>2</sup> Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 5-8.

<sup>3</sup> Henry P. Dart, "The Career of Dubreuil in French Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 18 (1935): 267-331.

<sup>4</sup> Notarial Archives of New Orleans (hereafter NONA)/Almonaster y Roxas, 1770, October 1, 205b-7a (four pages).



<sup>5</sup> Judith Kelleher Shafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1994), 2–3.

<sup>6</sup> Kimberly Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places, Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769–1803* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); see also “Avenues to Freedom. Open to New Orleans’ Black Population, 1769–1779,” *Louisiana History* 31 (1990): 237–64.

<sup>7</sup> Edward P. Jones, *The Known World* (New York: Harper Collins/Amistad Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Henry E. Sterkx, *The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Louisiana* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972), 248–51.

<sup>9</sup> St. Martin’s Church, *Marriage Records, 1825–1836*, VII, no. 167 (St. Martinville, Louisiana).

<sup>10</sup> This work by the Countess de Carcado is found in the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family (SSF Archives). The title of the book is *L’Ame Unie à Jésus Christ dans le très saint sacrement de l’autel*, vol. 2 (Paris: Méquignon Junior Librairie de la Faculté de Théologie, 1830).

<sup>11</sup> *Metropolitan Catholic Almanac and Laity’s Directory* (Baltimore: Fielding Lucas, Jr., 1849), 139.

<sup>12</sup> Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans (hereafter AANO), *St. Mary Marriages, 1805–1880*, no. 39; for the Amand Letters, see University of Notre Dame Archives, V-4–9.

<sup>13</sup> Ursuline Convent Archives, *Baptismal Register, November 19, 1837–September 14, 1845*.

<sup>14</sup> *Dictionary of Louisiana Biography*, s.v. “Rousselon, Etienne-Jean-François, clergyman, educator, administrator.”

<sup>15</sup> University of Notre Dame Archives, V-4–1. Antoine Blanc. August, 1841. Also AANO, Blanc to the Congregation, 13 October 1840, and AANO, Register of the Acts of the New Orleans Diocese, n. 113, February 4, 1841.

<sup>16</sup> AANO. See the lists from the baptismal registers of St. Louis Cathedral.

<sup>17</sup> A copy of the original document is in the Archives of the Holy Family.

<sup>18</sup> SSF Archives, *Constitutions Provisoires des Soeurs de la Sainte Famille*.

<sup>19</sup> NONA, Octave de Armas, 1851, May 23, no. 161. *Testament de Henriette Delille*.

<sup>20</sup> NONA, Octave de Armas, 1852, December 20, 53:378.

## Chapter 4

# Dealing with Desegregation

## *Black and White Responses to the Desegregation of the Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina, 1953*

CECILIA A. MOORE

Early Sunday morning, May 31, 1953, Bishop Vincent S. Waters left Nazareth and traveled sixty miles east and south to officially begin the desegregation of the Diocese of Raleigh. His destination was Newton Grove, a small tobacco village of about four hundred citizens, and most of them, both black and white, were Catholic. Newton Grove Catholics knew that the bishop had ordered the closing of the black parish, St. Benedict the Moor, and the integration of the white church, Holy Redeemer, but they had no idea that the bishop himself would preside at the mass that morning.

Less than six years into his episcopacy, Bishop Waters had announced in 1951 that the Diocese of Raleigh would not tolerate segregated parishes or schools.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, from 1945 Waters had begun to introduce Carolina Catholics to the new way of Catholicism that they would practice and lead the South in practicing as well. Stories abound of Waters confirming black and white children together in the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Raleigh, of his insisting on having white and black acolytes at masses at which he presided, and of his requiring the diocesan newspaper to cover the activities of black Catholics and their parishes with as much interest as they covered those of white Catholics in the diocese.<sup>2</sup> But nothing could quite prepare the faithful of North Carolina for what would transpire on this late spring morning in Newton Grove.

In the Catholic world North Carolina had been dubbed “the China of America” because it had the smallest Catholic population of any state in the Union.<sup>3</sup> But there were pockets of Catholicism throughout the Tar Heel State where Catholic evangelization had really taken root. Newton

Uncommon Faithfulness

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**M. Shawn Copeland, editor**  
with LaReine-Marie Mosely, S.N.D.,  
and Albert J. Raboteau



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