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Introduction

One of the most troubling facts concerning slavery was its association with Christianity. Christian beliefs and texts have been manipulated and utilized throughout history to gain power and control over certain groups of people, cultures, and races. In particular, history proves that the White man(s) was and has been the main culprit of this manipulation and control towards the Black slaves. The white men I am referring to are the Europeans who sailed the Atlantic Ocean to Africa to capture and enslave Africans. They then traveled to the Americas to start their colonies and began the dehumanization of African/African-American peoples in many regions particularly Maryland. During this time Maryland held a prominent position as one of the primary tobacco plantation areas in the U.S., concurrently maintaining strong ties to Christian theology. Furthermore in this essay, I will analyze “Thomas Bacon’s Sermon To Negro Slaves” which was given in 1749 at the Parish Church of Saint Peters in the province of Maryland. This essay aims to explain the tactics Thomas Bacon used to manipulate and persuade the slaves to fear not obeying their masters by conducting themselves and each other obediently. Using this text I will explore the power of Christianity as a weapon of manipulation and control and how the white man used this weapon to maintain their social dominance over African/African American slaves. I will complete this analysis through the methodological lens of the Panopticon as described by French Philosopher Michel Foucault.

Power of Rhetoric

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In the opening statement of this sermon, Thomas Bacon employs the rhetorical device of 'ethos' to appeal to the moral ethics of the slaves, aiming to capture their attention. Bacon begins by stating, "Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be Bond or Free." This line is crucially important because it directly quotes Ephesians 6:8, a statement by the apostle Paul in the New Testament of the Bible. It's essential to note the contextual difference between Bacon's and Paul's use of this language. Paul addressed a Christian audience in Ephesus around A.D 60-62, where 'doulos,' the Greek word for bondservants or servant-slaves, held a different connotation. In Ephesus, a bondservant was a citizen-owned by a master to work and pay off their debt, devoid of the negative connotations associated with slavery in America. Thomas Bacon strategically leverages this biblical reference to establish his credibility and align himself with the moral principles of the Christian God. By invoking Ephesians 6:8, Bacon aligns himself with the teachings of Paul, a respected figure in the Christian community, thereby bolstering his ethos. While Paul addressed a community of bondservants in a specific historical and cultural context, Bacon adapts the message to resonate with the enslaved Black congregation in Maryland. The congregation interprets the term "bond" not as a contractual work arrangement but as a representation of their harsh conditions of servitude.

Following his opening statement, Bacon's subsequent remarks suggest a historical connection with the Black congregation, indicating a past engagement and lectures to them. Bacon stated, "When you were last here, I endeavored to show you that GOD made you and all the World and that he made you and all Mankind to serve him; that it is he who places every Man in the Station or Rank which he holds in the World, making some Kings, some Masters, and others Servants and Slaves." By referencing a past meeting with the phrase 'When you were last

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here,' Bacon subtly implies an ongoing relationship in his interactions with this enslaved congregation. The choice of the term 'endeavored' suggests that he had previously made a conscious effort to impart knowledge or instructions to them, indicating a sustained relationship and Bacon's continued and active involvement in sharing his teachings with this congregation on previous occasions. The repetition of Bacon addressing these concepts in this sermon not only reinforces his message but also suggests a perceived need for the congregation to continually reflect on these fundamental principles. Bacon's implication of the divine order and purpose in the hierarchy of societal roles is crucial to understand. It not only conveys that the congregation was taught that God was the creator but also the authority responsible for assigning each person their earthly positions or roles in society. The statement "making some Kings, some Masters, and others Servants and Slaves" is Bacon's tactic to extend the belief of a hierarchical order established by God, where some individuals are destined to be kings, others masters, and others servants or slaves. This concept places the enslaved congregation in a subordinate position, affirming the notion that their current condition of slavery is a divine order from God alone.

Bacon then declares, "Every one of us is obliged to do the Business he hath set us about, and whoever is doing his Business quietly and honestly in the World is serving God, though his condition be ever so low and mean; and will be as much taken notice of, and as highly favored by God at the Last Day." Bacon's assertion that "Every one of us is obliged to do the Business he hath set us about" emphasizes individual responsibility and purpose. The use of the term "Business" expands the concept beyond mere occupation, suggesting that each slave's calling was a unique calling from God in their current life. This idea is another strategic tactic by Bacon to encourage the congregation to find dignity in their roles as slaves, despite the challenges they face. Bacon's implication about conducting one's business "quietly and honestly in the World"

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continues the moral dimension of the message. Given the subordinate conditions faced by these slaves, this tactic implies affirmation, suggesting that the value of their honest labor and actions is not unnoticed by God. Furthermore, Bacon asserts that individuals who conduct themselves in this manner are “serving God,” regardless of their “Condition... ever so low and mean.” This serves as another strategy to affirm the slaves, encouraging them to find solace and empowerment in serving God even within the confines of enslavement. Finally, the promise that those fulfilling their duties in this manner “will be as much taken notice of, and as highly favored by God at the last Day” provides a long-term perspective. Bacon assures the congregation of more divine recognition to come on the ‘last day,’ a reference to the end times or ‘eschatology’ in Christian traditions. For the congregation, this promise served as a source of spiritual resilience, inspiring perseverance in their duties with the hope of an ultimate reward communicated from Bacon, that God promises in the future.

Bacon then states, “I also laid before you, — That you ought to serve GOD for your own Sakes because you have Souls to be saved, That everyone who dies, must go either to Heaven or Hell; and that there is no other way of escaping everlasting Punishment in Hell, or being eternally happy in Heaven, but by serving GOD while he spares us Life upon Earth”. The caveats in the concepts of Heaven and Hell reside in the dichotomy announced. Contesting eternal happiness in Heaven against the prospect of everlasting punishment in Hell, Bacon outlawed a stark contrast that allows no middle ground. This binary perspective heightened the fear associated with potential consequences, communicating that disobedience or resistance would lead to a fate more severe than the hardships of slavery. Emphasizing the slaves should serve God “for your own sakes because you have Souls to be saved,” personalizes the consequences, making each negro feel accountable for their eternal fate. Furthermore, Bacon continually links

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salvation directly to obedience and service, portraying compliance with their masters' dictates not only as a temporal obligation but as a matter of eternal significance. Urgency introduced by the phrase "while he spares us Life upon Earth" exerted pressure on the congregation to conform promptly, emphasizing the fleeting nature of the opportunity to secure divine favor. Exploiting emotional pity, Bacon intertwined the fear of Hell and the promise of Heaven with their immediate circumstances. The notion of eternal suffering created a deep-seated fear surpassing the physical hardships of their lives in slavery, reinforcing a sense of powerlessness and dependency that rendered them more susceptible to manipulation.

Similar to the opening statement, this part of the sermon employs another rhetorical device. However, Bacon shifts from ethos to 'pathos,' appealing directly to the congregation's emotions by delving into profound themes such as salvation, eternal punishment, and everlasting happiness. The mention of facing a choice between Heaven and Hell, coupled with the urgency of escaping everlasting punishment, is the key to evoking an emotional response. The fear of divine retribution serves as a constant reminder, fostering a psychological state conducive to compliance and obedience. In this way, Bacon strategically employs the concepts of Heaven and Hell through the device of pathos, to influence the behavior of the slaves, both in the present and by shaping their beliefs about the eternal consequences of disobedient actions. Moreover, by conveying that "God placed masters and slaves in their current ranks" and asserting that "everyone is obliged to do the business they set about honestly, and whoever is doing that business honestly in the world is serving God," Bacon establishes a context for the enslaved congregation. This alignment between religious duty and obedience to their earthly masters becomes a pivotal aspect of Bacon's message, shaping the slave's perception of their roles and

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reinforcing the idea that fulfilling their duties to their masters is, in essence, the way of serving God.

Bacon continues by stating, “That you ought to look upon Him as your great and chief Master, to whom you must one day answer for everything you have done in this Life:—That he is always looking upon you, and taking Notice of your Behavior so that if you could deceive all the World, you cannot deceive GOD”. This piece of Bacon’s sermon uniquely sheds light on the metaphorical principles of the Panopticon as implemented by the French Philosopher Michel Foucault. When examining the metaphorical principles of the Panopticon through Foucault’s lens, the synergy of these elements becomes apparent. Although this sermon does not function as a physical institutional building with an inbuilt system of control, it does strongly argue the case for constant surveillance. For example, Bacon states, “That he(God) is always looking upon you, and taking Notice of your Behaviour”. In other words, Bacon’s assertion that God is the ultimate observer and chief master, who intentionally placed slaves under the control of slave masters, functions as an inherent system of control. In this context, the metaphorical aspects of the Panopticon unveil the mechanisms of power linked to the concept of God, aiming to produce disciplined negro slaves who embody the ethical norms and rules advocated by Bacon.

In the next lines of the sermon, Bacon continues with surveillance but he conducts the concept with more theological tactics. He states, “That you ought to love GOD above all Things, or else He will not love you, which would be the most dreadful thing that could happen to you: that if the Love of GOD is not strong enough to keep you from doing what is bad, you ought, at least, to dread his terrible Judgments, for that he is able, not only to destroy your Bodies, and strike you dead in a Moment but also, to cast both Body and Soul into Hell”. Strategically employing fear as a powerful motivator in this statement, Bacon intertwines theological elements

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to instill a profound sense of dread. While these elements are recurrent throughout the sermon, in this context, he utilizes the conditional nature of ‘God’s love’ as the driving force. Bacon declares, “That you ought to love GOD above all Things, or else He will not love you.” Here, the fear tactic operates by establishing a direct link between the slaves’ obedience, their love of God, and divine favor. Failure to prioritize their love for God is suggested to put them at risk of divine displeasure. Bacon heightens the atmosphere of terror by introducing the concept that if the love of God fails to prevent wrongdoing, then the slaves should ‘dread his terrible Judgments.’ This fear tactic exploits the notion that God possesses the power not only to inflict immediate punishments, such as ‘destroy your Bodies, and strike you dead in a Moment,’ but also to consign both Body and Soul to Hell. Manipulating these theological elements, Bacon distorts the Christian understanding of God’s love and justice, transforming it into a transactional relationship. As observed earlier, Bacon’s theological manipulation serves a specific purpose — to establish obedience as a prerequisite for divine favor and, consequently, to simultaneously maintain control over the enslaved congregation. The impact on the slaves is profound. Faced with the imminent threats of divine punishment, the congregation likely was left in a state of terror. The fear of losing divine love, coupled with the dread of severe judgments, became a potent psychological tool that compelled the slaves to conduct themselves obediently. The potential consequences outlined by Bacon, both immediate physical harm and eternal damnation in Hell, created a compelling incentive for obedience born out of deep-seated fear.

In the next portion of the sermon, Bacon shifts the authoritative focus from obeying God to the concept of obeying slave masters. It also contains a critical paradox that reveals the authentic dreadful subjectivity the slaves could not escape. He begins by stating, “In the next Place I endeavored to show you, how you ought to behave towards your Masters. That as GOD

himself hath set them over you here in the Nature of his Stewards, he expects you will do everything for them, as you do for himself:—That you must be obedient and subject to them in all Things, and do whatever they order you to do”. In this segment, Bacon imparts more instruction on the conduct of slaves towards their masters, drawing a parallel between the authority of masters and the divine sovereignty of God. Embedded within his instruction is a paradox, illuminating the religious duty of slaves to obey and submit to their masters, portraying the masters as conduits of God’s authority within the realm of servitude. The paradox is compelling, as it assigns a dual role to slave masters, akin to stewards appointed by God Himself. By framing masters as stewards, Bacon establishes a hierarchical structure that equates obedience to masters with obedience to God. This paradox becomes evident when slaves are instructed to serve their masters with the same devotion and reverence as they would serve God. This practice elevates earthly masters to a quasi-divine status within the context of slave obedience. Bacon strategically utilizes the divine authority of God to legitimize the unwavering obedience expected from slaves. The paradoxical nature of this directive potentially places slaves in a position where disobedience to their masters is equated with disobedience to God. The implication is clear – defiance or resistance to the commands of earthly masters would be construed as an act against God’s will, justifying severe disciplinary measures. By aligning the authority of masters with the divine sovereignty of God, Bacon reinforces the notion that slaves should not only obey but also revere their masters in the same way he reinforced to God. This theological manipulation solidifies the power dynamic between masters and slaves, exploiting Christian doctrines to establish unquestioning obedience and positioning masters in a near-divine authority.

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In the upcoming segment of the sermon, the idea of ‘Double Consciousness’ by Black American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois can be found. Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness suggests that African Americans live with the constant awareness of how they are perceived by the dominant white society. Bacon stated, “That you must not be Eye-Servants, that is, such as will be very busy in their Masters Presence, but very idle when their Backs are turned: For your head Master, Almighty GOD, is looking on you, and though you may escape being found out, or punished by your Owners for it, yet you cannot deceive GOD, who will punish you severely in the next World for your deceitful Dealing in this”. The parallel between the two lies in Bacon urging the congregation to be aware not only of their behavior from their perspective or the perspective of their masters but also from the divine perspective of God. This critical emphasis underscores the multiple perspectives through which the slaves must navigate their behavior and identity. In this segment, Bacon instructs the slaves not to succumb to the temptation of becoming ‘Eye-Servants’— individuals who exhibit diligence only when under the direct gaze of their masters but slacken their efforts when unsupervised. The essence of Bacon’s caution extends beyond the immediate consequences of deceit towards earthly masters. By repeating the framework of God as the ‘head Master,’ with an all-seeing and omnipotent presence, Bacon reiterates the inescapable nature of divine surveillance. Even if the slaves manage to elude discovery or evade punishment from their human owners, they cannot deceive the watchful eye of God. This dimension adds a profound layer of accountability, emphasizing that the slaves’ actions are subject to scrutiny not only in their earthly existence but also in their potential spiritual existence. This duality underlines the extending consequences of their behavior, highlighting moral accountability that reaches beyond the immediate and tangible repercussions within their earthly lives. The notion of escaping punishment on Earth but facing severe

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consequences in the next World serves as a powerful deterrent against deceptive practices.

Bacon's strategic use of Christian imagery aims to instill a sense of constant moral obligation and integrity, reinforcing the idea that true diligence should be an intrinsic quality, driven by an unwavering commitment to righteousness that transcends earthly consequences.

The following portion of Bacon's sermon is pivotal and deeply exemplifies his rhetoric. He employs rhetorical strategies aimed at instilling a sense of moral obligation and accountability within the enslaved congregation. This particular portion revolves around Bacon's attempt to align the slaves' behavior with the expectations one might have of diligent and respectful servants. By posing rhetorical questions and urging the slaves to consider their actions from the perspective of hypothetical masters and mistresses, Bacon strategically manipulates their mindset to reinforce his broader message of faithful servitude. He states, "Now, to suit this Rule to your particular Circumstances;—Suppose you were Masters and Mistresses, and had Servants under you, — would you not desire that your Servants should do their business faithfully and honestly, as well when your Back was turned, as while you were looking over them?—Would you not expect that they should take Notice of what you said to them?—That they should behave themselves with Respect towards you and yours, and be as careful of every Thing belonging to you as you would be yourselves?"

Bacon's use of rhetorical questions is evident as he asks the slaves to envision themselves in the position of masters and mistresses. The questions are tactical rhetorical devices to engage the slaves in self-reflection, prompting them to consider the standards they would expect from their servants. By asking, 'Would you not desire that your Servants should do their business faithfully and honestly, as well when your back was turned, as while you were looking over them?' Bacon is not seeking an actual answer but encouraging the slaves to acknowledge

the universality of ethical expectations in service. Furthermore, Bacon's manipulation becomes apparent as he appeals to the slaves' sense of empathy and self-interest. By framing the hypothetical scenarios in which they are the masters and mistresses, Bacon aims to make the slaves recognize the inherent value of honesty, diligence, and respect in service. This unique strategy prompts the slaves to internalize these qualities as desirable virtues, subtly guiding them toward a realization that aligns with Bacon's message of faithful and conscientious servitude. Altogether, this segment like the others showcases Bacon's strategic use of rhetorical devices to manipulate the slaves' perspective, fostering a sense of personal responsibility and aligning their conduct with the moral standards he advocates.

In the following segment, continuing his tactical use of rhetorical strategies, Bacon reiterates moral imperatives such as obedience and respect, drawing a parallel between serving earthly masters and serving God. These reinforced patterns, detected throughout the sermon, contribute significantly to Bacon's main argument. In stating, "You are Servants—do therefore as you would wish to be done by and you will both be good Servants to your Masters, and good Servants to GOD. If, then, you love your neighbor as yourself, or would do by others, as you could wish they would do by you." He urges the slaves to adhere to a moral code that transcends the confines of their servitude. This continues his desired foundation for ethical behavior by invoking the universal moral principle known as the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule is highly valued in Judeo-Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism history, leading to its influence throughout the world. In Judeo-Christianity, it is referred to as the 'Second Greatest Command,' the most upheld law in Jewish culture and traditions. The inclusion of the reciprocal expectation within the Golden Rule, as expressed in "If, then, you love your neighbor as yourself, or would do by others, as you could wish they would do by you," serves to reinforce the manipulative

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aspect of Bacon's message. While the Golden Rule is generally a positive ethical principle, in this context, Bacon's use of it remains a tool for manipulation. This repeated moral obligation tied to divine authority, reinforces the power structure, making the slaves more compliant as they see their actions as fulfilling both earthly and spiritual duties. The deliberate use of the term "neighbor" becomes a tactical linguistic device. In other words, Bacon employs the term 'neighbor' as a synonymous implication that the love, care, and consideration they are expected to demonstrate should be extended to their masters.

Bacon continues to exploit the moral imperative of respect as he states, "You will be as careful not to hurt anything belonging to a Neighbour, or to do any Harm to his Goods, his Cattle, or his Plantation, or to see it done by others, as you would be to hurt yourself, or any Thing you had of your own". In this statement, the emphasis that slaves exhibit the same level of care for their masters' possessions as for their own brings forth the facade of a moral code. However, upon closer examination, the inherent exploitation of this moral imperative becomes evident, exposing repeating complexities of control and manipulation. Bacon's choice of language, particularly the mention of "Goods," "Cattle," and "Plantation," goes beyond a mere call for ethical behavior; it serves as a stark reminder the slaves were physical property on their master plantations. The parallel drawn between the slaves' obligation to protect their masters' belongings and the inherent instinct to preserve one's own, highlights the insidious manipulation at play. While on the surface, the sermon may seem to advocate for a moral code, Bacon perpetuates the oppressive system by equating the slaves' self-interest with the protection of their masters' property.

In the epilogue of this sermon, Bacon shifts back to the rhetorical device of pathos, by using vivid and emotive language to evoke feelings of fear, empathy, and concern. He states,

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Suppose any of you to have been wicked Creatures,— idle, drunken, swearing, thievish, leud People;—and being at length overtaken by the Hand of GOD, and laid down on a painful, sick Bed, without any Hopes of Recovery, with all the Terrors of Conscience about you, and nothing before you but Death, and the fearful Apprehensions of being miserable forever,—what a dreadful State of Mind must you then be in.” The description of a person being overtaken by the consequences of a sinful life, lying on a painful sick bed with no hope of recovery, experiencing terrors of conscience, and facing the prospect of death and eternal misery was designed to provoke a strong emotional response from the slaves. He aimed to instill a sense of urgency and empathy, molding the emotional state of the congregation to align with the overarching ethical message he relentlessly communicated. The use of pathos in this excerpt establishes a powerful connection with the slaves. By prompting the congregation to envision the dire moral state, he consistently urges them to hold each other accountable for their behavior.

Directly following this evocative description he finishes the sermon by stating, “And what would you then give, that you had been blessed with a true Friend, one that had so much real Love for you, as to have warned you of your Danger and have hindered you, by his kind Advice, from running such Lengths of Wickedness as you had done? You have it in your Power to be such true Friends and Lovers of one another, you can help each other on in the Way toward Heaven, and you ought to check one another, when you see doing amiss: You can, on a Sunday Evening, talk about the good Advice you have heard in Church, and by telling it to such as could not be there, may do them much Good.” In this final segment exist recurring elements of manipulation embedded in a poignant rhetorical strategy used to advocate communal support and guidance among the congregation. This rhetorical strategy also exemplifies the crucial element of the metaphorical principles of the Panopticon. Commencing with a vivid description of the

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dreadful consequences of a sinful life, Bacon establishes an emotional connection with the slaves, exploiting their fears and vulnerabilities. He then introduces a hypothetical scenario, prompting the audience to reflect on the hypothetical value of a true friend who could have prevented their descent into wickedness. As this segment unfolds, Bacon suggests the power to be “true friends” and advocates for each other lies within their grasp, thereby creating a sense of agency among the slaves. The call to actively support and check each other’s behavior enables a plantation of communal surveillance and control, reinforcing ethical norms and expectations. The manipulative aspect becomes more apparent as Bacon issues a practical injunction. Instructing the slaves to share the sermon’s moral guidance beyond the church walls, he positions them as agents of moral influence amongst other slaves. This recommendation to discuss moral advice heard in church on a Sunday evening amplifies the sense of communal scrutiny. It also contributes to a form of community policing. In this way, this segment subtly employs the final principles of the Panopticon, advocating for a plantation of internalized surveillance and communal responsibility.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this essay was to explain the tactics Thomas Bacon used to manipulate and persuade the slaves to fear not obeying their masters by conducting themselves and each other obediently. This essay provided a concise analysis through the methodological lens of the Panopticon as described by French Philosopher Michel Foucault. Through the analysis, Thomas Bacon’s sermon to the negro slaves represents a masterful manipulation of Christian theology and rhetorical strategies. Aimed to control and guide the behavior of the enslaved congregation, Bacon strategically leverages the power of rhetoric, by

employing ethos and pathos to appeal to the moral ethics and emotions of the slaves. By intertwining biblical references with the harsh reality of slavery, Bacon reinforces his authority through the teachings of Christian narratives, effectively bolstering his central message. This sermon's recurrent themes of divine, self, and communal surveillance, coupled with the fear-inducing dichotomy of Heaven and Hell, exploit the slaves' vulnerabilities. Which creates a potent psychological tool for compliance. Bacon solidifies his control by framing earthly masters as stewards appointed by God, establishing a parallel between the authority of masters and the divine sovereignty of God. The rhetorical device of asking slaves to envision themselves as masters subtly guides their mindset. Fostering a sense of personal responsibility and aligning their conduct with Bacon's moral instructions. Other moral imperatives, such as the Golden Rule, not only serve as ethical guidelines but also function as tools for manipulation. Bacon's repetition of the emphasis on obedience and respect subtly reinforces the power structure, making the slaves more compliant by intertwining their earthly actions with spiritual duties. As explored, the metaphorical principles of the Panopticon, as elucidated by Michel Foucault, encompass this sermon uniquely. Although not a physical institution, the constant emphasis on divine surveillance mirrors the Panopticon's inherent system of control, urging slaves to behave as if always under the watchful eye of God.

In conclusion, this essay contextualizes the broader historical framework of slavery, focusing on how Christianity was used as a tool to establish slavery as justifiable. This project addresses an audience of readers interested in understanding the historical and rhetorical dimensions of the interwoven relationship between Christianity and slavery. This project serves as a call to action, to engage and explore disciplines such as history, theology, rhetoric, and the nuanced analysis of power dynamics within the framework of slavery.

