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Abstract of Findings/Summary of Activities

Early in 2005, the working argument for my dissertation research was effectively summarized in the following terms: “The dissertation explores the social impact of Christian liturgy in places and times that historians have long found devoid of any meaningful Christian practice. Beasley argues that the failure to recognize liturgical behavior as an important form of historical Christianity has obscured an essential process by which social power was created and contested in the British colonial world.” Having pursued evidence for that hypothesis since the end of the spring term, I have been gratified by the results, results that will both support and extend my intended lines of argument. Having spent the summer months in the seventeenth and eighteenth century records that will support my dissertation, I am pleased to have turned the corner into writing my second chapter by early September. I am particularly grateful for the support of the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture, which has been essential to my rapid progress in research this summer.

With the Center’s support, I spent portions of May and June in Jamaica, working in the archival collections of the National Library of Jamaica, the University of the West Indies at Mona, and particularly the Jamaica Archives in the colonial capital of Spanish Town. This was a stimulating period of research, combining the excitement of intellectual discovery with temporary residence in the largest Anglophone city south of Miami. In the Jamaica Archives, I was able to read in the parish and vestry minutes for the parishes of Jamaica, some stretching back to the late seventeenth century, within a generation of the

first English colonists. These records, underused by historians of early America, led me to several new insights on ritual life in the plantation colonies, particularly regarding mortuary practices and in relation to the participation of persons of color in the ritual life of the Church of England in Jamaica. I also came to understand more about the importance of liturgical culture to colonial governors and the degree to which the Anglican church was implicated in the slave regime. After the archives closed, I was able to visit some of the remaining colonial churches, to see where these rituals were enacted.

For the remainder of the summer, I worked in the microfilm collections of the correspondence of the Bishops of London with the colonial churches and in the papers of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, obtained from the Center for Research Libraries. Thus the summer enabled me to consider the story I seek to tell both in material transmitted to metropolitan elites in London and in the sometimes more telling material that remained in the particular colonies. I also decided to delay my research trip to Barbados until October, to allow me to finish my work in the metropolitan material. I depart for Barbados October 16 and look forward to putting the finishing touches on my dissertation research .

Summer 2005 was thus a turning point in the life of my research project. I am enjoying a dissertation fellowship during academic year 2005-2006 from the Center for the Americas and anticipate finishing my dissertation by the end of that year. Both the quality of the scholarship I hope to produce and the timeliness of my progress through the project can be attributed to the support of the C.S.R.C., for which I am profoundly thankful.