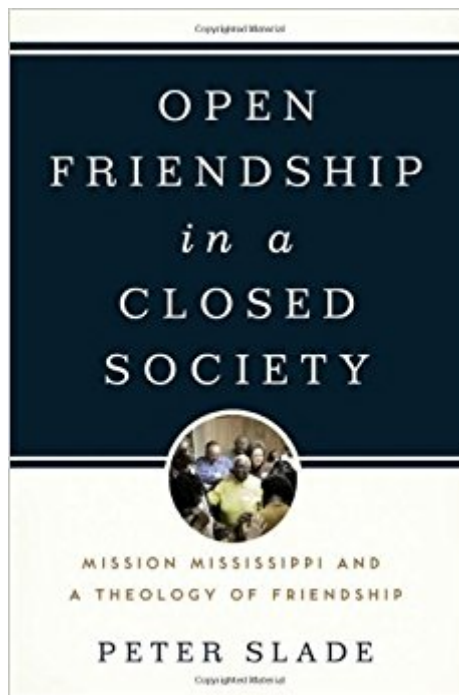




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# Open Friendship In A Closed Society: Mission Mississippi And A Theology Of Friendship



## Synopsis

Mission Mississippi is the largest interracial ecumenical church-based racial reconciliation group in the United States. Peter Slade offers a sustained examination of whether the Mission's model of racial reconciliation (which stresses one-on-one, individual friendships among religious people of different races) can effectively address the issue of social justice. Slade argues that Mission Mississippi's goal of "changing Mississippi one relationship at a time" is both a pragmatic strategy and a theological statement of hope for social and economic change in Mississippi. Carefully tracing the organization's strategies of biracial church partnerships and sponsorships of large civic events, and intercessory prayer breakfast groups, he concludes that they do indeed offer hope for not only for racial reconciliation but for enabling the mobilization of white economic and social power to benefit broad-based community development. At the same time, he honestly conveys the considerable obstacles to the success of these strategies. Slade's work comes out of the vibrant Lived Theology movement, which looks at the ways theologies go beyond philosophical writings to an embodiment in the grassroots lives of religious people. Drawing on extensive interviews and observations of Mission Mississippi activities, church sources, and theological texts, this book is important not only for scholars of theology and race relations but also Southern studies and religious studies.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The book strikes a delicate balance between constructive criticism and a deep awareness of and sympathy for the perspectives of both white and black. . . [Peter Slade] gets the story remarkably

right, with all its nuances."--The Christian Century "In a book that artfully combines theology, history, and sociology, Peter Slade examines the 'lived theology' of Mission Mississippi. . . . this book is a theological analysis awaiting the final verdict of history. And while Mississippi's history gives little reason for hope in this regard, Slade's perceptive study does."--Journal of American Studies "Open Friendship in a Closed Society is a compelling account of how prayer and friendship have enabled Christians in Mississippi to pursue racial reconciliation in the aftermath of the civil rights era. With keen attention to personal narratives and historical background, author Peter Slade leads the reader in an exciting exploration of the global implications of a local experiment in lived theology. I consider this book to be required reading for anyone who is willing to reconsider how religious practices and ideas can bring about social change." --Cheryl J. Sanders, Author of *Saints in Exile* and *Ministry at the Margins* "This is an excellent piece of lived theology. The theological concept is the 'open friendship' of Jesus Christ. The situation is the closed churches and closed white society of Mississippi. The agent is Mission Mississippi. The solution is: opening friendship with the excluded, the other, the stranger. The goal can't be personal relationships only, the new common cause must be social justice for the oppressed and discriminated. Peter Slade offers a peace-making book."

--Jürgen Moltman, Author of *Theology of Hope* "Peter Slade has listened carefully to the voice of the religious people doing the hard work of racial reconciliation, and his analysis puts them in fruitful conversation with academic theologians. This book makes original and powerful links across cultures, from Germany to the American South, to show connections between scholarly considerations of reconciliation and the lived experiences of people struggling to deal with one of the nation's most pressing concerns--transcending racial and religious barriers to achieve social healing. It is wide ranging, subtle, and incisive, with practical implications for the work of the theologian and the churchgoer." --Charles Reagan Wilson, author of *Judgment and Grace in Dixie* and Editor-in-chief of *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* "This is a remarkably well written and researched volume which details the inspiring work of an exceptional organization and some dedicated individuals who have been leading a southern community on a slow and conflicted journey out of a racially and theologically closed society. No one can read this book without a greater appreciation of the complexities but at the same time the heartening possibilities that are involved in the vital task of racial and spiritual reconciliation. It also serves as a reminder of the universality of the importance of that task." --William F. Winter, Former Governor of Mississippi "[Slade's] theological arguments and historical observations are tightly woven and winsomely written, and the mix of pragmatism and hope that permeates the book makes it not only wise but also useful, a welcome quality considering that Mississippi's problems are not as distinctive as its

history suggests."--Books and Culture

Peter Slade is Assistant Professor of Religion at Ashland University

In this small volume, Dr. Slade captures the power and significance of a seemingly small community movement which is living out the admonition of Christ to connect deeply in true friendship.

Connecting theological heavy hitters such as Bonhoeffer, Volf, and Moltmann with the everyday lives of Christians in Mississippi, he documents the power of the Spirit to bring healing to the long standing racial divide. Through the use of a balanced narrative he challenges the reader and the members of Mission Mississippi not to take an "either/or" approach to spirituality and social justice. The personal stories of those involved in Mission Mississippi throughout the book and render it both engaging and challenging to one's personal narrative and theology, especially with regard to the real possibility of substantive social change. Buy and read this exhaustively researched book that is both rigorously academic and readable at the same time.

Very interesting read about the racist troubles within the Presbyterian PCA church and how much the southern culture and way of thinking affected even Christ's elect. We all are to some degree a by-product of our environment/cultural worldview. Good to know the PCA has embraced and repented of their sins and are working to overcome and be a positive force for inclusion.

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