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Abstract

Several scholars have acknowledged the otherworldly character of black religion in America. From its inception in the late 18th century, the black church had preached a providential theology that aspired for a better and compensatory world to come. This theology provoked conflict with the burgeoning black abolitionist movement of the early 19th century. The disagreement centered on the adoption of moral suasion as abolitionist philosophy. The early phase of Martin Delany’s abolitionist career was the theater of this conflict. Delany publicly challenged the leading black churches on the problematic nature of otherworldly theology. He proposed a secular approach that emphasized human agency instead.

At the conclusion of the annual meeting of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society in August 1848, two prominent black abolitionists, William Wells Brown of Kentucky and Charles Lenox Remond of Massachusetts, were invited to address a gathering of the black community in Philadelphia. In anticipation of a large turnout, a committee was constituted and charged with the responsibility of applying to some of the leading black churches for permission to use their halls for this important anti-slavery gathering. Surprisingly, all the requests were rejected. As a last resort, the abolitionists turned to the Philadelphia Institute on Lombard Street, described as "a very small place" ("Letter from Columbia" 1848). Though the churches refused the use of their facilities, prominent black preachers and pastors attended the meeting. Among them were Revs. Daniel Scott of the Baptist Church and Stephen H. Gloucester of the Second Colored Presbyterian Church. The latter had in fact established quite a "distinguished" reputation "for his zealous opposition to anti-slavery" ("Letter from Columbia" 1848). It was not surprising, therefore, that the attitudes of the black church to anti-slavery featured prominently in the deliberations. In their speeches Brown and Remond strongly condemned the churches and openly challenged Revs. Scott and Gloucester to explain to the audience the justification for their churches' actions. For unspecified reasons both pastors declined to offer any explanations, proposing instead to debate Brown and Remond on the relationship of the black church to anti-slavery at a later date. They promised that during that debate they would prove that, in the words of Rev. Gloucester, "there is not a colored 'pro-slavery' church in Philadelphia" ("Letter from Columbia" 1848). In his acceptance of this challenge, Remond asked Scott and Gloucester if they would make their churches available for the debate. Their response was unequivocal and emphatic: No ("Letter from Columbia" 1848).

Rev. Gloucester was no stranger to controversy. Some months earlier, precisely in January 1848, a Scottish correspondent of *The Liberator* had published a letter about Gloucester that provoked this vitriolic reaction from Martin Delany: "that miserable person, Stephen H. Gloucester, has proved himself a traitor, worthy of the deepest and most lasting execration. Let the burning indignation of a misrepresented and insulted people lash him naked through the world" (Delany 1848f). Delany then called for the summoning of a meeting "in every place by the friends of the slave, irrespective of color, for the exposure of the deed of this clerical assassin" (Delany 1848f). He did not elaborate on whatever Gloucester had done to deserve such vicious condemnation. Whatever he had done was probably contrary to the interests of anti-slavery. Notwithstanding, indications are that Rev. Gloucester had not always been openly antagonistic to anti-slavery. He was one of eight black abolitionists, including James W. C. Pennington and Samuel E. Cornish, who helped found the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in May of 1840 (Quarles 1969). Also, his church, the Second Colored Presbyterian, was among those destroyed during the Moyamensing riot of August 1842 when anti-abolitionist mobs attacked and destroyed institutions and symbols of black progress (Simmons 1983). One critique portrayed this episode as a "prime example of whites denouncing blacks for their degradation while simultaneously destroying those institutions which sought to eradicate that degradation" (Simmons, 1983: 34). It should be noted that the Second Colored Presbyterian was a brick building that had cost the congregation nearly 10,000 dollars, a debt that took eighteen years to repay (Simmons,

1983: 34). Its destruction could explain why subsequently Rev. Gloucester wisely avoided public endorsement of anti-slavery.

In a related development, a biracial meeting of Philadelphia citizens was summoned at a black church in June of 1850. The notice reserved the lower part of the building for whites who had objected to an integrated seating (*North Star*, June 27, 1850).¹ Rev. Samuel R. Ward, a prominent black abolitionist, consented to the arrangement and agreed to attend and address the gathering. His action reflected the church's ambivalence. In spite of a commitment to abolition, Rev. Ward sanctioned the reservation of a "whites only" pew in a black church in order to appease the racist sensitivities of whites. Frederick Douglass reacted angrily, denouncing Ward's action as "the most cowardly, contemptible and servile specimen of self-degradation..." (*North Star*, June 27, 1850).

The aforementioned episodes mirrored the crisis and contradiction that informed the responses of some of the early black churches to anti-slavery. By 1848 the ambivalence of several black churches to anti-slavery had become an established and troubling fact. Reporting on the Philadelphia incident to Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany, co-editors of *the North Star*, one "W. W." wrote,

The battle now having begun, it ought to be continued on until its termination, until the church shall be able to vindicate the purity of her motives in regard to her opposition with the anti-slavery movement, her freedom from the venom of pro-slavery and put accusers forever at rest, or failing to do this, her accusers may be able to arrest her withering influences, and say to her: Hitherto thou hast domineered over the hearts and conscience of men, but no further...in this cause there shall be no neutrals ("Letter from Columbia" 1848).

The battle line seemed indeed to have been drawn: the black church vs. anti-slavery. It is uncertain, however, if the debate proposed by Revs. Scott and Gloucester ever took place. The one certainty was that the black church did not unanimously endorse anti-slavery. As a Philadelphian and noted black abolitionist, Geo W. Goines lamented,

Thousands of blacks flock to the churches to hear anything but anti-slavery.... The majority of the churches are so connected with slaveholding that they have forgotten that this is a land of slaves. And those that do not stand so connected have no dispensation to open their doors, to have the claims of suffering humanity presented to their people. They have closed their doors to the claims of suffering humanity ("Letter from Philadelphia" 1848).

Despite its origin as a protest institution against the injustices and segregationist policies of mainstream white churches, the black church did not develop a unified and consistent policy vis-à-vis the racism that permeated mainstream society. Instead of standing solidly in support of the abolitionist movement, several black churches seemed stymied by an otherworldly and compensatory theology, as well as other legal, socio-economic, cultural, and political impediments (Gravely 1989; Paris 1985). This hindrance resulted in conflicts of vision and strategy between several of the churches and the black

¹ Unsigned, untitled pieces from *The North Star* will be referenced parenthetically in this format (i.e., by publication title and date). Pieces with additional identifying information (i.e. author or title) will be cited accordingly and appear in the list of references.

abolitionist movement. This problem has received little, if any, scholarly attention. It should be stressed, however, that the otherworldly disposition of the churches was not the major problem. There was also a profound disagreement over the true meaning and potency of moral suasion as abolitionist and reform ideology. While there seemed to be a consensus on the need for moral reform, irreconcilable difference surfaced over the manner of implementation. This paper attempts to analyze the crisis in the black abolitionist movement engendered by the opposition of some of the early black churches to moral suasion. It interrogates an intriguing dilemma: the hostility of black churches to efforts aimed at undermining racism. It also highlights the inner tensions and struggles that defined the early black churches' engagement with abolitionism.

In this paper, the concept "black church" refers to any one of the following three situations. First are the truly independent black churches such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ) that evolved in protest against the discriminatory practices of white churches. These churches cherished the opportunity to be independent. The second refers to those churches that were chartered by, and thus offspring of, white churches such as the Baptist and Methodist conferences, which still exercised significant controls either in the appointment or ordination of the pastors, ownership of the lease of the property on which the churches were built, constitution of the trustees, or exercising significant influence on their composition. The third refers to individual pastors, elders, and trustees who ran the churches. They ranged from the truly radical and independent to the cautious and conservative. The doctrines they preached often reflected how they defined their responsibilities and the missions of their churches. Sometimes the pastor determined the church's response to abolition. Other times, it was the elders and trustees.

It should also be noted that the early black churches were not ideologically and doctrinally coherent but riddled with tensions and ambivalences. In their seminal publication, Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya propose a perspective which they believe would illuminate the dynamics and complexities of the challenges of the early black churches. Adopting a "dialectical model" of analysis would, they contend, "lead to a more dynamic view of the black churches along a continuum of ideological tension, struggles and change" (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990: 11). They reject the prevailing otherworldly/this-worldly binary, or what they term "single non dialectical typological" analysis of black churches. Their sociological perspective engages the dialectical tensions within the early black churches, revealing a troubled institution fractured by internal tensions and conflicts between rival theological viewpoints. These theological rivalries include *Priestly vs. Prophetic* (worship and spiritual life versus political concerns and issues of the wider community); *Otherworldly vs. This-worldly* (concerns with heaven and eternal life and neglect of politics and social concerns versus involvement in the affairs of the world, especially politics and social life); *Universalism vs. Particularism* (universalism of the Christian message versus particularism of their past history as institutions emerging from the racism of white Christians and larger society); and *Resistance vs. Accommodation* (a willingness to pursue change versus being influenced by the larger society and willing to take part in aspects of it, however marginal, as cultural broker and "mediating institution") (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990: 11–12). These dialectics, Lincoln and Mamiya argue, mirror the challenges associated with the engagement of the early black churches with the black abolitionist movement. The

ensuing conflict is a central paradox of the history of the black struggle for freedom in America, one that has escaped scholarly scrutiny.

MORAL SUASION CHALLENGE: THE BLACK CHURCH VS. ANTI-SLAVERY

The early phase of Martin R. Delany's abolitionist career offers a critical context for analysis and understanding of the dynamics of the inner tensions and contradictions that informed the responses of the early black churches to anti-slavery. Few 19th century blacks confronted and challenged the ambivalence of the early black church as courageously and defiantly as Martin Delany (1812–1885). His abolitionist activism during a two-year tenure as roving lecturer for and coeditor of Frederick Douglass's paper *The North Star* (1847–1849) provides a framework for analysis of the ambivalent response of the black church to anti-slavery. His primary responsibility entailed propagating reform values endorsed by the mainstream black abolitionist movement. These values were enshrined in the ideology of moral suasion, officially adopted as abolitionist philosophy in 1835. Moral suasion remained the driving force of black abolitionism throughout the first half of the 19th century (Adeleke 1998; Bell 1957, 1958). In its broader sense, moral suasion refers to the belief that slavery could be reformed through peaceful means as propagated by the followers of William Lloyd Garrison (Garrisonians) during the early decades of the 19th century. It also encapsulates the aspirations and visions of the early black abolitionists who adopted a universalistic worldview that deemphasized race in favor of situational/environmental causalities. They dismissed race as causative of the challenges and deficiencies blacks experienced and emphasized instead conditions and environmental factors that they believed could be remedied through moral reform.

Moral suasion evolved from a combination of circumstances. First, between 1831 and 1835, blacks organized five National Negro Conventions to coordinate efforts and discuss anti-slavery strategies. Meeting in Pennsylvania and New York, these pioneers of the black convention movement discussed the importance of moral reform, self-improvement, temperance, and the pursuit of knowledge (Bell 1969a, 1969b). Prominent white abolitionists, including William Lloyd Garrison, Rev. S. S. Jocelyn, Arthur Tappan, Benjamin Lundy, and John Rankin attended some of the early conventions and thus gained critical insights into, and a better understanding of, the dynamics of the black anti-slavery surge. Subsequently, several of them, including Garrison, abandoned their earlier endorsement of colonization (Bell 1969a; Delany 1968). Second, in December of 1833 a group of white abolitionists and four blacks assembled in Philadelphia to launch the American Anti-Slavery Society. The society pledged to resist slavery and discrimination with the weapon of moral suasion (Garrison 1833; Sorin, 1972: ch. 1, 4, 6; Stewart, 1976; ch. 1, 3). Third, at the 1835 National Negro Convention in Philadelphia, the American Moral Reform Society was launched to spearhead moral suasion, now officially adopted as a reform strategy. It would become the organizational face of moral suasion for the rest of the decade. As the name suggests, its chief objective was "moral reform" conceived broadly to include economic elevation, temperance, and education (Adeleke 1998; Bell 1958; McCormick 1969). Moral suasion sought to address some of the internal problems and shortcomings that had stymied black progress and which over the years had been used to justify slavery, racism and discriminatory practices. Advocates were convinced

that improvement in the moral and material conditions of blacks would appeal favorably to the moral conscience of whites. Moral suasion sought to encourage economic self-reliance among blacks with a view to disproving pro-slavery contention that blacks were inherently lazy, unproductive, and morally decadent.

Martin Delany's position as lecturer for *The North Star* launched him on a crusade to deliver anti-slavery lectures and spread the tenets of moral suasion to black communities across the nation. Based on his early life, Delany seemed headed for a career in the ministry. He was born in 1812 in Charlestown, Virginia (now in West Virginia), where his grandparents had settled after a period of sojourn in Norfolk. In spite of the agonies of slavery and the glaring complicity and hypocrisy of white Christians reflected in the use of religion to justify slavery, his maternal grandparents (Shango and his wife Graci) remained devout Christians. Religion afforded them, like most other blacks, psychological means for surviving the harsh realities of enslavement. Though they survived psychologically, their physical survival became increasingly threatened in Jeffersonian Virginia, a condition that prompted relocation to relatively liberal Pennsylvania. They first settled in Chambersburg. They raised their daughter Pati (Delany's mother) on Christian values, and she grew up "a most exemplary Christian." Pati in turn infused in her offspring a strong desire for Christian virtues. In early youth Delany supposedly "espoused total abstinence" and throughout his life avoided tobacco and liquor (Rollin, 1868: 25). His religious horizon broadened in the 1830s in Pittsburgh when he joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Pittsburgh Bible Society. In 1834 he became secretary of the Temperance Society of the People of Color of Pittsburgh and also helped found the Pittsburgh Young Men Moral Reform Society (Sterling, 1996: 42–43; Ullman, 1971: 26–27).

Delany's active anti-slavery career, however, began that momentous morning of July 29, 1830, when he left his parents in Chambersburg and set out on a 150-mile walk through the Allegheny Turnpike to Pittsburgh (Rollin, 1868: 22; Sterling, 1996: 42–43). Though only nineteen, the move reflected his developing consciousness since Pittsburgh was then a major hub of anti-slavery in Pennsylvania. There he joined other leading blacks in a struggle that transformed the state into the epicenter of the black struggle (Du Bois 1899; Foner, 1975: 104). As a devout moral suasion abolitionist, Delany participated actively in plans to improve the material and moral conditions of blacks. Through public lectures and the medium of *The Pittsburgh Mystery*, a paper he founded in 1843, Delany helped popularize moral suasion.² He would soon expand the scope nationwide. In 1847 Frederick Douglass, having broken ranks with the Garrisonians, embarked upon an independent black abolitionist course and travelled to Pittsburgh to solicit Delany's assistance (Foner, 1964: 15–172; Friedman 1982; Pease and Pease 1967; Quarles 1938; Tillery 1976). Both shared a passionate commitment to anti-slavery and understood the strategic importance of not just an independent black abolitionist path but, most crucial, an independent black abolitionist voice. No one expressed this imperative better than John Ruuswurm, founder of *Freedom's Journal*, black America's first newspaper. The inaugural issue (March 6, 1827) boldly declared,

² Delany started *The Pittsburgh Mystery* in 1843 and ran it until 1847, when he handed it over to a committee and joined Frederick Douglass in Rochester, New York, to start publishing *The North Star*.

We wish to plead our cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the publick [sic] been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly.... We are aware that there are many instances of vice among us, but we avow that it is because no one has taught its subject to be virtuous; many instances of poverty, because no sufficient effort accommodated to minds constructed by slavery, and deprived of early education have been made, to teach them how to husband their hard earnings, and to secure to themselves comfort (Dana, 1971: 34).

The need for blacks to “plead our own cause” had become even more urgent by the mid-1840s. Delany, therefore, did not need much convincing. When Douglass launched his paper *The North Star* in Rochester, New York, in 1847, Delany joined him as coeditor and lecturer. This inaugurated the activist phase of his moral suasion career, during which he encountered the opposition of several black churches to anti-slavery. He would also be exposed to their inner tensions and dialectics (Sterling, 1996: 93–106).

To understand fully the ambivalence of the church, it is necessary to return to those early beginnings when the scourge of discrimination birthed resistance and activism among blacks and unleashed the independent black church movement. In 1787, Reverends Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and a few other blacks withdrew from the Philadelphia-based St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church in protest of the entrenched tradition of segregation, that is, the practice of confining blacks to separate “Negro Pews” during worship. In April of that year, Reverends Allen and Jones founded the Free African Society, a precursor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which came into being in 1816 (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990: 20–76; Mitchell, 2004: 46–71; Wilmore, 1998: 99–124). Reacting to similar discriminations, blacks in Ohio, Michigan, Delaware, and other parts of the country withdrew from white churches and set up independent black churches. Most of the churches were Protestant denominations: Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian (Davis, 1966; ch. 6–7, 10; Jordan, 1968: ch. 5, 9; Weatherford, 1957: ch. 1–8). The word “independence” should be qualified in reference to these emerging churches. Many were chartered branches of white churches and thus still subordinated to their parent institutions, which often meant that their leadership was determined by, and dependent upon, the parent establishment.

Notwithstanding, contemporary observers perceived the declaration of independence by black churches as indicative of a commitment to anti-slavery. They would be disappointed. Though pastors and preachers were represented in the leadership of the antebellum black struggle, their churches did not always stand solidly behind anti-slavery. In fact, judged by their doctrinal practices, several of the black churches seemed reluctant or hesitant to endorse and propagate any activist reform measures that directly or indirectly questioned prevailing doctrinal teachings and could potentially alienate their more powerful, and still dominant, white sponsoring or “parent” affiliates. Not surprising, the ambivalence of these churches resulted in conflict with black abolitionists (Davis 1966; Frazier 1971; Genovese 1976; Raboteau 1978; Reimers, 1965: 8; Washington 1984). The conflict was most pronounced between 1847 and 1849 during Delany’s lecture tours of free black communities when, under the banner of moral suasion, he delivered anti-slavery lectures and sought to educate blacks on the most effective strategies of overcoming poverty and degradation.

Delany had not anticipated any hostile reactions. Quite the contrary, he expected favorable receptions since he thought he would essentially be lecturing to a sympathetic

audience. In essence, he thought he would be "preaching to the converted"! He and Douglass had hoped that embarking on an independent black abolitionist path would energize the black community and unite everyone behind a common vision of anti-slavery that would enlighten the ignorant and still gullible black masses about appropriate strategies of moral and material improvement. They had hoped that the church, a pivotal institution within the community, would play a leadership role in anti-slavery and help educate blacks on the values of industry, self-help, economy, and character reform. In fact, the dominance of those Benjamin Quarles characterized as "Clergymen-Abolitionists" in the leadership of the abolitionist movement made church endorsement of moral suasion seem a foregone conclusion (Quarles, 1969: 68–69). Furthermore, the fact that the independent black church had risen out of the "desire by the Negro to share more fully in the shaping of his own destiny" made such expectation even more realistic (Quarles, 1969: 69).

The strategic importance of the church and the leadership positions of the clergy bolstered Delany's optimism about the prospect of moral suasion. Moral suasion had one central mission: encourage self-deterministic efforts toward self-improvement. Delany's lectures focused on motivating and empowering blacks to engage efforts and activities that would change their impoverished and wretched conditions. The moral suasion strategy also entailed highlighting the evils of slavery and vigorously challenging and contesting any and all ideas that tended to incapacitate blacks and subvert their desire for change. In essence, moral suasion prioritized human agency. It was about inspiring blacks to become active agents of change.

ENGAGING "ILLIBERAL" (CONSERVATIVE) AND LIBERAL CHURCHES

Delany began his moral suasion crusade in what became his adopted state of Pennsylvania, visiting several black churches in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Allegheny. It is not surprising that he began in Pennsylvania since, as indicated earlier, it was in Philadelphia that black churches, after the epochal meeting of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, had refused the use of their facilities for anti-slavery meetings. Reflective of the Philadelphia episode, Delany discovered that in Pittsburgh the "anti-slavery tide" was equally at "low tide." It was difficult to organize anti-slavery meetings (*The North Star*, February 11, 1848). He concluded that blacks in these cities (Philadelphia and Pittsburgh) seemed more interested in religious revivalist crusades. In fact, his arrival in Pittsburgh coincided with a great revivalist event organized by one Rev. Thomas Lawrence. Delany lamented the focus on the pursuit of religious orthodoxy and the consequent neglect of temporal challenges and problems. He attributed this focus to a misreading of the gospel. He accused black religious leaders of forgetting that "the well-being of man, while upon earth, is to God of as much importance as his welfare in heaven. Man is superior to all earthly beings or things, he having here but a temporal existence, therefore, his temporal welfare should first be cared for" (*The North Star*, February 10, 1848). Led by ignorant and gullible pastors and preachers, according to Delany, several black churches in Pittsburgh socialized their congregations to focus wholly on the promises and prospects of heavenly inheritance, thereby neglecting their earthly problems. He estimated about ninety-six black churches in the Pittsburgh and Allegheny suburbs. This number notwithstanding, anti-slavery remained at "low tide"

because several of these churches forbade the use of their facilities for the propagation of moral suasion. They preferred instead orthodox religious revivalist activities (*The North Star*, February 18, 1848).

The leading black churches against anti-slavery in Pennsylvania included the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the St. Mary Street Colored Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, the Wesley Church in Allegheny, and the Baptist Church and the Colored Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. These churches denied Delany the use of their facilities (*The North Star*, February 18, 1848; November 5, 1848). There were others, however, led by those Delany described as “liberal” pastors who would gladly have made their facilities available but for the opposition of their “elders and trustees.” One such was Rev. B. F. Templeton, pastor of the Colored Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Delany deemed pastor and congregation favorably disposed to anti-slavery. The “so-called elders and trustees,” however, stood indomitably opposed (*The North Star*, November 17, 1848). There was, in consequence, a discernible and pervasive disregard for secular matters. People tended to listen, and respond more, to religious injunctions and promises. Delany concluded that blacks had been brainwashed into believing in, and depending on, divine providence. They turned to religion for answers to all their problems and challenges. He described the situation thus:

As among our people generally, the church is the Alpha and Omega of all things. It is their only source of information...their only acknowledged public body...their state legislature, as it were...their common council...their supreme court...their dictator and only acknowledged adviser; hence that which does not emanate from the church, may not expect to interest the people to any considerable extent (*The North Star*, February 16, 1849).

In Lancaster City and Harrisburg, church dominance of black life was so pronounced, according to Delany, that some blacks even expressed a desire to remain slaves rather than do anything (i.e., anti-slavery) that would jeopardize their prospect for heaven. In Harrisburg for instance, out of a population of between 700 and 800, only an average of fifty attended anti-slavery meetings. In contrast, the attendance at religious revivalist gatherings was staggering (*The North Star*, December 1, 1848; February 16, 1849). Delany had a mixed reception in Lancaster City. The clergies of the leading black churches gladly opened their doors and attended the meetings. Delany observed, however, that the youth and entire congregation manifested a disposition of “indifference” and “restlessness” that betrayed lack of interest in anything besides religious meetings. There seemed to be a disconnect between the clergy and congregation. Delany attributed this attitude to “an error arising from the miserable blunders of our former spiritual teachers; instilled into them by their pro-slavery and slaveholding oppressors, thereby the easier to degrade us, and keep us in wretched servility and subjection” (*The North Star*, February 16, 1849). Delany here refers to the use of religion to reinforce slavery that had been passed down from white preachers and pro-slavery advocates. Gullible “black preachers” had imbibed what Delany described as a “grievous error” and had in turn preached the doctrine to their congregations. Delany deemed this situation worse than slavery. As he lamented,

I look upon and hold to be a curse, more grievous in its nature and evil in its tendency, than the mere existence of slavery itself; for while there is no difficulty in finding a ready response from the most object of our oppressed brethren as to evils and wrongs of slavery, it is among the most common circumstances in the progress of our cause, to meet with opposition from the most intelligent among them, on the ground that the means to be used however moral, necessarily interfere with their religion (*The North Star*, February 16, 1849).

He discovered, much to his surprise, that some of the more intelligent blacks in the community opposed "anything that seemed to interfere with religious devotion, even refusing to allow anti-slavery meetings in the church or attend one on Sunday (Sabbath) which they deem interference with their religious rites and consequently are opposed to anti-slavery." When asked to host antislavery meetings, "many readily decline" (*The North Star*, February 16, 1849).

Some churches, however, readily embraced anti-slavery. One such was the Shiloh Church in Philadelphia, which made available its facility. Similarly, in York County the Rev. John T. Moore opened his church doors. There were also other "liberal" pastors in Pennsylvania who, Delany believed, would willingly and happily have endorsed anti-slavery but for the stiff opposition of the "leading Christians of their churches" (Delany 1849a). Among such pastors were Reverends M. M. Clark of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh and Stevens of the Wesley Church in Allegheny. The elders of their churches objected to their anti-slavery sympathies and accused them of "concerning themselves too much *with the things of the world*" (Delany 1849a; emphasis in the original). They were told to desist or "risk losing their usefulness as ministers of the gospel." The elders believed that the "things of this world," which the pastors emphasized in their worship, could not be "reached by *preaching* but by *lecturing*" (Delany 1849a; emphasis in original). Pastors were informed that their main responsibility was to *preach* and not *lecture*. To lecture was, in the opinion of the elders, to focus on worldly material pursuits instead of solidifying people's faith in divine promises.

Though Delany encountered "little or nothing in the cause of anti-slavery" in Pittsburgh, his visit to Pennsylvania was not altogether a failure. In West Chester, Pennsylvania, Delany held meetings in private homes since, according to him, despite the "almost absence of anti-slavery feeling" the colored people showed great interest filling the houses. He attributed this interest possibly to the influence of long-time resident and abolitionist A. D. Shadd (Delany 1849a). Pro-slavery influence was so pronounced that the only colored church in town was forced to be located some distance beyond the city limit (Delany 1849a). Delany held successful anti-slavery meetings among blacks in other locations including Carlisle, Harrisburg, Lancaster, Reading, York, and Lewiston. He cherished the opportunity to arouse "our people...to a greater sense of their own condition in this country, and the means necessary to change that condition" (*The North Star*, November 17, 1848). These lectures were possibly in private homes. In Allegheny County Delany appealed to Rev. A. R. Green, a pastor and editor of one of the leading religious papers in the county, *The Church Herald*, "to be more useful" by paying equal attention to "the temporal welfare of our people" (Delany 1849a). He urged the editor to focus "upon our moral elevation and temporal reformation—upon our education, morals manners and progress of our people in Pittsburgh and Allegheny" (Delany 1849a).

Delany described Christianity as a religion of morality, which called for conscious *reflection*. It is only when Christians reflect, he opined, that they become aware of, and thus are able to engage, the challenges of injustices and inequities, the correction of which is the true mission of Christianity. For Delany reflection became the central element of Christianity. He strongly believed that

Man must become moral before he can become religious, and genuine Christianity comes by reflection; and we venture the opinion, that there never was a professing Christian whose “religion stood” who was converted *without conviction*; which *conviction* can only come by *reflection*... (Delany 1849a; emphasis in the original).

Delany reasoned that humans must be sensitive to wrongs (reflection) before they can have a proper concept of right. This sensitivity called for prioritizing policies that improved the lives and conditions of less fortunate people, which Delany argued was the ultimate fulfillment of the Christian mission. Every step taken toward “morality and improvement,” therefore, constituted “a step gained toward Christianity, and there is no work more rightfully and legitimately that of the minister of the gospel than the elevation of man and woman temporally as well as spiritually” (Delany 1849a). Highlighting earthly problems and their solutions as well as consciously seeking to improve human lives on earth became the primal duties of preachers. Only then, Delany argued, “will the kingdom of Christ which they desire to establish, be made more fully and effectively manifest among men” (Delany 1849a).

Delany encountered mixed reactions in Ohio. In Cleveland there were two dominant black churches: the Methodist and the Baptist. The Methodist church, the more influential and comprised of prominent members of the community, was an affiliate or “branch” of Old Mother Bethel. In other words, it was not entirely independent. Delany found the church plagued by internal crisis. He attributed much of the crisis to the “ignorance” and “intolerance” of the leadership and called for the appointment of “a good and efficient pastor.” He described the current pastor as an intolerant and “illiberal person,” who opposed “every manner of moral improvement. Everything that does not yield to the clerical dictum was, to the pastor, bad, and therefore of the devil” (Delany 1848c). Delany described the pastor as “a two-faced, double-tongued, subtle person, pretending one thing when he intended another...though a colored man, he is a most fearfully untrustworthy man” (Delany 1848c). He questioned why the Methodist conference would place such men in charge of black congregations. He suspected a sinister motive: to “promote ignorance and degradation among a hopeless and desperate race” (Delany 1848c). Denouncing this tradition, Delany pleaded, “[Why] in God’s name, I beseech them in future, stop this most unwise procedure,” which has engendered “ignorance and superstition, but most deleterious are its effects upon the whole church by driving from it intelligent and best of the people” (Delany 1848c). He warned that if the Methodist Church continued to encourage and foster such policies, blacks, “however, Methodistically inclined,” would “go elsewhere, as they should do, rather than submit to such debasement” (Delany 1848c).

Writing from Hanover Delany reported that he was refused the Friends’ (Quakers) meeting house in Columbiana and thus had to deliver lectures in the private home of “our friend Lot Holmes whose doors were flown open, and rather over a hundred persons, male and female, crowded in the two parlors who faithfully gave ears to testimony

against the crying sin of American slavery" (Delany 1848d). Delany wondered how these "misnamed Friends would reconcile themselves to their cause?" (Delany 1848d). He deemed their action contrary to the spirit of Christianity. Christianity was, he opined, inconceivable "where there is no humanity" (Delany 1848d). In Hanover itself Delany was refused the Methodist and Disciples' Churches. Church leaders accused him of "infidelity." As he noted, "It was enough for them to know that I was a moral suasion abolitionist to ensure opposition" (Delany 1848d). Delany observed a disconnect between church leadership and congregation. He believed that "the vast majority of the people desired to hear antislavery lecture and were disappointed when the churches shut their doors" (Delany 1848d). According to him, many of those disappointed were Presbyterians who subsequently made their private homes available for anti-slavery meetings. There was, however, the exception of one Mr. Sloan, "a staunch friend of the slave who made the Presbyterian Church available" (Delany 1848d).

In Chillicothe, Ohio, where Delany spent about a week, he delivered lectures on the subject of "moral elevation" at the African Methodist Episcopal Church and at the Union Township Settlement nine miles out of town. He also lectured to a large gathering of women at the Colored Baptist Church, as well as at a Methodist Church two and a half miles out of town, and at the town of Frankfurt about twelve miles east of Chillicothe (Delany 1848a). He also held several meetings in private homes (Delany 1848a). In Columbus, New Lisbon, and Springfield, the dominance of pro-slavery influence induced hostile and negative responses. He encountered a similar atmosphere in Dayton. Despite a pervasive pro-slavery atmosphere with abolitionists under constant threat, Delany succeeded in organizing several meetings among blacks in Dayton. He described Dayton as "a very pro-slavery community," rampant with mob spirit. Notwithstanding, his meetings attracted "a general audience" (Delany 1848e). To illustrate the "mob spirit," Delany cited the case of one Dr. Adams Jewett, an abolitionist who had boldly displayed notices of the meetings in the front porch of his house. Delany was astonished to see such a courageous act in "a pro-slavery place" like Dayton. But it had not been without a cost. Dr. Jewett "was four or five times mobbed...having his windows broken to atoms...the medicines and a great deal of the furniture in his office and home destroyed. Dr. Jewett, a philanthropist, anti-slavery in a pro-slavery environment" (Delany 1848e). Nonetheless, Delany also had good audience "with the ladies and gentlemen" at a small church. Due to what he described as "the anxiety of the people" for more lectures and the building being small, Delany secured permission to use the city hall for three more meetings. An estimated 1,100 people attended these meetings. Subsequently, he lectured to the colored congregation at the True Wesleyan Church, under the pastorate of one Mr. C. Clemence, whom he described as a "nice gentleman, Oberlin graduate" (Delany 1848e). Delany left Dayton on Saturday, June 10, 1848, and arrived in Springfield, Ohio, to discover that "people and clergy were rather too pro-slavery to obtain a church" (Delany 1848e). Something curious happened, however. Since no church would host his meetings, Delany applied to the sheriff for permission to use the court house. It was "readily granted;" however, "the court being in session, it could not be used" (Delany 1848e). He extended his stay in Springfield hoping for a speedy adjournment of the court. After four days of waiting, he left in frustration. And then, it happened: the court adjourned shortly after his departure (Delany 1848e)!

Delany had a mixed reception in Cincinnati. He held several meetings there including at the Harrison Street Church, the Sixth Street Methodist Church, the Union Baptist Church, and Baker Street Church. There were about five to six churches among blacks there, some of independent denomination, others affiliated with “the white church government” (Delany 1848b). The Baker Street Baptist Church had its own pastor who was black and the congregation “possessing full ownership in the property” (Delany 1848b). The Sixth Street Methodist Church on the other hand had a white pastor, and the church “belongs to the white Methodist conference” (Delany 1848b). Most of the black churches in Cincinnati responded favorably to anti-slavery. An incident at the Fifth Street Congregational Church (formerly Rev. Mr. Blanchard’s) is noteworthy. Being of “liberal” persuasion, the pastor, Rev. Boyinston, willingly made the church available for Delany’s lecture on the evening May 6, 1848. Anxious listeners, men and women, black and white, filled the building to capacity. In spite of a slight illness, Delany delivered a powerful lecture exposing the evils of slavery and urging blacks to strive for self-elevation by cultivating the tenets of moral suasion (Delany 1848b; *The North Star*, May 26, 1848). Due to the interests exhibited by the audience, Delany sought and got approval from the pastor for the use of the church for two more evenings. But the trustees of the church, whom he described as “*the rulers of the people*,” reneged on the promise. They were dissatisfied with the themes of his earlier lectures, which they characterized as “too liberal” (Delany 1848b). Apparently the Fifth Street Congregational Church was white controlled. Delany was convinced that the denial had to do with his advocacy of moral suasion, which the white trustees found threatening since it condemned slavery and the existing racial inequality and encouraged blacks to become active agents of their own salvation. The trustees would rather have the black congregation fed with “conservative” values. Delany concluded, “So long as we are conservative...we may get their churches, but a declaration of truth through the channel of liberal sentiments, is certain to meet with religious execration” (Delany 1848b). This church was the same one where Charles Lenox Remond had successfully lectured some years back. Then, according to Delany, the church was under the pastorate of Rev. Blanchard, “who being liberal and uncompromising wielded some influence in the Church, even among the trustees” (Delany 1848b).

Reporting from Wilmington, Delaware, Delany lamented the prevalence of slavish characteristics and the absence of what he characterized as “zeal for the higher incentive of life” among blacks there. He attributed this condition to the fact that the leading black churches in Wilmington, the AME, the Zion AME, the Union AME, and the Zion Methodist Church, were all under white control (Delany 1849f). It is not clear from his report if he held anti-slavery meetings in these churches, but he was full of praises for two “liberal” pastors: Revs. Abram Cole of the Wesley Church and Smith of the Bethel Church, both of whom he credited with the “success” of his mission in Wilmington (Delany 1849f). Delany’s meetings in the Rev. Abram Cole’s Church were packed to capacity, with many unable to gain entry. In Detroit, Michigan, he had access to the facilities of the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal churches. The Methodist church, however, the largest and most prominent of the colored churches, vehemently opposed anti-slavery and refused the use of its facilities. According to Delany the pastor was “against every manner of moral improvement” (*The North Star*, July 24, 1848). In New

York Delany seemed to have encountered overwhelmingly "liberal" churches and leadership since he reported no opposition to his lectures, which were well attended.

Generally, Delany's reports suggest the dominance of what he described as "illiberal" black churches, whose growing influence was of serious concern to anti-slavery activists. In several counties in Pennsylvania and Ohio, for example, it was difficult, even where meeting halls were procured, to get enough people interested in anti-slavery lectures. The average of fifty that turned up in Harrisburg, according to Delany, usually came very late and with no reasonable excuse (*The North Star*, December 1, 1848). In Philadelphia, as Delany discovered, though some pastors opened their church doors, generally people came late and displayed indifference and restlessness by constantly "running in and out" of the lectures. He attributed this reception to the overarching influence of providential determinism (Delany 1849g).

DELANY'S MATERIALIST AND THIS-WORLDLY THEOLOGY

To say that Martin Delany was disappointed by the encounter with "illiberal" churches is an understatement. Nothing had prepared him for such counterintuitive experiences. Why would any institution born of resistance to racism be opposed to efforts aimed at destroying racism? Better yet, why would a black church oppose anti-slavery?

The Rev. Stephen Gloucester himself suggested an answer when he claimed that in spite of his and other churches' refusal to host anti-slavery lectures, "there is not a colored 'pro-slavery' church in Philadelphia." As indicated above, Gloucester helped establish the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Nevertheless, he and the "illiberal" churches he represented had distinct notions of the role of the church in anti-slavery. These churches were not fundamentally against anti-slavery. They had misgivings, however, about its strategy (i.e., moral suasion). In fact, they deemed their own activities (i.e., the churches') anti-slavery, regardless of how Delany and other moral suasion abolitionists perceived them.

Their conception of anti-slavery, and the role of the church in it, derived from three interrelated factors: otherworldliness, scriptural precepts, and the fragile nature of their independence. A great number of antebellum black churches preached otherworldly and compensatory theology. They subscribed to the view that blacks, as God's "suffering servants" on earth, were destined to inherit his Kingdom. This providential worldview limited the church's function to helping blacks psychologically endure temporal injustice in preparation for inheriting the heavenly kingdom (Frazier, 1971: 19–34; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Mitchell 2004; Paris 1985).³ Nonetheless, otherworldliness should not preclude active participation in, or identification with, measures aimed directly at improving the condition of blacks *in this world*. The opposition of some churches to anti-slavery was due more to misgivings about moral suasion and its seeming negation of certain existential scriptural precepts.

The "illiberal" churches Delany encountered objected to moral suasion for a number of reasons. First, in its bid for the moral regeneration of blacks (which these churches endorsed), moral suasion also encouraged the drive for material wealth. Emphasis on

³ For Delany's views of the "illiberal" churches, see his reports in *The North Star*, particularly those of February 18, 1848; April 20, 1848; August 4, 1848; March 16, 1849; March 23, 1849; and April 27, 1849.

materialism, many feared, would compromise blacks' chances of realizing the divine promise.⁴ In this respect, materialism contradicted and obstructed the divine plan. A second reason relates to belief in a divine plan for humanity. The injustices blacks experienced, whether economic, social, or political, were constituents of a divine plan meant to better prepare them for God's Kingdom. What blacks should preoccupy themselves with, therefore, was not direct action to change their situation but strengthening their religious faith to prepare them better mentally, psychologically, and physically to endure all forms of temporal injustices in preparation for their promised heavenly inheritance. This theology explains why these conservative churches prioritized religious revivalist crusades and closed their doors to anti-slavery doctrines that sought immediate and, in their judgment, radical changes.

Delany highlighted three dominant religious precepts and injunctions that undergirded the revivalist ethos. The first was "[Seek] ye the kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness, and ALL other things shall be added" (Delany 1849b). He observed that many black church leaders wrongfully believed that the injunction was meant for black churches and that it offered solutions to all the challenges blacks confronted. Delany, however, disagreed, insisting that the injunction was meant solely for the disciples, those called by Jesus to abandon their occupations and follow him. It was necessary to reassure them of a living. If they followed Jesus, all their needs would be met. This injunction, he opined, was meant for the apostolic era and not relevant to the 19th century black struggle. Delany contended that the second, "[Stand] still and see the salvation of God," was also erroneously interpreted as a command to wait for and anticipate God's intervention. The last, "Give us this day our daily bread," taught reliance upon God, through prayers, for daily sustenance (Delany 1849b, 1849d). Delany traced the precepts to the false teachings of slaveholders imparted to gullible black religious leaders, who in turn wrongfully passed them along to their congregations.

Contrary to the injunctions and divine promises, Delany insisted heavenly intercession could not remedy the challenges blacks confronted. In fact, he was confident that God himself had not mandated divine solution to human problems. God meant for humans to seek temporal and earthly solutions, and he had provided the wherewithal to do so. Delany advanced and defended the contention that God created the earth and its fullness "for high and mighty purposes—the special benefit of man," for possession and enjoyment. To enjoy truly the benefits of God's providence, humans had to *possess* and *appropriate* the resources. Such accumulation would also enable them to accomplish God's injunction to help the less fortunate (Delany 1849b). The divinely mandated responsibility to assist the poor and needy was, Delany reasoned, conceivable only with the possession and appropriation of material wealth. Rather than focus on heavenly fulfillment, God had instead given humans an earthly mission. In essence, Delany used the divine precepts to argue for the compatibility of religion and materialism. God intended that humans should acquire mastery "over the earth, to *possess its productivity* and *enjoy them*" (Delany 1849e, emphasis added). Delany underscored that Christianity, therefore, was inconceivable absent material possession and compassion for the less fortunate (Delany 1848d).

Delany urged blacks to cease looking to providence to accomplish what God had already empowered them to do for themselves. In the alternate theology he preached,

⁴ See note 3.

God functioned by *means*, not *miracles*, and had given humanity all the necessary *means*. Unfortunately, false religious teachings had misled blacks into seeking divine solutions (Delany 1848d). Delany concluded that there had never been a "grosser and more palpable absurdity." He urged blacks to focus instead on pursuing occupations that would improve their conditions here on earth. "We must therefore become a business, money-making people," he insisted. Such preoccupation was fundamental because "Prayers and praises only fill one's soul with emotions, but can never fill his mouth with bread, nor his pocket with money" (Delany 1848d).

Delany identified three distinct laws by which, he argued, God ruled the destinies of humans: *spiritual*, *moral*, and *physical*. These laws were "as invariable as God Himself, and without a strict conformity to one or the other nothing can be affected" (Delany 1849c). A physical or temporal goal cannot be achieved utilizing spiritual means and vice versa. Consequently, prayer being a spiritual means, and in conformity with spiritual law, could only be used to achieve spiritual, not physical or temporal, ends. Delany denounced reliance on the precept "Give us this day our daily bread" as misguided, "a spiritual blunder" (Delany 1849c). Like the other precepts, this one was meant for the disciples, who "were taught to daily ask to be fed with the bread of heaven upon which to feast their soul, to fit and prepare them," for their job of propagating the gospel (Delany 1849c). Delany cited as indisputable evidence that prayers were not meant for "temporal and physical ends" the contrast between the wretched and impoverished conditions of prayerful blacks and the wealth and affluence of the wicked, sadistic, and prayer-less slaveholders. This contrast clearly established that transforming the inhumane condition of blacks required temporal means, not prayers. Delany was curious that whites who taught blacks to pray and encouraged them to turn to heavenly solutions did not apply the same principles to their own situations. Instead, he noted, "While the pro-slavery whites keep us praying and focusing on heaven, they are able to monopolize the wealth of this world. They have us focus on heaven, so we won't be on their way" (Delany 1849c).

Instead of praying and "standing still to see the salvation of God," Delany proposed a different precept: "Now is the accepted time, TODAY is the Day of salvation." God intended salvation *here* and *now*, and not *hereafter* (Delany 1849d). The problems blacks confronted called for earthly solutions, not fatalistic surrender to heavenly promises. Delany again highlighted the hypocrisy of white preachers:

Our masters have been so accustomed to teach us how to live in the world to come that they have forgotten to teach us how to live in this world, but are always very careful to teach their own children and themselves, however religious they may be, how to make a living HERE, while in this world (Delany 1849d).

Nothing was more illustrative of the absurdity and falsity of reliance on prayers for dealing with the challenges of blacks than the glaring discrepancy in the relative conditions of slaves and their masters. Delany's illustration is worth quoting at length:

The slave who prays, has not only got nothing, but dare not lay claim to his own person...to the affections of his own wife and children; while the wicked master, the infidel wretch, who neither prays, nor believes in the existence of God, possesses power, almost unlimited. How can you reconcile yourself to such a glaring contradiction? (Delany 1849c).

The religious injunctions Delany critiqued taught the primacy of providential determinism, which supposedly embodied and guaranteed the goals of the anti-slavery movement. In the view of “illiberal” churches, the moral suasion push was unnecessary. The goals of moral suasion were already embedded in the divine precepts. Consequently, these churches were optimistic that changes in the black condition would come. But the changes would be the functions not of any temporal or secular force nor of any human agency but of the divine. In preparation they taught their congregations to seek spiritual regeneration through prayers and revivalist crusades. It could be argued, therefore, that “illiberal” churches situated moral suasion within what could be termed “the moral economy of God.” Moral suasion was about seeking out and adhering to divine injunctions and, *ipso facto*, divine solution and strategies, as opposed to ideologies and solutions derived from and rooted in human agency.

Apart from ideological constraints, there were other factors related to the contexts within which several black churches functioned that militated against effective support for anti-slavery. Doctrinally, the independence of several of these churches was fragile at best. As already indicated, several remained under the control of the white churches from which they had emerged (Delany 1849c; Mitchell, 2004: 46–129). Even where blacks seemed in control of their churches, whites continued to exert influence in the appointment of pastors. This reality could partly explain the opposition of the so-called “illiberal” churches to anti-slavery. Many found the themes of Delany’s anti-slavery lectures unsettling given their compromised and fragile status. To host lectures critical of slavery would most definitely have created a problem vis-à-vis their more powerful and dominant affiliates. As suggested earlier, Delany condemned slavery in his lectures, repeatedly highlighted the hypocrisy of white religious leaders, and urged blacks to seek every opportunity to uplift and free themselves both psychologically and physically. Such lectures would definitely ruffle feathers, especially of those who would rather maintain blacks in perpetual subordination.

The radical and potentially destabilizing nature of Delany’s lectures received coverage in local newspapers. *The Anti-Slavery Bugle* (Ohio) published the following account of one of Delany’s lectures: “Dr. Delany...lectured on slavery in this place on Sunday afternoon and evening. The chief points upon which he spoke, were the cruel and aggressive principle upon which anti-slavery based its claim, the expediency of emancipation, and the absurdity of prejudice against color” (*The North Star*, March 31, 1848).

Similarly, *the Cincinnati Herald* wrote this about one of Delany’s lectures:

The address of Dr. R. Delany...a colored man, on the subject of slavery, on Monday evening last in the Sixth Congregational Church, was an extraordinary production in more than one respect. Apart from its being a well arranged discourse, clear, distinct, and forcible, from one of a proscribed and disenfranchised race, it was a most bold and manly denunciation of the religious and political hypocrisy of the times (“M. R. Delany” 1849).

Delany ended this particular lecture with a scathing rebuke of the government and the oppressive system. According to the reporter, Delany declared “in the language of Frederick Douglass” that he would “welcome the bolt, whether from Heaven or Hell, that shall strike down and severe [sic] a Union that is built upon the liberties of the people”

("M. R. Delany" 1849). A resident of York, Pennsylvania, who identified simply as "M.C." informed Douglass how "the people in this part of the vineyard have been invigorated by a discourse, long eloquent and argumentative, by your manly and distinguished co-laborer, M. R. Delany" ("Letter from York" 1848). In his lectures delivered over three evenings, according to M. C., Delany talked about and did "ample justice" to "the present condition of the colored people" ("Letter from York" 1848). He not only condemned slavery but also the religious disposition of blacks, their propensity to focus too much on religion to the detriment of other challenges. Delany, M. C., continued,

Dealt out some home-thrusts at our religious aspirations, not with disparagement at our truly pious notions, but of the sacrifices we make of our temporal duties, and the irrational extent to which we carry our religious ones. He contended that, and wisely too, that our temporal duties were as essential to our elevation as our religious ones were to our future happiness... ("Letter from York" 1848).

Given the tone and contents of his lectures, it should come as no surprise, therefore, that black churches with tenuous independence at best would be concerned about retaliatory measures from their parent or affiliate white churches.

According to Henry Mitchell (2004: 48–49), "prior to 1800 *no* church, North or South, evolved without some form of white denominational recognition, trusteeship of land title, and/or certification to the government by respected whites that the Blacks involved would cause the slave system no trouble" [emphasis in the original]. Regardless of how black churches evolved, they were always regarded as subordinates to their white "sponsoring" institutions. In the words of Mitchell (2004: 49), "Whether whites exited mixed congregations and formed their own, or whites invited the blacks to exit and form their own separate congregation, the black group was always thought of as the white church's mission, subordinate to the sponsoring church."

The above situation was "inevitable," Mitchell (2004: 49) argues, due to a "legal requirement for white sponsors and guarantors" without which "government prohibited blacks from gathering for mass worship." Although in some instances, Mitchell (2004: 49) contends, "the separation of congregations was supposedly amicable...in every case the black congregation had no choice but to accept 'assistance' and continued supervision of a pastoral nature. This was true in both the North and the South in the early years, and continued in the South right up to the Civil War."

This "supervision" included the appointment of white preachers, if only for the monthly service of Holy Communion, as was true of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. Blacks were considered incapable of serving as full pastors and denied full ordination. This refusal was another means by which white churches maintained some control (Mitchell, 2004: 50). Also, in many cases black church buildings were on leased lands, and titles to church sites were legally required to be held in trust by white trustees (Mitchell, 2004: 60). In one of his reports, Delany cited the situation in Wilmington, Delaware, where whites continued to exercise control over some of the key black churches. Even the church founded by Reverend Allen and his followers in Philadelphia happened through the financial assistance of whites who retained control of ordaining key church functionaries. Rev. Allen was himself ordained a deacon by the white Bishop Ashbury in 1799 (Delany 1849f; Mitchell 2004; Quarles 1969; Reimers,

1965: 11–12). These situations could compromise their capacity for independent thought and action, especially on anti-slavery.

It is also important to acknowledge the broader hostile anti-abolitionist environment within which these early black churches functioned. The Moyamensing riot mentioned earlier was not an isolated occurrence. Anti-slavery and anti-abolitionist violence was a widespread and recurrent phenomenon in the early 19th century (Mabee 1970; Richards 1970; Simmons, 1983: 5–57; Stewart, 1976: 50–73). Until the 1850s, therefore, abolitionism was not a popular phenomenon in the North. The ambivalent and hostile reactions of some black churches to anti-slavery, therefore, reflected northern attitudes. Though the North might be free of slavery, it was not free of racism. As one authority noted, “well before the Civil War, racial discrimination and segregation were part of the Protestant church life in both the North and South” (Reimers, 1965: 18). This environment would partly explain the reluctance of many black churches to engage in or endorse efforts geared towards undermining a *status quo* that whites, North and South, seemed determined to protect.

CONCLUSION

Due to the opposition he encountered, Delany made the issue of religion and freedom the centerpiece of his anti-slavery lectures. He criticized providential determinism, arguing that those who subscribed to the doctrine condemned themselves to a life of perpetual poverty and dependence. He denounced conservative churches for misdirecting blacks. Delany portrayed providential determinism as the ideological weapon of the pro-slavery establishment in its bid to perpetuate the subordination of blacks. He described its injunctions as anachronistic. They had outlived their usefulness (Delany 1849b, 1849c, 1849d). To be truly free, blacks would have to do precisely what whites were doing: apply the same solution to their problems. In Delany’s judgment, therefore, black problems were largely temporal and secular and therefore required secular rather than religious solutions. Blacks could never hope to overcome their marginalized and dependent status without the acquisition of material wealth.

Indications are that the debate proposed by Revs. Scott and Gloucester never happened. Though some black churches endorsed moral suasion and helped promote anti-slavery, others did not. The latter viewed the anti-slavery movement and its doctrine of moral suasion as too material and this-worldly, tending to distract blacks from religious obligations. They believed that propagating the gospel and highlighting Christ’s experience were effective and enough of an indictment of temporal injustice. Indeed, they assumed that focusing on the Bible and the life of Christ could help blacks psychologically overcome temporal injustice and thus better prepare them for heavenly inheritance. Delany disagreed. He advanced arguments supposedly derived from divine sources to show that God sanctioned the struggle against temporal injustice. He urged blacks to jettison a theological view that reinforced slavery and degradation. He was convinced that the fulfillment of God’s purpose for humanity entailed aggressive acquisition and accumulation of material wealth. In this regard Christianity and moral suasion were complementary and mutually reinforcing.

The faith Delany and other black abolitionists reposed in moral suasion seem misplaced. The contention that as oppressed people blacks had a responsibility to

demonstrate qualities of moral virtues, thrift, and industry suggested that their problems could be remedied through self-improvement. It also presumed that success in this regard would appeal favorably to the moral conscience of the nation. Both proved wrong. Moral suasion was predicated on false and problematic premises: that slaveholders and their supporters had a moral conscience and that moral improvement would remedy the racism that blacks experienced.

The ambivalence of black churches notwithstanding, a significant segment of the black community embraced moral suasion. There were economically successful, educated, and morally upright blacks in many of the so-called free northern states. Yet their accomplishments failed to nibble the moral conscience of whites. The response in many states, as the Moyamensing riot exemplified, was hostile and violent. By 1849, just two years into his partnership with Douglass, Delany had reached a critical crossroads. With the seeming failure of moral suasion and what he saw as a pervasive and seemingly indestructible cancer of racism, he reversed course and began propagating emigration, leaving Douglass, still optimistic, hanging tightly to moral suasion. It is difficult to predict with any certainty what the outcome would have been had black churches unanimously endorsed moral suasion. The failure of moral suasion, however, should not be construed as vindication of the "illiberal" churches. Their position would have had far-reaching and tragic consequences. It would have exacerbated rather than ameliorated black problems. Most whites (at least in the perception of leading blacks) seemed comforted by a worldview that taught blacks to endure and ignore the injustices they experienced. In this respect moral suasion remained the better option, and the position of the "liberal" churches seemed more realistic. In the end it was persistent protests and human agency, not fatalistic surrender to otherworldliness, that finally ended slavery.

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