

The Religious Dimensions of Martin R. Delany's Struggle

(マーティン・R・デラニーの闘争の宗教的次元)

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SUMMARY IN JAPANESE: これまでの、マーティン・R・デラニー(1812-1885)の研究では、彼の思想形成において宗教が演じた役割が完全に無視されている状態である。その生涯を通じて、彼のアフリカ系アメリカ人闘争の思想に宗教が影響をおよぼしている。彼は黒人の宗教心の深さ、そして黒人教会の思想的影響の大きさに気付いていたので、彼は自分の闘争戦略を正当化するためそれを宗教で包んだ。彼はまた、黒人のアメリカ主流への統合を促すために宗教を使った。彼はキリスト教の諸段階—自由意志擁護主義、功利主義、世俗主義—が、有力な黒人教会において超俗的、摂理決定論的な姿勢が優勢だったために曖昧になっていることを明らかにした。黒人の地位向上、統合を促進するため、彼は、儉約、勤勉、物質主義を提唱した。彼は、物質主義とキリスト教の教条は矛盾しないとする彼の信念を正当化する淵源を聖書に求めた。そして、その世俗主義と物質主義の正当化によって、超世俗主義を善とし、世俗的、物質的傾向を禁じている黒人教会と対立関係に陥ることとなった。しかし、1850年の逃亡奴隷取締法の成立によって、多くの黒人たちは統合への夢を捨ててしまうに至った。デラニーは、この後の国外集団移住を唱える者、民族主義者の運動においても指導的役割を担った。彼は黒人に、自分たちの最終目標の実現のために方向転換をするよう促した。国外集団移住を正当化するため、彼は再び宗教に戻った。聖書を引用することによって、国外集団移住は、黒人の精神的向上への神聖不可侵の戦略であるとの彼の主張を強めようとした。しかしながら、彼の国外集団移住の宗教的説得はごく少数の黒人の心を動かしたに過ぎず、

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国外集団移住は大規模な社会運動になることはなかった。黒人の大多数は、アメリカ合衆国の中での社会的変化の可能性に期待を引き続き寄せていたのである。

Most critics describe Martin Delany (1812-1885) as a leading black nationalist.¹ Underlining his pioneering status, some have even tagged him “the father of black nationalism.”² A few disagree, insisting that there were black nationalists before him.³ Many also tie him closely to the Pan-Africanist tradition.⁴ For most, he epitomized black radicalism. All agree that it is inconceivable to discuss black nationalism, in all its manifestations, without acknowledging Delany. He espoused one of the contending ideologies of the nineteenth century black struggle (i.e. Emigration), and spearheaded the movement to return free blacks of “sterling worth” to Africa.

Studies of his career emphasize his “radicalism,” “nationalism” and “Pan-Africanism.” A staunch nationalist, Delany’s persistent struggle to attain perfect equality with whites won the respect and admiration of his contemporaries. He became, in the estimation of many, the quintessence of blackness.⁵ He was unquestionably a leading ideologue of the black struggle. Critics, however, tend to discuss his political ideas in isolation from the religious foundation upon which they developed. Religion shaped his philosophy of the black struggle. It was the legitimizing force that gave his programs and strategies a “radical” complexion of a very different sort from that emphasized and applauded by most modern critics. Overwhelmed by the search for a radical and instrumentalist history, critics ignored the religious and conservative underpinnings of his programs. He has consequently been misrepresented as an ideological rebel; a man perpetually at odds with his society.⁶ This paper addresses this historiographical problem and attempts to bridge the existing intellectual lacuna. It highlights not only how religion shaped and defined his twin ideologies — Integration and Emigration — but also how he actively used religion to both advance classic American middle class values, and steer the black struggle along the path of reconciliation with mainstream society.

**A Theology of Integration :
Moral Suasion Abolitionist, 1847-1849**

Based on his upbringing, Delany seemed destined for a career in the church. In spite of the experience of slavery (perhaps because of it) his maternal grandparents remained devout Christians. His mother Patti, received an orthodox Christian training, becoming “a most exemplary Christian.”⁷ She in turn infused in her offspring a strong sense of moral values. In early youth Delany espoused total abstinence, and throughout his life, avoided tobacco and liquor.⁸ His religious horizon broadened in the 1830s in Pittsburgh consequent upon his membership of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Pittsburgh Bible Society. In 1832 he became secretary of the Temperance Society of Pittsburgh, and also helped found the Pittsburgh Young Men’s Moral Reform Society.⁹ He actively participated in efforts to improve the material and moral conditions of blacks. Through public lectures, and the medium of his short-lived paper, *The Pittsburgh Mystery*, he advanced the cause of reform in Pennsylvania.

The need for blacks to transcend the status of appendages and secondary partners of white abolitionists, and assume a leadership and much more active role in the abolitionist movement inspired the founding of *The North Star* in 1847. It’s founder, Frederick Douglass, also sought a medium that would reach out to, and educate, blacks. He solicited the assistance of Delany who became co-editor and roving lecturer.

Delany assumed two major responsibilities. First to expose and condemn the evils of slavery. Second, to enlighten blacks on the most effective strategy for elevation. He upheld capitalism as the most effective cure for the endemic poverty that plagued blacks. A good capitalist education would, he believed, equip blacks with the business acumen necessary to enhance their economic status. His lectures focused on showing blacks how “to live in this world”.¹⁰ He urged them to become intelligent and efficient capitalist businessmen and women; engaged in wealth-generating professions such as farming mechanics, and wholesale and retail trading. Wealth, he insisted, was the passport to black

redemption, the "self-evident truth" that had the moral force to induce positive changes.¹¹ A demonstration of black industry and economic prowess "would not admit of controversy, (but) would bear its truth as evident as self-existence" and wrest long overdue concessions from whites.¹²

Delany's strategy betrayed his subscription to the prevailing abolitionist and middle class ideology conceived as moral suasion. Moral suasionists rejected violence in favor of progress through an indirect appeal to moral conscience and reason, convinced that an improvement in the moral and material conditions of blacks was the "self-evident truth" capable of negating the pro-slavery contention of black inferiority. The foundations of slavery and racism thus weakened, whites would clearly perceive the irrationality of the status quo and respond positively to the demand for change. These ideas also underscored his faith in the tenets of mid-nineteenth century thought-Protestantism, the Enlightenment and Romanticism. There was a strong faith in the potency of industry, in the capacity of human beings to effect change, and in their sensitivity to rational persuasion.

As Delany embarked on his lecture tour of northern free black communities early in 1847, he had little inkling of the opposition and obstacles ahead. At every stop, he sought the endorsement and assistance of the black church. This was both necessary and logical given the status of the church as ;

The Alpha and Omega of all things, their (i. e. blacks) only source of information, their acknowledged public body, state legislature, common council, supreme court dictator and only acknowledged adviser.¹³

Highly respected by blacks, and regarded as the only legitimate source of information worthy of consideration, the church became central to the success of his mission. He eagerly sought to channel his anti-slavery lectures, particularly his capitalist values, through the church, hoping in the process, to enhance their legitimacy and acceptability. Much to his chagrin, however, the response of several black churches to moral suasion was anything but enthusiastic.

Several of his requests for permission to use church facilities for anti-slavery/moral suasion lectures and meetings were turned down in Pennsylvania. There were about ninety-six black churches in the suburbs of Pittsburgh and Allegheny, yet blacks in these places manifested very little anti-slavery consciousness, due largely to the opposition of the elders and their refusal to commit church facilities to functions other than religious.¹⁴ He was denied access to the facilities of the African Methodist Episcopal church, and the St. Mary Street Colored Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh; the Wesleyan Church in Allegheny; the Baptist Church and the Colored Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.¹⁵ In Lancaster and Harrisburg, church influence was so pronounced that some blacks even expressed a desire to remain slaves, rather than embrace a doctrine (i. e. moral suasion) that would jeopardize their prospect for heaven. In Harrisburg, for instance, out of a black population of between 700 and 800, only an average of 50 attended his anti-slavery lectures.¹⁶ There were a few notable exceptions. Rev. M. M. Clark of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh and Rev. D. Stevens of the Wesleyan Church in Allegheny both endorsed anti-slavery, and would willingly have opened their doors, but for the stiff opposition of the "leading Christians of their churches."¹⁷ This was equally true of Rev. B. F. Templeton, Pastor of the Colored Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, who would have opened his church door to anti-slavery but for the opposition of the elders and trustees.¹⁸

He encountered mixed reactions in Ohio. The two leading black churches in Hanover, the Methodist and the Disciple, accused Delany of "infidelity," and shut him out of their premises. "It was enough for them to know that I was a moral suasion abolitionist to ensure opposition" he reported back to Douglass.¹⁹ The only exception was the Colored Presbyterian Church, which hosted his meetings. In Chillicothe, he held meetings in private homes because the leading churches—the AMEC, the Baptist and the Methodist—opposed his mission.²⁰ He was similarly denounced in Columbus, New Lisbon, and also in Springfield where the dominance of pro-slavery influence induced in blacks a hostile response to anti-slavery.²¹ In Cincinnati, however, the Fifth Street Congregational Church, the Union Baptist Church and the Harrison Street Baptist Church, hosted his lectures. The Universalist

Church and the True Wesleyan Church, both in Dayton; and the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Milton, all endorsed moral suasion and provided facilities for his lectures.²² An incident in the Boyinston's Church in Cincinnati illustrates the dilemma of several black churches. An anti-slavery man, Rev. Boyinston, welcomed Delany to his congregation. In spite of a slight illness, Delany delivered a powerful denunciation of slavery, and urged blacks to strive for elevation through moral suasion. Due to the tremendous interest the lecture generated, he sought and got approval from the Reverend for two additional lectures, to which the trustees of the church strongly objected on the ground that his earlier lecture was anti-slavery and "too liberal."²³

In Wilmington, Delaware, Delany deplored the dominance of "slavish characteristics" among blacks, and the absence of any "zeal for the higher incentives of life."²⁴ He secured, however, the assistance and support of two "Liberal" Pastors, Revs. Abram Cole of the Wesley Church and Smith of the Bethel Church.²⁵

In Detroit, Michigan, he had access to the facilities of the Baptist, the Presbyterian and the Episcopal Churches. However, the largest and most influential colored church—the Methodist—turned him away, the Pastor condemning "every manner of moral improvement."²⁶

Though not all black churches opposed moral suasion, those that did were sufficiently influential to cause serious concern. In several counties in Pennsylvania and Ohio, it was difficult, even where meeting venues were procured, to attract a large turn-out. In some instances, the audience, according to Delany, betrayed indifference and restlessness, disrupting the lectures by constantly "running in and out"; exhibiting as well, a lack of sustained interest in anything but religion.²⁷

Church opposition to moral suasion had long been a troubling phenomenon to black abolitionists. Early in August 1840, leading black abolitionists in Philadelphia authorized a committee to apply to some of the black churches for permission to use their halls for an important anti-slavery meeting. All the requests were rejected. As a last resort, the abolitionists turned to the Philadelphia Institute on Lombard Street—a small place.²⁸ The hostility of the black church to anti-slavery featured in the proceedings and sharply divided the members.

This incident promoted one concerned observer to declare that a “battle line” had emerged between the black churches and the anti-slavery movement.²⁹ Another disturbed black Philadelphian, Geo W. Goines, lamented the fact that the majority of black churches seemed to have “forgotten that this is a land of slavery, — (and)—have closed their doors to the claims of suffering humanity.”³⁰

Opposition to moral suasion underlined the other-worldly character of ante-bellum black religion. Many black churches espoused the notion that earthly injustice was a stepping stone to the promised kingdom of God, and should, therefore, be accommodated and endured, rather than confronted. They consequently objected to the materialistic thrust of the moral suasionist philosophy, describing materialism as a negation of the divine plan. The best strategy, therefore, was not direct action *a la* moral suasion, but a strengthening of religious faith to equip blacks with the mental, psychological and physical strength to endure temporal injustice.³¹

Delany traced the cause of opposition to moral suasion to the potency of three biblical injunctions. The first one, “First, seek ye the kingdom of God and all else will follow” supposedly originated from Christ who enjoined mankind to accord priority to the search for the heavenly Kingdom. The second, “Stand still and see the salvation of God” upheld the imminence of salvation. The last, “Give us this day our daily bread” taught reliance upon providence, through prayer for daily sustenance.³² Remarkably, the injunctions guaranteed virtually everything the anti-slavery movement sought through moral suasion—freedom and material development. Moral suasion, therefore, appeared superfluous, appropriating functions that rightly belonged to providential determinism.

The ideological factor (i. e. providential) alone does not adequately account for the conservatism of several black churches. There was an equally compelling pragmatic consideration. Delany’s moral suasionist drive occurred against the background of the anti-black and anti-abolitionist riots of the Jacksonian epoch. The late 1820s and 1830s witnessed anti-abolitionist violence targeted at wealthy and industrious blacks, and institutional frameworks for black industry and elevation (e. g. the church, temperance and cooperative societies).³³ The intensity

of this violence, in such "free" black havens as New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania must have turned many blacks, and black institutions, away from anti-slavery to providential determinism. A leading opponent of moral suasion in Philadelphia was the Rev. Stephen Gloucester whose "zealous opposition to anti-slavery" was almost legendary.³⁴ Violence was no fairy tale to him. A founding member of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, Gloucester had come face-to-face with anti-black violence and had paid severely. He and his congregation lost their brick church — the Second Colored Presbyterian Church—in the two-day Moyamensing riot of 1842 in Philadelphia.³⁵

Due to the nature of the opposition, Delany made the relationship between religion and freedom the leitmotif of his anti-slavery lectures. He criticized the slave-holders for fashioning Christianity into a pro-slavery weapon for the perpetual enslavement of blacks. Though useful and relevant to the interest of the "slaveocrats," other worldliness had sustained black poverty and inferiority, and therefore, was detrimental to the struggle for freedom.³⁶ He was, however, more critical of the black churches for adopting providential determinism. Blacks had been informed that capitalism was evil and that it unnecessarily and dangerously interfered with their "prospect for heaven." Delany denounced this idea as erroneous propaganda designed to keep blacks completely out of business and guarantee whites a monopoly of economic, and, *ipso facto*, political power.³⁷

The visible priority accorded providentialism was, in Delany's estimation, a "great mistake" resulting from a "misconception of the character and ways of the Deity."³⁸ The attainment of meaningful freedom and elevation was, therefore, contingent upon an informed knowledge of God. Otherwise, blacks would forever sentence themselves to inaction and poverty. While acknowledging the necessity of religion, Delany lamented the fact that "susceptibility" to a pro-slavery religion had dangerously stymied black initiatives. His critique of black religious disposition is worth quoting at length;

The colored races are highly susceptible to religion; it is a constituent principle of their nature... But unfortunately for them, they carry it too far. They usually stand still—hope in God, and really expect

him to do that for them, which it is necessary they should do for themselves, We must know God, that is understand his nature and purposes, in order to serve him; and to serve him well, is but to know him rightly. To depend for assistance upon God, is a duty and right; but to know when, how and what manner to obtain it, is the key to this great bulwark of strength, and depository of aid.³⁹

He assumed the task of revealing the “nature and purposes”, the hidden and submerged side of God; the side that held the key to black elevation *in this world*.

Led by ignorant and gullible pastors/elders, many black churches, according to him, adapted certain “egregious errors” (i. e. the divine injunctions) from the slaveholders.⁴⁰ These churches, in consequence, discouraged the acquisition of wealth, and imposed upon their congregations a complacent and fatalistic disposition vis-à-vis earthly problems, thereby giving whites a solid platform upon which to consolidate their economic and political dominance.⁴¹ The divine injunctions were, he opined, instructions meant for the disciples of Christ during the apostolic age, and designed to strengthen their faith and facilitate their task of spreading the gospel. They had long outlived their purpose and had become anachronistic in the context of the nineteenth century black struggle.⁴²

In several anti-slavery lectures and publications he advanced a secular conception of black problems, in contrast to the religious definition upheld by advocates of providentialism.⁴³ Paradoxically, his secularism endorsed a certain degree of providentialism. He identified three divine laws for the resolution of human problems—the Physical, Moral and Spiritual each with distinct and fixed spheres. Spiritual law (i. e. Prayer) dealt with spiritual problems. Physical and Moral laws, whose basic components included thrift, industry, moral reform and materialism (in essence, moral suasion), are linked and pertained to temporal affairs—slavery and racism.⁴⁴

By tracing all three laws to one divine origin, he successfully linked hitherto divorced spiritualism and secularism and cautioned blacks against conceiving the two as necessarily antagonistic. He adduced two justifications for the compatibility of religion and materialism. First,

that God created the earth and its resources for utilitarian purposes, and intended man to possess "it's productions and enjoy them." Second, that it was impossible to fulfill God's commandment to assist the poor and needy without the acquisition of wealth.⁴⁵ He further upheld the condition and life-style of whites as evidence of God's approbation of materialism. Unencumbered by religion, whites consolidated their affluence and dominance through wealth-accumulation, while blacks, blindly glued to religion, languished in poverty and degradation. If God had outlawed materialism, he reasoned, the fate of whites (given their evil social system; slavery; their greed and acquisitive instincts and their irreligious life-style) would have been miserably different. The prevailing "objectionable relationship," at least, would have been reversed, placing the religious and non-capitalist blacks in positions of economic and political dominance.⁴⁶ Emphasizing this issue, he wrote: "There are no people more religious in this country, than the colored people, and none so poor and miserable as they. That prosperity and wealth, smiles upon the efforts of wicked white men, whom we know to utter the name of God with curses, instead of praises."⁴⁷ God, he further argued, had entrusted upon humanity (irrespective of religious disposition) a divine responsibility to exploit and appropriate the resources of the world. The development of an individual, or that of a wider entity like society, therefore, depended on the degree of accumulation. The nature of society itself, especially in relation to such cherished values such as freedom and equality, was also contingent upon accumulation.

Nations and the individuals composing them function, according to Delany, in conformity with certain fixed natural laws. The most pervasive of these laws is the desire for "higher incentives" (i. e. ambition).⁴⁸ A group, therefore, advances in accordance with the level of the ambition of its members. He applied this "higher incentive" principle to the "objectionable relation" between blacks and whites. The materialistic inclinations of whites, ensured their economic and political exaltation over blacks, whose propensity for "higher incentive" is circumscribed by a dubious providential deterministic religion. To redress this imbalance, Delany impressed on blacks the absolute and universal character of his law of equal attainments—"There is no equality of persons where there is not an equality of attainment."⁴⁹ This law is further proof of

God's endorsement of capitalism. Blacks must, therefore, become capitalistic in order to justify any claims of equality with whites.⁵⁰ To remain inactive and subordinated in the United States, with hands tied to providential determinism, is not to surrender to whites a monopoly of the resources common to humanity and "further despoil us of every right possession sacred to our existence" but worse still, to confront the "disgrace and ordeal of almighty displeasure."⁵¹

He thus underlined a certain duality to Christianity that the providential posture of several black churches blurred—spiritualism and secularism—and urged a reconciliation, rather than, a divorce of the two. Black economic elevation and integration into mainstream society was inconceivable without a balance of these two forces. Blinded and misled by pro-slavery misrepresentations of Christianity, blacks, he surmised, accorded priority to one (spiritualism) at the expense of the other (secularism). He thus blamed the continued subordination of blacks on the prioritization of spiritualism and its wrongful application (as antidote) to fundamentally secular problems.⁵² He admonished black churches to abandon a unilineal and mono-functional posture and assume both spiritual and temporal responsibilities for, "the well-being of man, while upon earth is to God of as much importance as his welfare in heaven."⁵³ It is only when Christians advance social justice that the Kingdom of God "which is ministers desire to establish, be made fully and effectually manifest among men."⁵⁴

Given a choice, Delany would prioritize temporal matters. Dismissing the divine injunctions, he offered blacks two equally compelling divine precepts—"Now is the accepted time," "Today is the day of salvation," —emphasizing a temporal dimension to redemption.⁵⁵ He persistently hammered on the relationship of Christianity to social justice. In fact, the two are inseparable in his thought—to embrace the cause of social justice is to advance the cause of Christianity;

There never was a professing Christian whose religion stood, who was converted without conviction. Conviction can only come by reflection — indeed it is reflection itself. Bring the mind to bear upon particular wrongs and you thus prepare it for the reception of the truth. Man must first be made sensible to wrongs before he can

have a proper conception of right.⁵⁶

Delany adduced a conception of religion that challenged the traditional orthodoxy of the black church. He strongly objected to the use of Christianity to justify and sustain a *status quo* of black subordination. He urged blacks to embrace a utilitarian conception of religion that fastened their minds upon the problems of temporal existence. His projection of Christianity as a libertarian and utilitarian religion negated the spirit of providential determinism. Though he instilled in blacks an awareness of the evils of slavery and racism, and awakened them from a lethargic and fatalistic disposition, he failed to win the black churches completely away from other-worldliness.

A Theology of Emigration: 1850-1860:

By the end of the 1840s the failure of moral suasion as reform strategy was evident. Black efforts at self-improvement (educational, moral and economic) paradoxically, reinforced white resentments and induced further anti-black violence. Increasingly, blacks began to experiment with immediatist and politically militant strategies. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 effected a *coup de grace* on moral suasion. Though aimed at the apprehension of fugitives, it threatened free blacks with re-enslavement. More significantly, many blacks interpreted the law as an ominous sign of the impending nationalization of slavery. It shattered their integrationist dream. Delany was among the most disillusioned. Jettisoning moral suasion, he embraced emigration, and in 1852 launched the emigrationist movement with the publication of *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the colored People of the United States* (Philadelphia; 1852). The book is a massive testimony to the industrial and commercial capacities of blacks, and their contributions to the development of America. He presented a strong case for black citizenship and integration. While strongly emphasizing black compatibility with, and entitlement to, all the rights and privileges of American citizenship, he underscored the hopelessness of the situation. The Fugitive Law foreshadowed the doom of the inte-

grationist dream. All indications, he argued, suggested the strengthening and intensification of slavery and racism. He depicted the country as a closed society whose stability and survival depended on black subordination. Though slavery was sectional, racism was national, and very soon, he predicted, slavery would become national. To avoid this imminent disaster, he urged blacks to emigrate. The development of an externally situated, and economically powerful black nation, would, he believed, undermine slavery and racism worldwide.⁵⁷

Publication of *The Condition* immediately drew a storm of protest from blacks. Emigration came under attack in several black state conventions. Many equated emigration with the obnoxious colonization scheme of the pro-slavery American Colonization Society. For blacks to embrace emigration, Frederick Douglass professed “is to stab their own cause. Is to concede a point which every black man must die rather than yield—that is, that the prejudice and maladministration toward us are invincible to truths, invincible to continued and virtuous efforts for their over-throw.”⁵⁸ Many agreed. Even in what had become Delany’s adopted state — Pennsylvania — blacks moved to “remain and fight” in the United States for as long as one black remained in bondage. Emigration, they emphasized, was tantamount to abandoning the slaves and strengthening the knot of bondage.⁵⁹ Meeting at a National Convention in Rochester, New York, in July 1853, blacks rejected all schemes of repatriation, resolving to “plant our trees on American soil, and repose beneath their shade.” Instead of emigration, delegates endorsed cultural-pluralistic strategies.⁶⁰

Though *The Condition* formally launched the emigrationist debate/movement, emigration as a strategy had been a component of black liberation thought from time immemorial. It was, however, the emergence of the pro-slavery colonization movement in 1816/1817 that paradoxically undermined emigration, since blacks conceived the two as synonyms. Delany was well aware of this negative perception of emigration long before he published his book. Moreover, as a Pittsburgh agent of Henry Bibb’s *Voice of the Fugitive*, he attended an anti-slavery convention in Toronto, Canada in 1851, where he and three United States delegates rejected a resolution that urged American blacks to emigrate to Canada on the ground that it was “impolitic and contrary

to our professed policy — of opposing the infamous Fugitive Slave Law and the scheme of Colonization.”⁶¹

This awareness of the depth of opposition to emigration undoubtedly influenced his treatment of the subject in *The Condition*. It definitely dictated his choice of religion as the medium through which to propagate emigration. Since emigration *as a political solution*, appeared unpopular, perhaps emigration *as a religious solution* would appeal favorably to the religiously-minded black community.

He quickly established the historicity of emigration. It was not an aberration, but the natural and divinely sanctioned reaction of all oppressed people.⁶² To prove its divine character, Delany referred to several biblical migrations — the movement of Dido and followers from Tyre to Mauritania, and the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. He then reminded blacks of a more recent migration of another religious group, the Puritans, who left the old for the new world.⁶³ Emigration was, therefore historical, legitimate and divine. He underlined the link between capitalism and religion, and demonstrated how emigration (divinely sanctioned) would advance the capitalist goal of the black middle class. The ultimate end of emigration was, therefore, not only detrimental to the interest of blacks, but also contrary to God's wish. To further reassure skeptics, he announced that the relocation site had carefully been selected and set aside by God. The “finger of God” had set the entire American Continent as a place refuge for freedom-seeking emigrants, and had specifically set aside Central and South America and the West Indies for blacks.⁶⁴ He represented the conducive sub-tropical climate, the rich natural resources and the preponderance of people of color (constituting the *ruling element*) as divinely conditioned factors that made these parts of the world ideal for the resettlement of free blacks.⁶⁵ According to him ; “God has, as certain as he has ever designed anything, has designed this great portion of the new world for us, the colored races.”⁶⁶ In a picturesque depiction of divine approval, he declared : “Heaven's pathway stands unobstructed, which will lead us into a paradise of bliss. Let us go on and possess this land and the God of Israel will be our God.”⁶⁷

To strengthen the emigrationist appeal, he added a messianic/mis-sionary factor. Emigration would enable blacks concomitantly to

advance themselves and execute a divine function. It was the first step in the fulfillment of a divine promise that “a prince (i. e. power) shall come out of Egypt (from among the African race) and Ethiopia stretch forth (from all parts of the world) her hands unto God.”⁶⁸ The movement of blacks out of the United States was, therefore, a prelude to the redemption of mankind. Free blacks thus had a divine responsibility entrusted upon them as the “instrumentalities” for the redemption of the world. Refusal to execute the divine responsibility embedded in emigration would result in God dispossessing blacks of whatever little they had and withdrawing his “divine care and protection.”⁶⁹ Or, as Delany poignantly proclaimed, “as certain as we stubborn our heart, and stiffen our necks against it (i. e. emigration), his (i. e. God’s) protecting arm and fostering care will be withdrawn from us.”⁷⁰

His sermons, however, appealed to very few blacks. Emigration remained a minority movement. The majority of blacks endorsed a cultural pluralistic approach to promoting integration. Many objected to a racialist definition of the problem, insisting that *Condition* not *Race* was the factor and that a change in the *Condition* of blacks through “economy, amassing riches, educating our children, and being temperate” (not emigration) would accelerate integration.⁷¹

Perhaps the most vicious attack against emigration, and more significantly, against Delany, occurred at a state convention of colored citizens of Illinois. Delegates accused him of advocating “a spirit of disunion which, if encouraged, will prove fatal to our hopes and aspirations as a people.”⁷²

Delany denied the charges, and reaffirmed his contention that blacks had no choice in the United States, and that the nation was inching toward nationalizing slavery.⁷³

Proceeding with his emigration plan, he summoned his followers to a National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, in August 1854, where he read a lengthy presentation justifying his scheme.⁷⁴ Again, he strongly appealed to religion. Stressing the imperialistic disposition of whites, he urged blacks to “make an issue, create an event, and establish for ourselves a position,” through emigration to the West Indies, Central and South America.⁷⁵ Emigration was indispensable to the redemption and “effective elevation” of blacks, and to the “pursuit of our legitimate

claims to inherent rights, bequeathed to us by the will of heaven—the endowment of God, our common parent.”⁷⁶

Delegates at Cleveland, particularly the originators of the scheme, perceived themselves as commissioned by God to head the movement for the national regeneration of blacks, and therefore, accountable to him “who will surely require the blood of our people at our hands, if they perish in their national bondage.”⁷⁷ They defined a cause-effect relationship between oppression and emigration—the former usually inducing the latter. An oppressed minority must perforce emigrate as a prelude to “entering upon a higher spiritual life and development.”⁷⁸ Emigration becomes a purifying and redeeming process. One of them referred to the biblical experience of “the ancient people of God (i. e. Israelites)—(who) after being ground down to dust under the despotism of Egypt, received their new birth by removal,” as proof of both the divine and redeeming qualities of emigration.⁷⁹ The added burden of accountability thrust a responsibility of immense magnitude upon the emigrationists—to convince the race to emigrate.

Demographic factors also bore the stamp of divine approval. Delany estimated the population of people of “pure European extraction” in the West Indies, Central and South America at 3,495,714 in contrast to a colored population of 20,974,286.⁸⁰ This preponderance of number made the colored race “the *ruling element*, as they ever must be, of those countries.”⁸¹ He, therefore, exhorted blacks to regard “this most fortunate, heaven-designed (and fixed) state and condition of things” as proof of God’s desire to elevate them through emigration. Consequently, persistent refusal to emigrate would result in the “universal possessions and control by whites of every habitable portion of the earth,” thus strengthening their strangle hold on blacks.⁸²

Emigration was also an avenue for the assertion of black “physiological superiority” over white. According to Delany, God had endowed blacks with “natural properties” that allowed them to survive in all climatic conditions temperate, cold and hot—unlike whites, whose adaptability is restricted to temperate and cold environments.⁸³ A logical implication of this divinely conditioned “superiority” is the flexibility and mobility it induces whenever conditions in any particular environment turned unbearable—as with the North American situa-

tion. By emigrating to sub-tropical west Indies, South and Central America, therefore, blacks would simply be utilizing an option made available by God through their “physiological superiority.” “The creator has indisputably adapted us for the denizens of EVERY soil,” he told blacks ; “all that is left for us to do is to MAKE ourselves the LORDS of terrestrial creation.”⁸⁴ Again, his divine rendition of emigration won few converts. A state council of the colored citizens of Massachusetts expressed the feelings of other blacks when it equated emigration with colonization and voiced “a strong and unqualified condemnation” of both movements.⁸⁵

Conclusion

His use of religion to justify two contradictory goals—integration and emigration—is fascinating. To advance integration, he situated “the Kingdom of God” temporally (here in the United States) attainable through the pursuit of materialism. To render capitalism more acceptable to blacks, he clothed it in divine robes. When this failed, he externalized the divine kingdom, realizable this time, through divinely sanctioned and directed emigration. His religious appeals failed in both respects.

In the earlier phase, his religion was a component of the moral suasionist crusade. He used religion to effect a convergence of interests and aspirations between blacks and whites, and render integration mutually acceptable and legitimate. When moral suasion collapsed in the late 1840s, it pulled every auxiliary component along. Emigration is often misconceived as a radical movement. Delany built his emigrationist platform upon a religious foundation that has been submerged beneath the misguided conception of nineteenth century black nationalism, especially its separatist aspect, as a militant, countervailing cultural phenomenon. Though he used religion to justify emigration, Delany was careful to emphasize the pervasive power of a ubiquitous God, whose universal law—fixed and immutable—governed humanity, irrespective of geographical or physiological differences. He did not urge emigration en masse. His constituency was the free black commu-

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nity of "sterling Worth"; the resourceful and wealthy few who, he hoped, would develop the economic and moral force of a foreign land—the external equivalent of more suasion—that would induce recognition, respect, and win long over-due concessions of freedom and equality. The Central focus of his emigrationist scheme was not change in Africa, Central and South America and the West Indies *per se*, but how that change would influence further changes in an external environment—the United States. Emigration enabled him to externalize the geo-political setting for the advancement of integration in the United States. However, the narrowness of the emigrationist call, and more significantly, its correspondence with colonization became problematic. First, it was difficult to demonstrate to blacks, beyond verbal promises, how the departure of a minority, and their activities elsewhere would induce positive reforms within the United States. Second, it was even more difficult to convince blacks that God sanctioned emigration—a scheme deemed synonymous with the dreaded and pernicious pro-slavery colonization movement. Most blacks conceived of emigration as colonization with a black face, and refused to believe that God sanctioned such a "pro-slavery scheme."

Delany's alienation from the mainstream black struggle notwithstanding, his ideas attest to his prudence and foresightedness. He was certainly a child of his time. A significant paradox of his theology was its dualistic function—it served both integrationist and emigrationist purposes. His use of religion to advance capitalistic goals underlined his subscription (along with other middle class blacks) to the dominant Protestant work ethics. But he was also ahead of his time. His utilitarian and secular definition of religion—the contention that religion is only meaningful and relevant to the extent that it addresses secular problems—was revolutionary in the context of the nineteenth-century black struggle. He can legitimately be counted among the primogenitors of liberation theology.

Notes

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- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 9 Victor Ullman, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27. See also Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American; Martin R. Delany, 1812-1885*, (New York: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 42-43.
- 10 M. R. Delany, "Domestic Economy," *The North Star*, March 23, 1849; p. 2. April 13, 1849; p. 2. See also his *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, (New York: Amo Press and *The New York Times*, 1968), p. 195.
- 11 *Ibid.* See also his "Political Economy," *Ibid.*, March 1849, p. 2. Also May 6, 1848, p. 2;

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- April 7, 1848, p. 3; October 6, 1849, p. 2; January 2, 1848, p. 3.
- 12 *Ibid.*, Dec. 15, 1848, p. 2.
- 13 *Ibid.*, Feb. 16, 1849. For more on the preeminence of the church see his "Domestic Economy," *op. cit.*; and also *The Condition, op. cit.*, Chapter IV.
- 14 *The North Star*, Feb. 18, 1849.
- 15 *Ibid.*, See also November 5, 1848.
- 16 *Ibid.*, December 1, 1848, February 16, 1849.
- 17 *Ibid.*, November 17, 1848, July 13, 1849.
- 18 *Ibid.*, Also February 18, 1848.
- 19 *Ibid.*, April 14, 1848.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*, April 28, 1848, June 7, 1848.
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- 23 *Ibid.*, May 26, 1848.
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- 26 *Ibid.*, July 24, 1848.
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- 47 *The Condition, Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 48 *Ibid.*, Chapt. IV & V. also *The North Star*, March 16, 1849.
- 49 *The Condition, Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 50 *Ibid.*, Chapt. V, also pp. 171-173, *The North Star*, December 15, 1848, May 26, 1848 "Domestic Economy" *Ibid.*, April 13, 1849.
- 51 *Ibid.*, See also M.R. Delany, "Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent" in Frank Rollin, *op. cit.*, p. 337.
- 52 *The Condition, op. cit.*, Capt. IV. "Domestic Economy," *op. cit.*
- 53 *The North Star*, February 6, November 27, 1848.
- 54 *Ibid.*, July 13, 1849.
- 55 "Domestic Economy," *The North Star*, April 20, 1849.
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