Delany began his antislavery career an advocate of moral suasion. In fact, apart from the American Moral Reform Society founded in 1835 and whose crusade for moral suasion effectively ended in 1841, it was Delany, along with Frederick Douglass, through the medium of the *North Star*, who would take the moral suasion crusade far deeper into Black communities across the nation. In its push for Blacks to become much more active and self-deterministic, moral suasion encouraged the pursuit of worldly gains and acquisitions. This conflicted with the otherworldly and compensatory providential theology propagated by some of the early and leading Black churches. As a moral suasion abolitionist, therefore, Delany had to engage the subject of religion, for it was challenging to activate the human agency and self-deterministic drives of Blacks if at the same time they were being infused with otherworldly and compensatory theology. Delany therefore assumed this challenge in the early phase of his antislavery and abolitionist activism. He expended a considerable amount of time and effort on explaining and theorizing religion as means of liberation. In fact, religion was a core element of the foundation of Delany’s philosophy of the Black struggle. It was the legitimizing force that gave his programs and strategies simultaneously a conservative and radical complexion. This notwithstanding, religion is today the least associated with Martin Delany. His nationalist, Pan-Africanist, and seemingly uncompromising and militant antiestablishment ideas and idiosyncrasies effectively masked his religious ideology. In consequence, therefore, there has prevailed a tendency to discuss Delany’s political and nationalist ideas in isolation from the religious foundation upon which they developed.

Consumed by the search for a radical and instrumentalist history, some critics ignored the dualistic and complex role religion played in Delany’s thoughts. They
focused, and rather selectively, on his perceived “radical” nationalist ideas and programs. Yet, no understanding of the complexities and ambiguities of Delany’s life and thought would be complete without acknowledging and engaging his attitude toward and use of religion. Religion played a central role in both the conservative (integrationist) and “radical” (nationalist) phases of his career. In essence, his religious thoughts embodied complex ethos, and were amenable to radical and conservative interpretations. At one point, he used religion as a “militant” and subversive means of encouraging Black/human agency and self-determination to infuse in Blacks a belief in their capacity and responsibility for change. The goal was to demonstrate Blacks’ compatibility with American values and establish a strong case for integration (conservative end). At other times, under a different set of circumstances, Delany draped religion in nationalist robes. It became the means of justifying and advancing his nationalist ideology of emigration. The objective this time was to create an independent Black nationality abroad (a radical end). In other words, Delany invoked religion in the two phases of his life (integration and emigration). First, he used religion to push for integration in America. When this seemed to fail, he then redefined the same religion to bolster his advocacy of emigration and quest for an independent Black nationality. This chapter is about how religion undergirded both countervailing ideologies of integration and separatism. Delany’s use of religion to argue simultaneously for integration and separatism demands clarity and deeper understanding. In the integrationist phase, Delany vigorously challenged what he characterized as the misuse and abuse of religion by some of the leading Black churches to stymie Black efforts. He argued instead that religion be used as a means for Black liberation. The rationale he defended anticipated much of what modern scholars associate with liberation theology. He portrayed Christianity as a religion concerned with much more than spiritual salvation. It was, he would insist and attempt to justify, also about securing the secular and material well-being of humanity.

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 Pati, was raised on Christian values, becoming “a most exemplary Christian.” In turn, she 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. His religious horizon broadened in the 1830s in Pittsburgh when he joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Pittsburgh Bible Society. In fact, one can date the beginning of Delany’s antislavery career to July of 1831 when he left his parents in Chambersburg and headed for Pittsburgh. Though only nineteen, the
move reflected his developing consciousness since Pittsburgh was then a major hub of antislavery activism in Pennsylvania. He became involved in plans to improve the material and moral conditions of Blacks. In 1834, he was appointed Secretary of the Temperance Society of the People of Color of Pittsburgh and subsequently helped found the Pittsburgh Young Men’s Literary and Moral Reform Society. Through public lectures and medium of the Pittsburgh Mystery, Delany condemned slavery, popularized moral suasion, and advanced the cause of reform in Pennsylvania. To fully understand the role of religion in Delany’s life and thought, it is necessary to examine how religion shaped, fractured, and problematized early nineteenth-century Black abolitionism—a movement of which Delany was both founding and contributing member. While leading Black abolitionists and institutions (church, newspapers, and self-help and fraternal societies) seemed to agree on goals, they disagreed sharply on strategy.

The reformist atmosphere of Jacksonian America, especially the Second Great Awakening, seemed to thrust upon the church (religion) a major role in helping to transform society for the good of everyone. There was a pervasive optimism about, and belief in, human agency—that is, the human capacity and obligation to help change society for the good of everyone. This was the central message of the evangelical reform movements of the time. Black abolitionists embraced and welcomed this challenge. It infused in Blacks a sense of responsibility and a desire to become active agents of change. In its formative years, the Black church also welcomed this challenge. Yet, despite the reformist impulse within the Black church, controversies surfaced over strategies, and the broader goals of the Black abolitionist movement. This chapter addresses not only the controversial and problematic responses of the Black church to antislavery, but also the countervailing religious ideas Martin Delany developed in order to configure and promote his twin ideologies of integration and separatism (emigration). It is an analysis and exposition of how Delany used religion to promote American middle-class values and steer the Black struggle along the path of reconciliation with mainstream society, and when this failed, he reconfigured it to justify his push for an independent Black nationality. As a prelude, it is necessary to examine the broader context of the crisis religion provoked within the early Black abolitionist movement—a cause Delany would spearhead.

The Black Church and Antislavery

In August of 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. The city had just hosted the annual meeting of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, which generated so much interest in, and enthusiasm for, antislavery. Anticipating a large turnout, a committee was charged with the task of applying to some of the leading Black churches for permission to use their halls for this important antislavery 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.”

Though the churches refused the use of their facilities, prominent Black preachers and pastors attended the meeting. Among them were Rev. Daniel Scott of the Baptist church and Rev. Stephen H. Gloucester of the Second Colored Presbyterian Church. The latter had in fact established quite “a distinguished” reputation “for his zealous opposition to antislavery.” It was not surprising, therefore, that the attitude of the Black church towards antislavery featured prominently in the deliberations. In their speeches, Brown and Remond strongly condemned the churches and openly challenged Revs. Scott and Gloucester to explain the justification for their churches’ actions. For unspecified reasons, both pastors refused to offer any explanations, but instead proposed to debate Brown and Remond on the subject of the relationship of the Black church to antislavery at a later date. They promised that during that debate they would prove that, in the words of Reverend Gloucester, “there is not a colored ‘pro-slavery’ church in Philadelphia.”

Accepting the challenge, Remond then asked if they would make their churches available for the debate. Both pastors declined.

Reverend Gloucester was no stranger to controversy. In January of 1848, a Scottish correspondent for the *Liberator* had published a letter about Gloucester’s visit to Britain and his addresses to both the British and Foreign Anti-slavery Society and the Free Church of Scotland. Among abolitionists, the latter had the unsavory reputation of being proslavery. Gloucester reportedly distanced himself from the abolitionist movement which he characterized as “violent, impolitic and detrimental to antislavery.” Enraged, Black abolitionists back home were unsparing. Frederick Douglass denounced Gloucester as “one of the vilest traitors of his race.” Martin Delany was more vicious: “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 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.”

These denunciations notwithstanding, Reverend Gloucester had not always been antagonistic to antislavery. He was born a slave in 1802 in Tennessee. At
fourteen, his father purchased his freedom, and subsequently the family relocated to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where Gloucester immersed himself in community and antislavery activism, specifically the Underground Railroad. He would also contribute to advancing literacy. Furthermore, he was one of eight Blacks including James W. C. Pennington and Samuel E. Cornish, who founded the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in May of 1840. But, Gloucester changed when his church, the Second Colored Presbyterian, was destroyed during the August 1842 Moyamensing riot when anti-abolitionist mobs attacked and destroyed institutions and symbols of Black progress. A contemporary portrayed this riot as “a prime example of Whites denouncing Blacks for their degradation while simultaneously destroying those institutions which sought to eradicate that degradation.” It should be noted that the Second Colored Presbyterian was a brick building that had cost the congregation nearly ten thousand dollars; a debt that took eighteen years to repay. Its destruction could explain why subsequently Reverend Gloucester wisely avoided public endorsement of antislavery. The episode compelled rethinking of his antislavery activism. He became “cautious, defensive and accommodating,” and while soliciting funds to rebuild the church, publicly disavowed abolitionism.

This “cautious and accommodating” disposition was not uniquely Gloucestrian. In a related development in June of 1850, a biracial meeting of Philadelphia citizens was summoned at a Black church. The lower part of the building was reserved exclusively for Whites who had objected to an integrated seating. Rev. Samuel R. Ward, a leading Black abolitionist, consented to the arrangement and agreed to address the gathering. His sanctioning of the reservation of a “Whites only” pew in a Black church to appease the racist sensibilities of Whites angered fellow abolitionists. Frederick Douglass denounced Ward’s action as “the most cowardly, contemptible and servile specimen of self-degradation.”

The aforementioned episodes exemplified the crisis and contradictions that informed the responses of some of the early Black churches to antislavery. By 1848, the absence of a coherent Black church response to abolitionism had become an established and troubling reality. Reporting on the Philadelphia incident to Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany, coeditors 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 to rest, or failing to do this,
her accusers may be able to arrest her withering influence, and say to her. Hitherto hast thou domineered over the hearts and consciences of men, but no further—here let thy proud waves be stayed, so that we may see her, with all her lofty pretensions, recoil in obedience to the high behest of truth.

The battle line appeared drawn: the Black church versus antislavery. It is uncertain, however, if the debate proposed by Revs. Scott and Gloucester happened. The one certainty was that the Black church did not enthusiastically embrace antislavery. As a Philadelphian and noted Black abolitionist Geo W. Goines lamented, “Thousands of Blacks flock to the churches to hear anything but antislavery. . . . The majority of the churches are so connected with slaveholding [emphasis added] that they have forgotten that this is a land of slaves.”

Though the Black church originated in protest against the segregationist policies of mainstream White churches, it did not develop a coherent and unified policy vis-à-vis the pervasive racism of mainstream society. Instead of standing solidly in support of antislavery, several Black churches seemed stymied by an otherworldly and compensatory theology, as well as other legal, socioeconomic, cultural, and political constraints. Consequently, these churches refused to host abolitionist lectures and events resulting in conflicts with the values and ideologies of the mainstream Black abolitionist movement. At its core, this conflict revolved around the meaning and efficacy of moral suasion as reform ideology. While everyone seemed to agree on the need for moral reform, not everyone endorsed the strategies embedded in moral suasion.

The Moral Suasion Challenge

The ambivalence of the early Black churches to antislavery was most evident in their response to moral suasion. Moral suasion embodied the universalistic vision and aspirations of the early nineteenth-century Black abolitionists. It reflected their collective decision to give environmental and situational causalities precedence over race and racism. Essentially, Black abolitionists attributed the challenges Black confronted to environmental (condition) factor. They were therefore optimistic that the problems could be remedied by moral reforms. A deep and abiding faith in the redemptive and progressive character of American political culture bolstered their optimism, as reflected in this declaration by delegates at the 1832 Second National Negro Convention in Philadelphia:

We yet anticipate in the moral strength of this nation, a final redemption from those evils that have been illegitimately entailed on us as a people.
We yet expect by due exertions on our part... to acquire a moral and intellectual strength... that would unshaft the calumnious darts of our adversaries, and present to the world a general character, that they will feel bound to respect and admire.27

In her recent publication *Force and Freedom*, Kellie Carter Jackson contends that Black abolitionists in the early 1830s confronted a choice between a “seditious and revolutionary” call for resistance to antislavery espoused in David Walker’s *Appeal* (1829) and William Lloyd Garrison’s ideology of moral suasion, which emerged with the founding of his paper the *Liberator* and subsequently the New England Anti-slavery Society and the American Anti-slavery Society.28 Carter Jackson argues that Black leaders confronted a choice between violence and a moral suasion approach that endorsed “compromise” and cooperation with White abolitionists (like Garrison) who had jettisoned their earlier support of colonization for “immediacy” abolition.29 Blacks chose to embrace moral suasion and reposed faith in the redemptive capacity of the “moral strength of the nation.” In his study, Eddie Glaude Jr. describes the appeal of moral suasion as essentially about the “politics of respectability” which stressed reform of “individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire system of American race relations.”30 Blacks were encouraged to “embrace temperance, to work hard, and in short, to assume a general sense of self-regulation and self-improvement along moral, educational and economic lines.”31 Moral suasion, they believed, would pave the way to elevation, “to a proper rank and standing among men.”32

The evolution of moral suasion can be traced to a combination of circumstances. First, between 1831 and 1835, Blacks organized five Negro National Conventions to develop consensus on antislavery strategies. Meeting in Pennsylvania and New York, delegates discussed the importance of moral reform, self-improvement, temperance, and the pursuit of knowledge.33 Second, in December of 1833 a group of White abolitionists and four Blacks met in Philadelphia to launch the American Anti-Slavery Society. They pledged to seek reform utilizing moral suasion.34 Third, delegates at the 1835 Negro National Convention in Philadelphia launched the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS) and formally adopted moral suasion as reform strategy.35 Reflecting the values of its founding leader William Whipper, the AMRS adhered to the belief that “we are all made in the image of God, and are endowed with those attributes which the Deity has given to man.”36 Consequently, as Glaude explains, Whipper and his colleagues were willing to bury “in the bosom of Christian benevolence all
those natural distinctions (and) complexional variations that have hitherto marked the history, character and operations of men; and now boldly plea for the Christian and moral elevation of the human race.”

Moral suasion advocates therefore believed that improvements in the moral and material conditions of Blacks would disprove the proslavery contention that Blacks were inherently inferior, lazy, unintelligent, and morally decadent. Such improvements, they hoped, would appeal favorably to the moral conscience of Whites. The faith Blacks reposed in moral suasion also derived from verbal promises and reassurances by prominent White abolitionists. In August of 1837, the Moral Reform Society of Philadelphia hosted a “Moral Reform Convention” attended by delegates of “Colored Citizens” from “various states, cities and towns” across the nation “to device the best method and to procure and promote the best means, for the moral, social, and political elevation of Colored Americans.” A “distinguished” Quaker lady, also described as “a tried philanthropist” addressed the gathering on “moral and intellectual culture,” and implored the delegates to “Make yourselves a character of EMINENCE in moral, intellectual, and social virtues, and we [i.e., Whites] shall lose sight of your color.” The promise of this Quaker lady notwithstanding, moral suasion was not a reactive ideology that Black abolitionists developed in order to satisfy the whims of some White paternalists. Regardless of how one interprets the “moral,” Manisha Sinha rightly notes that moral suasion embodied resistance. “Moral reform and racial uplift were,” she suggests, “constitutive of rather than an alternative to the politics of resistance.” Blacks did not simply embrace “bourgeois values” embedded in moral suasion just to appease Whites, or “prove Black worthiness in White eyes.” Moral suasion entailed what Sinha describes as “complementary strategies to challenge slavery and the community-wide problem of racism and poverty.”

Moral suasion therefore embodied the goal of abolitionism, and was part of a much broader reform efforts. Black abolitionists organized conventions and created institutions (churches, newspapers, and self-help and mutual aid societies). These institutions and structures were, according to John Ernest, directed at challenging attempts by the dominant society to impose upon Blacks a “collective identity” of negation and negativity. Resisting this attempt, Blacks sought to wrest control of defining themselves from “within” their community based on their “shared cultural practices, community affiliations, and the joys and responsibilities of family, work, and self-governance.” Moral suasion was therefore about a group taking charge of defining itself and its values. This was the driving force that propelled the Black abolitionist movement. Furthermore,
moral suasion, as Carter Jackson stresses, assured Blacks that an appeal to the nation’s moral conscience would ultimately obliterate the unmitigated violence and dehumanization they experienced. Unfortunately, this assurance was shattered, Carter Jackson suggests, by the surge of violence and the fear it unleashed, exemplified by the insurrection of Nat Turner, the violent rhetoric of David Walker’s *Appeal*, and the murder of White abolitionist Elijah P. Lovejoy. While Carter Jackson is correct in highlighting the violence that defined the context of moral suasion, this should not mitigate the fact that Black abolitionists who embraced moral suasion in the early 1830s truly believed in the ideology, and never seriously considered violence as a viable option.

Fundamentally, moral suasion was an inward-looking ideology which encouraged Blacks to believe in themselves. In response, Blacks evinced confidence that they too possessed both the capacity and wherewithal for change. Moral suasion also represented Blacks’ subscription and commitment to broader nationwide reform initiatives and movements. The immediate challenge was how to spread the tenets of moral suasion across Black communities, and all major institutions and organizations (churches; self-help, fraternal, and mutual aid societies; newspapers; and abolitionists) embraced this challenge. However, almost from the start, there emerged disagreement over implementation, and it was Martin Robison Delany who would undertake the task of spreading moral suasion and in the process unearthed what could be termed, in the words of Henry Mitchell, the “Long-Hidden” reality of the early Black church: ambivalence to antislavery. In 1847 Delany had the opportunity to expand the scope of his activism nationwide when Frederick Douglass embarked upon an independent Black abolitionist course, and traveled to Pittsburgh to solicit his assistance. Both shared a passionate commitment to antislavery and understood the strategic importance of an independent Black abolitionist path. 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. It was during this period that he confronted the “Long-Hidden” reality. From 1847 to 1849, as coeditor and roving lecturer for Frederick Douglass’s paper, the *North Star*, Delany embarked on tours of Black communities in the Midwest and Northeast to deliver antislavery lectures and propagate moral suasion.

Delany had not anticipated any hostile reactions to his lectures. Quite the contrary, he expected favorable receptions from Black churches since he thought he would essentially be “preaching to the converted.” He and Douglass had hoped that embarking on an independent Black abolitionist path would energize the Black community. They had also expected the church to assume leadership role
in antislavery and help educate Blacks on the values of industry, self-help, economy, and character reform. In fact, the preponderance of those whom historian Benjamin Quarles characterized as “Clergymen-Abolitionists” in the leadership of the abolitionist movement made church endorsement of moral suasion seemed like a foregone conclusion. Also, 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.

Engaging “Illiberal” and Liberal Churches

Delany began his antislavery and moral suasion lectures in Pennsylvania by visiting several Black churches in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Allegheny. It should not surprise anyone that he began in Pennsylvania, since it was in Philadelphia that Black churches had refused the use of their facilities for antislavery meetings. There was an estimated ninety-six Black churches in Pittsburgh and Allegheny suburbs. Yet, reflective of the Philadelphia episode, Delany reported that it was difficult to organize antislavery lectures because the “antislavery tide” was equally at “low tide.” He observed that Blacks in these cities seemed more interested in religious revivalist gatherings. In several Black churches in Pittsburgh, Delany encountered those he characterized as “ignorant” and “gullible” pastors who refused the use of their facilities and encouraged their congregations instead to seek heavenly rewards through religious revivalism. His arrival in Pittsburgh coincided with a great revivalist worship organized by one Rev. Thomas Lawrence. Delany denounced this pursuit of “religious orthodoxy” and neglect of temporal challenges and problems. He accused these 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.”

Other Black churches opposed to moral suasion included the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the St. Mary Street Colored Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, the Wesley Church in Allegheny, the Baptist Church, and the Colored Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. These “illiberal” churches, as Delany characterized them, denied him the use of their facilities. However, there were other churches 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 confirmed that both pastor and congregation embraced antislavery and seemed eager for his lectures. However, the “so-called elders and trustees” disagreed. He noted, with dismay,
that congregants were being brainwashed into believing in, and relying on, divine providence.

In Lancaster city and Harrisburg Delany observed that otherworldly theology was so entrenched that some Blacks declared that they would rather remain enslaved than engage in any activities, movements or causes that could jeopardize their prospect for heaven. In Harrisburg, with a population of between seven and eight hundred, only an average of fifty attended antislavery meetings and several arrived very late. This was in sharp contrast to attendance at religious revivalist gatherings.\textsuperscript{54} Delany had a mixed reception in Lancaster city. The clergies of the leading Black churches gladly opened their doors and attended the meetings. However, the youth and entire congregation displayed “indifference” and “restlessness” and seemed uninterested in antislavery. He ascribed this to “the grievous doctrine” instilled into Black preachers by “their pro-slavery and slaveholding oppressors,” designed to maintain Blacks in “servility and subjection.”\textsuperscript{55} According to this doctrine, God supposedly designated Blacks his earthly “suffering servants” in order for them to inherit his heavenly kingdom. Adherents, therefore, “readily declined” when asked to host antislavery meetings, convinced that antislavery lectures compromised the peoples’ preparedness for heavenly inheritance.\textsuperscript{56}

Some churches boldly and openly embraced antislavery. One such was the Shiloh Church in Philadelphia, which made available its facility. Delany, however, lamented that in some of the churches in Philadelphia, congregants came late and would often display disruptive behaviors such as “running in and out.”\textsuperscript{57} Similarly, in York County, the Reverend John T. Moore opened his church doors. There were also other “liberal” pastors in Pennsylvania who, Delany believed, would willingly and happily have endorsed antislavery, but for the stiff opposition of “the leading Christians of their churches.” Among such pastors were Rev. M. M. Clark of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh and Reverend Stevens of the Wesley Church in Allegheny. The elders of their churches objected to their antislavery sympathies and accused both pastors of “concerning themselves too much \textit{with the things of the world} [emphasis in original].”\textsuperscript{58} They were told to desist or “risk losing their usefulness as ministers of the gospel.” The “elders” believed that the “\textit{things of this world},” which the pastors emphasized in their worship could not “be reached by \textit{preaching} but by \textit{lecturing} [emphasis in original].”\textsuperscript{59} They were informed that their primary duty was to \textit{preach} and not \textit{lecture}. \textit{Lecture}, in the opinion of the “elders” encouraged worldly material pursuits.

Delany’s visit to Pennsylvania was not entirely a failure. In West Chester, for example, proslavery influence was so entrenched that the only Colored church
in town was located some distance beyond the city limit. Nonetheless, the Colored residents yearned for Delany’s lectures and hosted several meetings and lectures in private homes. He attributed the success of these house meetings to the influence of longtime resident and abolitionist A. D. Shadd. Delany also held successful antislavery meetings in private homes 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.” 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.” He urged the pastor/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 then described Christianity as a religion of morality and conscious reflection. Reflection would lead Christians to greater knowledge and understanding of the essence and mission of Christianity. He believed that humans must first be sensitive to wrongs (reflection) before they can have a proper conception of rights. This mandated improving the lives and conditions of less fortunate people. Every step taken toward “morality and improvement” constituted, in Delany’s words, “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 encountered mixed reactions in Ohio. In Cleveland, there were two dominant Black churches: the Methodist and the Baptist. The Methodist, the larger and comprised of prominent members of the community was an affiliate of Old Mother Bethel. It was not fully 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 “illiberal person,” who opposed “every manner of moral improvement.” Delany denounced the Methodist Conference for placing such individuals in charge of Black congregations and accused the Conference of deliberately promoting “ignorance and degradation” among Blacks.

Writing from Hanover, Ohio, 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” with over a hundred in attendance. Delany wondered how these “misnamed Friends would reconcile themselves to their cause?” Their action contradicted the spirit
of Christianity which, Delany insisted, was inconceivable “where there is no humanity.” He was also denied access to the “Methodist and Disciples’ Churches.” Leaders of the respective churches accused Delany of “infidelity.” As he noted, “It was enough for them to know that I was a moral suasion abolitionist to ensure opposition.” Delany however observed a disconnection between church leadership and congregation. The majority of the people “desired to hear antislavery lecture and were disappointed when the churches shut their doors.”

Most of the disappointed were “Presbyterians” who subsequently made their private homes available for antislavery meetings. There was, however, the exception of one Mr. Sloan, “a staunch friend of the slave who made his Presbyterian Church available.”

Delany had a mixed reception in Cincinnati. He held several meetings here 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 Black churches in Cincinnati, some of independent denomination, others affiliated with “the White church government.” The Baker Street Baptist Church had its own pastor who was Black and the congregation “possessing full ownership in the property.” The Sixth Street Methodist Church, on the other hand, had a White pastor, and the church, according to Delany, “belongs to the White Methodist conference.” Most of the Black churches in Cincinnati responded favorably to antislavery. There was an incident at the Fifth Street Congregational Church (formerly Reverend Blanchard’s). Being of “liberal” persuasion, the pastor, Reverend Boyinston, readily made the church available for Delany’s lecture. Anxious listeners of both races (men and women) filled the building to capacity. In spite of a slight illness, Delany delivered a powerful lecture in which he exposed the evils of slavery and urged Blacks to strive for self-elevation through moral suasion. Due to the enthusiasm of the audience, Delany sought and got approval from the pastor for two more lectures. However, the trustees of the church, who Delany described as “THE RULERS OF THE PEOPLE,” [emphasis in original] objected. They were dissatisfied with the themes of his earlier lectures which they characterized as “too liberal.” Apparently, the Fifth Street Congregation Church was White-controlled. Delany believed that the trustees objected to the moral suasion and antislavery contents of his lectures, especially since he encouraged Blacks to become active agents of their own salvation. He concluded therefore that; “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 spent one week in Chillicothe, Ohio, and 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 half miles out of town, and at the town of Frankfort, about twelve miles east of Chillicothe. He also held several meetings in private homes. However, proslavery influences provoked hostilities in Columbus, New Lisbon, and Springfield. In Dayton, despite a pervasive proslavery atmosphere, Delany succeeded in organizing several meetings. He described Dayton as “a very pro-slavery community,” rampant with mob spirit. Notwithstanding, his meetings attracted “a general audience.” To illustrate the “mob spirit,” Delany described what happened to one Dr. Adams Jewett, an abolitionist who had boldly displayed notices of the meetings in the front porch of his house. Dr. Jewett “was four or five times mobbed . . . having his windows broken to atoms.” Delany also had good audience “with the ladies and gentlemen” at a small church. Due to “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 C. Clemence described as “a nice gentleman, Oberlin graduate.” Delany left Dayton on Saturday, 10th of June 1848, and arrived in Springfield, Ohio, to discover that “people and clergy were rather too pro-slavery to obtain a church.” Since no church would host his meetings. Delany applied to the sheriff for permission to use the courthouse. It was “readily granted.” However, “the court being in session, it could not be used.” He extended his stay in Springfield hoping for a speedy adjournment of the court. After four days of waiting without adjournment, Delany left in frustration. And then the court promptly adjourned shortly after his departure!

Delany encountered slavish characteristics and the absence of “zeal for the higher incentive of life” among Blacks in Wilmington, Delaware. He attributed this to the fact that the leading Black churches: the AME, the Zion AME, the Union AME, and the Zion Methodist were all White controlled. Nonetheless, there are indications that Delany succeeded in organizing several meetings. He praised two “liberal” pastors—Rev. Abram Cole of the Wesley Church and Reverend Smith of the Bethel Church—for “the success” of his mission in Wilmington. The meetings in Reverend Cole’s church were well attended, with many unable to gain entry. In Detroit, Michigan, Delany had access to the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal churches. However, the Methodist, the largest of the Colored churches, vehemently opposed antislavery and shut its doors. According to Delany, the pastor was against “every manner of moral
improvement.” 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.

**Delany’s Materialist and This-Worldly Theology**

Generally, Delany’s reports suggested the dominance of “illiberal” churches whose growing influence alarmed antislavery activists. Undoubtedly, this reality shocked and disappointed him. Nothing had prepared him for such counterintuitive experience. Why would a Black church oppose antislavery? The Reverend Stephen Gloucester himself suggested an answer when he claimed that in spite of his and other churches’ refusal to host antislavery lectures, “there is not a colored ‘pro-slavery’ church in Philadelphia.”

As indicated above, Reverend 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 antislavery. While they were not opposed to antislavery per se, they had misgivings about the demands and mandates of moral suasion. Their conception of antislavery and the role of the church derived from two interrelated factors and circumstances: first, otherworldliness and scriptural injunctions, and second, their fragile and compromised independence.

A good number of antebellum Black churches preached otherworldly and compensatory theology which confined the churches’ function to helping their congregants psychologically endure temporal injustice in preparation for heavenly inheritance. “Illiberal” churches had misgivings about moral suasion and its seeming disruption of otherworldly ethos. Specifically, they opposed moral suasion for the following reasons. First, in its bid for the moral regeneration of Blacks (which the churches endorsed), moral suasion also encouraged the drive for material wealth which, to some of the churches, jeopardized Blacks’ chances of realizing the divine promise. Second, moral suasion implied doubts in God’s promise. These churches preached that God had sanctioned the injustices Blacks experienced in order to better prepare them for His heavenly kingdom. Therefore, instead of direct action aimed at changing their condition, Blacks were expected to prioritize religious revivalism which supposedly would bolster their capacity to psychologically and physically endure temporal injustices. Delany highlighted three dominant religious injunctions that undergirded the revivalist ethos. The first was, “First seek ye the kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness, and ALL other things shall be added [emphasis in original].” He lamented that many Black church leaders wrongly appropriated this injunction, convinced
that it offered solutions to all the challenges Blacks confronted. Delany argued instead that the injunction was meant solely for the disciples, those whom Jesus Christ had called to propagate the gospel. It was necessary to reassure them of a living. The second, “Stand till and see the salvation of God,” was also, Delany contended, misconstrued as a command to wait for, and anticipate, God’s intervention. The third, “Give us this day our daily bread,” taught reliance upon God, through prayers, for daily sustenance. Delany denounced reliance on this particular injunction as “a spiritual blunder.” Like the others, this 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 preaching the gospel. He ascribed all three injunctions to the false religious dogmas slaveholders and their sympathizers infused in ignorant and gullible Black preachers. Delany opted instead for what John Ernest describes as “a motivated Black approach to religion.” He wanted Blacks to “make your religion subserve your interest, as your oppressors do theirs. . . . They use their scriptures to make you submit, by preaching to you the texts of ‘obedience to your masters’ and ‘standing still to see the salvation.’” He advocated a different understanding of, and orientation to, the Bible “so as to make it of interest to us.”

Delany denounced providential determinism as “a great mistake” resulting from “a misconception of the character and ways of the Deity.” The attainment of meaningful freedom and elevation was, therefore, contingent upon an informed knowledge of God. Otherwise, Blacks would forever confine themselves to inaction and poverty. While acknowledging the necessity of religion, Delany lamented the fact that being “susceptible” to a proslavery religion had demonstrably 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.

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.
Delany theorized that contrary to the injunctions and divine promises, the challenges Blacks confronted could not be remedied by heavenly intercession. In fact, he was confident that God Himself had not mandated divine solution to human problems. Rather, God meant for humans to seek temporal and earthly solutions, and He had provided the wherewithal. He created the earth and its fullness “for high and mighty purposes—the special benefit of man.” To truly enjoy the benefits of God’s providence, therefore, humans had to appropriate and possess the resources. Such accumulation would also enable them accomplish God’s injunction to help the less fortunate. Delany reasoned therefore that it was only through the appropriation and possession of material wealth would humans execute God’s command to assist the poor and needy. Instead of heavenly inheritance, therefore, God had given humans an earthly mission. Delany used the divine precepts therefore to underscore the compatibility of religion and materialism. God intended for humans to acquire mastery “over the earth, to possess its’ productivity and enjoy them” [emphasis added]. Given this mandate, Christianity was inconceivable, Delany concluded, absent material possession and compassion for the less fortunate.

In the alternate theology Delany preached, 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 contended 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. 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 identified three distinct laws through which, according to him, 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.” A physical or temporal goal cannot be achieved utilizing spiritual means and vice versa. Consequently, being a spiritual means, and in conformity with spiritual law, prayer could only be used to achieve spiritual not physical or temporal goals. 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. Delany drew attention to a fundamental contradiction; “how can you reconcile yourselves to these facts—facts, which challenge, and defy contradiction, that 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, means of all kinds, lands, money and wealth in abundance, besides owning the very bodies and souls, as it were, of the people who depend upon prayer as a means?"

Instead of praying or “standing still to see the salvation of God,” Delany proposed as alternative; “NOW is the accepted time, TODAY is the Day of salvation [emphasis in original].” God intended salvation here and now, and not hereafter. Based on his ideas, it could be inferred that Delany anticipated modern day liberation theology, which John Ernest depicts as “the theological core of nineteenth-century African-American Christianity” exemplified by James W. C. Pennington who “linked intellectual life with question of biblical interpretation and then placing both within the context of governance, both human and divine” Furthermore, liberation theology “calls for attention to social order and disorder in determining the proper reading and application of the Bible. God is identified with the condition of the oppressed and specifically with the historical expression of oppression and the struggle for liberation.”

It should be acknowledged however that Delany’s experiences as described in his travel reports cast doubt about the “theological core” of liberation theology in the nineteenth-century Black church. Not every Black church embraced and endorsed “liberation theology.” If there was a “theological core” at all in the nineteenth century, it would be “Providential determinism.” And yet, even this viewpoint is questionable. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya complicate any attempt at superimposing a single “ideological core.” In their study of the Black church they criticized the “otherworldly-this-worldly” binary, or what they termed “single nondialectical typology” that had dominated the historiography and argued for a dialectical and “Sociological perspective” that highlights the conflicting viewpoints that permeated the churches. They believed that this “dialectical model” of analysis would “lead to a more dynamic view of the Black churches along a continuum of ideological tension, struggles and change.” They identified four major ideological tensions reflective of conflicting theological viewpoints such as priestly vs. prophetic (worship and spiritual life versus political and secular concerns); otherworldly vs. this-worldly (concerns with heaven and eternal life versus involvement in the affairs of the world); universalism vs. particularism (universalism of the Christian message versus particularism of the larger society); and resistance vs. accommodation (willingness to pursue change versus engaging society as cultural broker and “mediating institution”).

These ideological viewpoints and conflicts notwithstanding, from the perspective of Martin Delany, the dominant tradition he encountered and had
to counteract was the otherworldly and providential. There were, however, other factors besides providential determinism that shaped the contexts within which the several Black churches he encountered functioned which also undermined effective support for antislavery. At best, some of these churches had fragile independence. They remained under the control of the White churches against which they had rebelled.\footnote{116} Even where Blacks seemed in control of their churches, Whites continued to exert influence in pastoral appointments. Many therefore found the themes of Delany’s lectures unsettling. To host lectures critical of slavery would most definitely have created a problem for the churches vis-à-vis their more powerful and dominant White affiliates. As suggested earlier, Delany condemned slavery in his lectures and highlighted the hypocrisy of White religious leaders. He enjoined Blacks to explore every available means 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 disruptive nature of Delany’s lectures received coverage in local newspapers. The Anti-Slavery Bugle (Ohio) editorialized that Delany condemned slavery and “the absurdity of prejudice against color and urged the expediency of emancipation.”\footnote{117} Similarly, the Cincinnati Herald described Delany’s lecture at the Sixth Congregational Church as “forcible . . . bold and manly denunciation of the religious and political hypocrisy of the times.”\footnote{118} Delany ended this particular lecture with a scathing rebuke of the government and the oppressive system. According to a 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 a Union that is built upon the liberties of the people.”\footnote{119} A resident of York, Pennsylvania, who identified simply as “M C” informed Douglass on how “the people in this part of the vineyard have been invigorated by a discourse, long eloquent and argumentative, by your manly and distinguished colaborer, M. R. Delany.”\footnote{120} 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.”\footnote{121}

Given the content and tone of Delany’s lectures, it should not surprise anyone, therefore, that Black churches with tenuous independence would be concerned about retaliatory measures from their affiliate White churches. As Henry Mitchell contended, “prior to 1800, no Black churches evolved north or south without some form of White denominational recognition, trusteeship of land title, and or certification to the government by respected Whites that Blacks involved would cause the slave system no trouble.”\footnote{122} Regardless of how they
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evolved, Black churches were “always” subordinate to White “sponsoring” institutions. This was “inevitable,” Mitchell argued, due to “a legal requirement for White sponsors and guarantors.” Absent this sponsorship and guarantors, “government prohibited Blacks from gathering for mass worship.” Mitchell further explained that “in the north and south in the early years, and continued in the south up to the Civil War,” Black congregations were obligated to accept White “assistance” and pastoral supervision. This “supervision” included the superimposition of White preachers, if only for the monthly service of Holy Communion. This was true of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, where Blacks were considered incapable of serving as full pastors and thus denied ordination. This was the church founded by Rev. Richard Allen and his followers, and it was financed by Whites who retained control of ordaining key functionaries.

There were also several instances where Black church buildings were on leased lands, and titles to church sites held by White trustees. In one of his reports, Delany mentioned the situation in Wilmington, Delaware, where Whites exercised control over several Black churches. This underscored the precarious “independence” of these churches, and thus constrained their antislavery engagements. 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. Antislavery and anti-abolitionist violence was a widespread and recurrent phenomenon in the early nineteenth century. Black church buildings and symbols of Black progress were targeted and destroyed by anti-abolitionist mobs in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. This explained the reluctance of many of these churches to engage in, or endorse, efforts to undermine a system Whites, North and South, seemed determined to protect.

It was obvious that despite the prominence of pastors and preachers in the antebellum Black struggles, their churches did not solidly embrace antislavery. Several of the churches refused to support measures which directly or indirectly questioned prevailing doctrinal teachings, and could potentially alienate their more powerful, and still influential, White sponsoring or “parent” affiliates. This was why Delany made the issue of religion and freedom the centerpiece of his antislavery lectures. The religious injunctions he condemned prioritized providential determinism which, in the judgment of “illiberal” churches, rendered moral suasion irrelevant. The injunctions supposedly embodied the goals of antislavery. “Illiberal” churches, therefore, envisioned change in the Black condition resulting not from any temporal, secular or human agency, but from
divine intercession. These churches encapsulated moral suasion within what could be termed “the moral economy of God.” Moral suasion was about seeking out, and adhering to, divine injunctions that would ease the pathway to the promised heavenly inheritance. Delany disagreed and insisted that those who relied on divine intervention condemned themselves to perpetual poverty and dependence. He denounced “illiberal” churches for misrepresenting Christianity and misleading their congregations. He offered scriptural evidence to complicate and disrupt providential determinist discourse and insisted that God’s plan for humanity mandated a this-worldly materialistic disposition. Delany’s counter narratives notwithstanding, the moral suasion ideology was inherently and fundamentally flawed. It implied that the challenges Blacks confronted could be eradicated through self-improvement. It also presumed that moral suasion could appeal favorably to the moral conscience of the nation. Both proved wrong. In essence, moral suasion was predicated on a false perception of slaveholders and their supporters as people who possessed a moral conscience.

Notwithstanding the false premise of moral suasion, and despite the opposition of several Black churches, Delany had encountered economically successful, educated, and morally upright Blacks. Yet, their accomplishments failed to gnaw the moral conscience of Whites. Instead, they became victims of White hostility and violence. It became evident that the challenges Blacks confronted had less to do with “moral” shortcomings. There was another for more troubling cause as the “Colored Citizens” of Pennsylvania underlined in their 1848 Appeal to the Commonwealth: “The barrier that deprives us of the rights which you enjoy finds no palliative in merit—no consolation in piety—no hope in intellectual and moral pursuits—because we are not ‘White.’” None was more troubled by this conclusion than William Whipper, the acclaimed “universalist” and among the leading and prominent advocates of moral suasion. It must have been particularly disheartening for Whipper to admit publicly that:

We have been advocates of the doctrine that we must be elevated before we could expect to enjoy the privileges of American citizenship. We now utterly discard it, and ask pardon for our former errors. The Declaration of Independence and the laws of God had made all men equal. It was not lack of elevation, but complexion that deprived the man of color of equal treatment. Religious morals and intellectual elevation would not secure full political privileges . . . because we are Black.

Delany fully concurred, and by 1849, just two years into his partnership with Douglass, he had reached a critical crossroads. He had witnessed and experienced
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enough of the troubling and violent reality that daily defined Black existence in America. In a report he sent from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in February of 1849, Delany had detailed in graphic and horrifying manner how Blacks then experienced America. This document captured his disillusionment with America and heralded the end of the integrationist aspirations and visions he and Douglass once shared. Perhaps for maximum effect, Delany juxtaposed two contradictory emotions and realities. He reminisced about the almost two decades he had traversed the beautiful and serene landscapes of the Alleghany Mountains, marveling at “the beauty, picturesque, grand and sublime scenes.” This environment, as he experienced it, allowed the human soul to “expand in the magnitude of its nature, and soar to the extent of human susceptibility.” The mountains afforded Delany a place, sheltered from the atrocities of the outside world, in which he could appreciate:

His existence as a man in America, my own native land. It is there and there my soul is lifted up, my bosom caused to swell with emotion, and I am lost in the wonder at the dignity of my own nature. I see in the work of nature around me, the wisdom and goodness of God. I contemplate them, and conscious that he has endowed me with facilities to comprehend them, I then perceive the likeness I bear to him.

Delany then contrasted this positive vision of the human potential with the stark reality of the denial to Blacks the right to fully realize that potential. Blacks generally were denied the opportunity to fully share the American experience; prompting Delany to wonder; “What being is man!—of how much importance—created in the impress image of his maker and how debased is God, and outraged his divinity in the person of the oppressed colored people of America?” Using his personal experience, Delany both exposed and denounced the dissonance between the promises of Black humanity (embedded in God’s reflection) and the reality of entrenched slavery, racial bigotry, and intolerance. He characterized the abuse and debasement of Blacks he both witnessed and experienced as a violation and abuse of God’s essence. Echoing David Walker, Delany denounced America and predicted that: “The thunder of his mighty wrath must sooner or later break forth, with all its terrible consequences and scourge this guilty nation, for the endless outrage and cruelty committed upon an innocent and unoffending people. I invoke the aid of Jehovah, in this mighty work of chastisement.” Delany then prayed that God would unleash on the nation, “for mocking Him in the person of three millions of his black children, . . . the fiery dragons of heaven, bearing with their approach the
vengeance of an angry God!” Delany concluded that moral suasion had failed. However determined Blacks pushed for change, it would not happen. He discerned an entrenched, pervasive, and seemingly indestructible cancer of racism. This conviction prompted Delany to reverse course and this marked the start of his gravitation toward emigration and Black nationalism, leaving Douglass, still optimistic, hanging tightly to moral suasion.

Religion and Emigration: 1850–1863

Disappointment with moral suasion and a turn to emigration did not mean that Delany was done completely with religion. Disillusionment with the ambivalent responses of Black churches to antislavery could not diminish or obliterate Delany’s belief in the potency of religion. In fact, the turn to emigration inaugurated a new chapter and phase in his antislavery career—one in which religion would play an equally crucial role. Though emigration was a political strategy designed to create avenues for further enhancing and advancing the fortunes of oppressed, impoverished, and enslaved Blacks, it would not be easy convincing Blacks to leave a nation they had grown accustomed to for the unknown, particularly for a place that had been given mystifying, conflicting, and negative attributes. The immediate challenges for Delany were first how to convince a population steeped in religious and providential determinism that emigration was consistent with their worldview, and second how to then encourage the same people to emigrate to Africa—a place that was for them infused with derogatory and dreadful attributes.

In the 1830s, Delany’s mentor the Reverend Lewis Woodson had written extensively in support of emigration to the West (Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio). He based his arguments on utilitarian, existential, and religious considerations. He called on those who encountered life threatening situations to emigrate. Woodson justified his call for emigration on purely the practical and existential need to escape from, and overcome, life-endangering conditions and thus be in position to protest some other day. He believed that the fate of every enslaved person ultimately depended on the survival of the free. Consequently, he posed the rhetorical question: “Strike from the list of the living, the freemen, and what becomes of the slave?” Woodson also invoked religious or biblical justification for his emigration ideas. He contended that “Christ directed his disciples when persecuted in one place to seek refuge in another.” He adduced a robust biblical justification for emigration that is worth quoting at length. Writing under the pseudonym “Augustine” in a letter to the editor of the Colored American dated May 3, 1838, Woodson wrote:
The principle which prompted a desire to better our condition by emigration, is perfectly sound and good—it was recognized by God, when he caused the immediate descendants of Noah, to leave off building the city and tower in which they had just engaged, and ‘scattered them abroad from thence, upon the face of all the earth;’—Among other things, God has here taught us that it is not his will that men should continue together in great numbers, engaged in works that never can result in any practical good. So also, God dealt with Abraham. For when he saw him in Ur of the Chaldees, surrounded by his incorrigibly wicked friends and countrymen, and his moral character continually exposed to the corrupting influence of idolatry, He said unto him, ‘get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee.’ In addition to this, our Blessed Redeemer said to His disciples on a certain occasion, ‘when they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another.’ [emphasis in original]

Woodson offered possibly the most compelling religious interpretation of emigration at the time, and the fundamentals of his arguments would reappear in Delany’s own interpretation. Delany imbibed Woodson’s religious ideas—specifically the injunction against exposing oneself to martyrdom in a cause in which survival was crucial for ultimate success. By the early 1850s, with the benefit of his exposure to the religiosity of Blacks, people for whom religion had become, in his words, “alpha and omega,” Delany decided it was necessary to seek religious justification for emigration in order to enhance its appeal and acceptance. He found Woodson’s arguments compelling and useful.

By the mid-1840s, the failure of moral suasion as a 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 demand immediate change and their strategies became much more political. These were reflected in the deliberations and proceedings of the State and National conventions of the late 1840s and early 1850s. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law (FSL) in 1850 was the final blow on moral suasion. Though aimed at the apprehension of fugitives, it threatened free Blacks with re-enslavement. More significantly, some Blacks, among the most vocal and prominent, Martin Delany, interpreted the law as an ominous sign of the impending nationalization of slavery. As Grant Shreve argues, “By the late 1850s, the territorial advances of US slaveholding interests had convinced a growing class of Black intellectuals that universal bondage was in the offing. . .
Black emigration was the political movement developing out of these conclusion.”\textsuperscript{146} This reality shattered their integrationist dream.

Delany was among the most disillusioned. Jettisoning moral suasion, he embraced emigration, and in 1852 launched the emigration movement with the publication of his book, \textit{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 compelling case for Black citizenship and integration. While highlighting Black compatibility with, and entitlement to, all the rights and privileges of American citizenship, he also emphasized the hopelessness of the situation.\textsuperscript{147} In this, Delany would diverge from the reform paths and strategies of leading and prominent Black abolitionists. For instance, Sterling Stuckey noted that Delany’s path diverged from that of his one-time partner Frederick Douglass. Unlike Douglass, the consummate integrationist and optimist, Delany concluded that the “struggle in America alone could never achieve freedom for Blacks . . . though he agreed that free Blacks should never accept racism, freedom was forever beyond their grasp in America, unless those of talent migrated to establish a nation for themselves.”\textsuperscript{148} Delany’s turn to emigration led him also, according to Sterling Stuckey, to renounce the prevailing Victorian construction of Africa. He now represented Africa in the most positive lights, and to bolster his call for emigration, drew correlation between African traditions and values and Southern Black life and culture. Stuckey argued that Delany attempted to convince Blacks that they were really not relocating to an entirely strange and unfamiliar environment.\textsuperscript{149} Stuckey is only partially right. While it is true that Delany developed positive portraits of Africa, he was not absolute and unequivocal in denunciation and rejection of Victorian values and worldview. He would later invoke those same values as prescriptions for “civilizing” aspects of African culture he characterized as primitive.\textsuperscript{150}

Delany represented the Fugitive Act as the death knell of the integrationist dream. All indications, he argued, suggested the strengthening and intensification of slavery and racism. He depicted the United States as a nation whose stability and survival depended on Black subordination.\textsuperscript{151} Delany essentially described a Herrenvolk political culture in which the rights and privileges of one group depended on the denial of such rights to other groups. Though slavery was sectional, racism was national, and very soon, Delany predicted, slavery would become national.\textsuperscript{152} To avoid this imminent disaster, he urged Blacks to emigrate. He believed that the development of an externally situated and economically powerful Black nation would generate the force to undermine slavery and
racism worldwide.\textsuperscript{153} Publication of *The Condition* immediately drew a storm of protest from some Blacks, and emigration came under attack in several Black state conventions. Many equated emigration with the loathsome colonization scheme of the proslavery American Colonization Society (ACS). Frederick Douglass, for example, insisted that emigration was tantamount to Blacks’ sabotaging “their own cause.” They would in essence be conceding “a point which every Black man must die rather than yield—that is, that the prejudice and mal-administration toward us are invincible to truths, invincible to continued and virtuous efforts for their over-throw.”\textsuperscript{154} 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.\textsuperscript{155} Meeting at a National Convention in Rochester, New York, in July 1853, convened by Frederick Douglass, Blacks rejected all schemes of repatriation, and resolved instead to “plant our trees on American soil, and repose beneath their shade.”\textsuperscript{156}

Though publication of *The Condition* formally launched Delany’s emigration movement, this was not the first time Blacks experimented with a variant of this strategy. Lott Cary, Paul Cuffee, and a few others had advanced and promoted a similar scheme much earlier.\textsuperscript{157} It was, however, the emergence of the controversial and proslavery American Colonization Society in 1816–1817 that paradoxically undermined emigration, since most 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 had attended an antislavery convention in Toronto in 1851, where he and three other United States delegates objected to 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.”\textsuperscript{158} In a recent study, Richard Blackett identifies Delany as one of the earliest critics of colonization in Pennsylvania, who publicly denounced the ACS and vehemently opposed colonizing free Blacks in Liberia; a place he described as “a miserable hovel of emancipated and superannuated slaves and deceived colored men, controlled by the intrigue of a conclave of upstarts colored hirelings of the slave power of the United States.”\textsuperscript{159} To be clear, that was pre-1850. The FSL changed Delany’s viewpoint on Liberia. When he embraced emigration, Delany’s perception of Liberia and other parts of Africa changed radically.\textsuperscript{160} In his earlier opposition to colonization, Delany, as David Brion Davis rightly noted, was careful to distinguish colonization from emigration.
The former was White-inspired, White-led, and proslavery in its vision; the latter was Black-inspired, Black-led, and antislavery in its goal. By the mid-to-late 1850s, however, Delany would abandon his opposition to colonization and began to solicit the assistance of the ACS for emigration. In fact, his first trip to Liberia and the Niger Valley of West Africa was partly funded by the ACS.\textsuperscript{161}

Delany’s advocacy of emigration, as demonstrated earlier, provoked widespread rejection and condemnation. This must have influenced how he addressed the subject in \textit{The Condition}. It definitely dictated his choice of religion as the medium through which to reformulate emigration. Since emigration \textit{as a political solution}, appeared unpopular, perhaps emigration \textit{as a religious injunction and solution} would appeal favorably to the religious-minded Black community. He quickly mapped the religious foundation of emigration. Emigration was not an aberration, but the logical and divinely sanctioned solution for all oppressed people.\textsuperscript{162} 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.\textsuperscript{163} This proved therefore that emigration was historical, legitimate, and divine. Delany underlined the link between capitalism and religion and demonstrated how emigration (divinely sanctioned) would advance the capitalist goal of the Black middle class. Emigration was consequently consistent with God’s plan.\textsuperscript{164}

To further reassure skeptics, Delany announced that the relocation site had carefully been selected and set aside by God. The “finger of God” had established the entire American continent as a place of refuge for freedom-seeking emigrants, and had specifically set aside Central and South America and the West Indies for Blacks.\textsuperscript{165} He characterized the subtropical climate, the rich natural resources, and the preponderance of people of color (constituting the \textit{ruling element} in these regions) as divinely conditioned factors that made these parts of the world ideal for the resettlement of free Blacks.\textsuperscript{166} 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.”\textsuperscript{167} 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.”\textsuperscript{168}

To strengthen the appeal of emigration, Delany introduced a messianic/missionary 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."¹⁶⁹ The movement of Blacks out of the United States was, therefore, a prelude to the redemption of humankind. Free Blacks had been entrusted with a divine mission and responsibility. They were the “instrumentalities” God had created for the redemption of the world. Refusal or failure to undertake the divine responsibility embedded in emigration would, Delany suggested, result in God dispossessing Blacks of whatever little they had and withdrawing his “divine care and protection.”¹⁷⁰ 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.”¹⁷¹ 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 in America. Many objected to a racialist definition of the problem and insisted 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.¹⁷² Perhaps the most vicious attack against emigration, and pointedly, against Delany, occurred at a State Convention of Colored Citizens of Illinois. Delegates accused Delany of advocating “a spirit of disunion which, if encouraged, will prove fatal to our hopes and aspirations as a people.”¹⁷³ Delany denied the charges, and reaffirmed his contention that Blacks had no chance in the United States, and that the nation was inching toward nationalizing slavery.¹⁷⁴ He insisted that “Whites cannot be rationally and morally persuaded out of their prejudice because they have a material stake in Black subordination and because they have too little empathy for what they consider a degraded race.”¹⁷⁵ Delany considered emigration imperative since “Blacks cannot compel Whites to treat them as equals, because Whites greatly outnumber and have significantly more power than Blacks.”¹⁷⁶ 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 in which he elaborated on, and justified, his scheme.¹⁷⁷ 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,” by emigrating to the West Indies, Central and South America.¹⁷⁸ Delany characterized emigration as 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.”¹⁷⁹
Delegates at Cleveland, particularly the leadership of the movement, perceived themselves as commissioned by God to spearhead emigration 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.” They defined a cause-effect relationship between oppression and emigration—the former usually induced the latter. An oppressed minority must perforce emigrate as a prelude to “entering upon a higher spiritual life and development.” Emigration became 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. The added burden of accountability imposed a responsibility of immense magnitude upon advocates of emigration. It was their duty to convince other members of the race to emigrate. It was clear that emigration was an unpopular option and a tough sell. In April of 1853, just about one year after the publication of Delany’s *The Condition*, Uriah Boston of Poughkeepsie, New York, published a piece in *Frederick Douglass’s Paper* critical of what he perceived as the growing separatist inclinations of prominent Black abolitionists. He was particularly troubled by the racial undertone and concerned, as Patrick Rael notes, that the quest for a distinct Black nationality would lend credence to and reinforce “the propriety and necessity of African colonization.” Boston did not believe that Blacks could ever constitute “a nation within a nation.” He would wish that Blacks would not accentuate the racial differences but “lessen the distinction between Whites and colored citizens of the United States.” Boston’s integrationist preference directly contradicted Delany’s emigration/nationality scheme. In Delany’s judgment, the prospect for Black elevation and racial equality was nonexistent in America. He was very skeptical of, and cynical about, how he felt Blacks had been duped into believing in the doctrine of “universal humanity and natural rights,” and thus “we are the same as other people.” This was not true. He considered this a red herring designed to lure Blacks into complacency and thus compromise and erode their true identity even as their oppressors advance and promote the doctrine of “universal *Anglo-Saxon predominance* [emphasis in original].”

Delany remained firm in his support of emigration and searched deeper into the Bible for divine corroboration. He found biblical evidence for the demographic factor. 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. This preponderance of number
made the Colored race “the ruling element, as they ever must be, of those countries [emphasis in original].” 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.

Delany also considered emigration an avenue for the assertion of Black “physiological superiority.” As he reasoned, God had endowed Blacks with “natural properties” that enabled them to survive in all climatic conditions—temperate, cold, and hot—unlike Whites, whose adaptability, he argued, was confined to temperate and cold environments. A logical implication of this “divinely” conditioned “superiority” was the flexibility and mobility it facilitated whenever conditions in any particular environment became unbearable—as with the North American situation. By emigrating to subtropical West Indies, South America, and Central America, therefore, Blacks would simply be utilizing an option made available by God through their “physiological superiority.” As he reiterated: “The creator has indisputably adapted us for the denizens of EVERY soil . . . all that is left for us to do is to MAKE ourselves the LORDS of terrestrial creation [emphasis in original].” 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.

Conclusion

Delany’s 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 in an attempt to affect 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 emigration platform upon a religious foundation that had been submerged beneath the misguided conception of nineteenth-century Black nationalism, especially its separatist aspect, as a militant, countervailing political and 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 advocate emigration en masse. His constituency was the free Black community of “sterling worth”; the resourceful and wealthy few he hoped would develop the economic and moral force of a foreign land that would induce recognition, respect, and long over-due concessions of freedom and equality. Fundamentally, Delany theorized the external equivalent of moral suasion. The central focus of his emigration 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 geopolitical setting for the advancement of integration in the United States. However, the limited scope of the emigration call, and more significantly, its correspondence with colonization proved problematic. First, it was difficult to demonstrate to Blacks, beyond verbal promises, how the departure of a few, and their activities elsewhere, could induce positive reforms within the United States. Second, it was even more difficult to convince Blacks that God sanctioned emigration—a scheme that bore similarity to the dreaded and pernicious proslavery 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 attested 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 addressed secular problems—was revolutionary in the context of the nineteenth-century Black struggle. He can legitimately be counted among the precursors of modern liberation theology.