



VOLUME 2

# SWING LOW

AN ANTHOLOGY  
*of* BLACK  
CHRISTIANITY  
*in the*  
UNITED STATES



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InterVarsity Press  
ivpress.com

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Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.

[www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com).

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# INTRODUCTION

*SWING LOW* VOLUME 2 excavates the breadth and depth of theological expression emerging from African American Christian foremothers and forefathers into the present. Because Black faith has been an overwhelmingly oral tradition, primary sources bearing witness to African American Christianity are often scattered. This anthology simultaneously fortifies the presence of Black Christians within the universal cloud of witnesses and attests to distinct voices within the tradition. By mining the riches of African American literary history and understanding its doctrinal contours, this anthology conveys, in its theological orientation, the breadth of the literary witness of African American Christianity.

## THE THEOLOGICAL ANCHORS OF BLACK CHRISTIANITY

Resources that comprise the African American theological tradition have been curated in a variety of ways. Among trained theologians, the most common criterion for inclusion is radicalism. Theologian James H. Cone argues that “the black church was born in protest” and that a radical posture is the hallmark that legitimizes a Black church.<sup>1</sup> Historian Gayraud S. Wilmore’s 1973 publication of *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* cemented Cone’s insistence on political protest as the means of belonging to the African American religious tradition.<sup>2</sup> This approach incorporates figures based on their opposition to slavery, resistance against Jim Crow segregation, and fight against social

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<sup>1</sup>James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 94.

<sup>2</sup>Cone and Wilmore’s contemporaries also critiqued their historical approach. Chief among them was Cecil Cone, the brother of James Cone. Cecil Cone insisted that James Cone’s deployment of Black power in his theological project bequeathed essential problems in his formulation. Cecil Cone writes, “Because [James] Cone used Black Power as the point of departure for this theological analysis of black religion, our argument is that he was unable to grasp its essence. He wrongly perceived black religion to be primarily political activity as found in Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown. This led Cone to an affirmation of the pre-Civil War black religious traditions of Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, and Gabriel Prosser, but to a rejection of the post-Civil War traditions as compensatory. . . . The confessional story of black people’s relationship to the Almighty Sovereign God is replaced by the call to political activity.” Cecil Wayne Cone, “The Identity Crisis in Black Theology: An Investigation of the Theological Interpretation of Black Religion in the Works of Joseph R. Washington, James Cone and J. Deotis Roberts” (PhD diss., Emory University, 1974), 63.

injustice—and simultaneously overlooks Conversion stories and the vibrant spiritual witness of Black Christianity.

The two-volume work *Swing Low* resists assessing the African American Christian tradition with a method that materialized in the middle of the twentieth century. While this volume includes a broad alliance of self-professed African American Christians, the anthology employs a theological framework that emerged from the nascent days of African American faith to guide contemporary readings. The primary sources in this volume document how the theological Anchors emerged and matured in their sophistication and emphasis through history.

The Anchors maintain a familiar cord that goes back to the orthodox theological commitments of both African and non-African church fathers. While Black Christians did not set out to establish an organized doctrinal framework, these thought patterns consistently emerge from the literature. The following theological Anchors summarize the doctrinal commitments that African Americans have historically affirmed.



**Anchor 1: Big God.** A Big God is at the center of African American Christianity—the one who is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). The God who is able is affirmed without dispute throughout the tradition. In the Black community, African American theologians conclude that the ultimate question is not “Does God exist?” but rather “What is his character?”

During the Great Awakenings, Black converts received an overly spiritualized faith from evangelists. Despite accepting the Christian faith, they did not internalize all they received. African slaves contested a dualistic expression of God confined to the spiritual realm. From the beginning of the African American story, there was an assumption that divine interaction profoundly shaped every area of human existence—including the social, political, and economic spheres. Divine handiwork ascribed intrinsic value to God’s creation and especially to his image bearers. Consequently, Black Christians were convinced that the oppression they endured and the counterfeit doctrine used to uphold Black inferiority were not beyond divine judgment.

God’s sovereignty affirmed that neither slave masters nor bigots were ultimate—God was. The need for a Big God in the face of suffering did

not expire at emancipation; it was necessary when Reconstruction unraveled, during Jim Crow segregation, and throughout decades of de facto racism and disenfranchisement. God's meticulous providence brought comfort to the faithful despite their circumstances because perfect love, grace, and mercy are essential to God's character. The tension created between life's barbarous circumstances and a sovereign God caused theodicy (that is, the issue of divine engagement with evil in the world) to emerge as a centerpiece of theological consideration. However, God's praiseworthy character deemed him worthy of confidence. God executes his divine will, which includes justice on earth as it is in heaven and hope in the life to come.



**Anchor 2: Jesus.** Christ is essential to the Christian faith, and his person and work are fundamental to the African American theological tradition. A driving motif of the incarnation is identification. Jesus identified with God the Father and the Holy Spirit at his baptism and with humanity during his wilderness temptations. For Black Christians, Jesus' identification with life's joys and sorrows forged meaningful solidarity with the marginalized. Referring to the Savior as Jesus (his given name), rather than Christ (his office), emphasized Jesus' nearness to the plight of the oppressed.

Jesus' kinship with those who are "despised and rejected" contradicts the social order's ongoing assault on their image-bearing capacity. Jesus' earthly life was a foretaste that casted seeds of love and justice that will fully bloom in his kingdom. While his life bespoke solidarity with the "least of these," this is only comforting because he is God. The God-man purchased redemption on Calvary's cross, and sinners who receive Jesus' death and resurrection for their sin are free from sin's deadly consequences.

African American Christians have long placed a strong emphasis on the blood of Jesus. "The blood," which is central in Black preaching and hymnody, testifies that the Savior is acquainted with grief, and his blood washes away their guilty stains. Blacks in the antebellum period were captivated by Christ's blood because unjust bloodshed by slaves draped over barrels, strapped to trees, and tied to fenceposts was a tragically common occurrence. But Jesus' redeeming blood, shed on the cross,

granted hope in the pit of suffering, and his resurrection offered believers a foretaste of victory over sin and oppression that was theirs in Christ Jesus.



**Anchor 3: Conversion and Walking in the Spirit.** Conversion and Walking in the Spirit coalesce as an event and a process. Like two sides of the same coin, these distinct realities relate to each other. The Conversion (or salvation) event exchanges sin and condemnation for new life in Christ through his atoning death and resurrection. The moment of Conversion initiates the sanctification process, wherein believers are conformed to Christ's likeness by overcoming the power of sin in their lives by the Spirit's power. While the lion's share of the tradition affirms that sanctification is a lifelong process, those in the holiness tradition embrace Christian perfectionism, which affirms that believers are fully sanctified in a second blessing of the Spirit (distinct from salvation).

The concepts of sin, repentance, conversion, and sanctification are prominent within African American Christianity because large numbers of Blacks converted to faith in Christ at revivals during the Great Awakenings. These themes were woven into the fabric of African American Christianity. From one generation to the next, these biblical concepts were passed down through discipleship because believers are prone to pass along notions that fanned their belief into flame.

Walking in the Spirit is the means of demonstrating Christ's lordship in the believer's life. Sanctification encompasses pursuing personal piety expressed in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and social awareness as described in Micah's summary of godly living (Micah 6:8). Spiritual warfare, in the form of racial terrorism, reinforces the need for God's Spirit in daily life. The need for a powerful spiritual experience marked Black church gatherings, which featured exuberant worship and dynamic preaching that made doctrine dance. Parishioners gathered with expectancy to encounter the Spirit to overcome the hurts of the past and prevail over the trials to come. The role of the Holy Spirit in the African American Christian tradition cannot be overestimated.



**Anchor 4: The Good Book.** The Bible is the Good Book. African Americans are a Bible-centric people with a healthy dependence

on God's revealed Word. Despite high illiteracy rates, Bible knowledge increased dramatically as enslaved Blacks rehearsed biblical stories and sang spirituals in the fields and in their living quarters. Telling and re-telling biblical accounts of Israel was far more than entertainment; it was an act of resistance. African Americans avoided making the Good Book an object of distanced analysis and thrust themselves into the biblical narrative. Slaves identified with the Hebrew people and declared themselves participants in the biblical drama. Their identification with the story further cemented them within the people of God and reassured their inherent dignity.

During the antebellum period, few desires rivaled that for education within the Black community. During Reconstruction, literacy skyrocketed as Blacks were educated. Reading was the primary goal of education, and in particular reading Scripture. The impact of the biblical narrative was amplified, especially among Black leaders, because pastors did not read theological treatises crafted by formally trained theologians; they mastered "telling the story." African Americans also desired to read Scripture to undo the exegetical abuses of slave owners who sought to justify Black subservience with the words of God.

African American Christians affirmed that Scripture was the sole divinely authored guide for salvation and godly living. The nineteenth century gave rise to debates about the sufficiency and inerrancy of Scripture that were primarily located in the ivory towers of theological academies to which Blacks had no access. Among African Americans, the most fundamental assertion concerning Scripture's nature has been regarding authority—does the Bible have the right to guide personal and public life? An affirmative answer has been virtually unquestioned because it is assumed that when the Bible speaks, God speaks. Among contemporary African American Christians, interpretative issues that question the Bible's authority are largely relegated to the academy, not the church. Rank-and-file Black Christians are a Bible-believing people.



**Anchor 5: Deliverance.** God is a liberator. This biblical theme directly applies the Christian faith to the African American experience. Sometimes also called freedom or liberation, Deliverance is established in significant biblical events that serve as an interpretative

key for unlocking Scripture's message and discerning the unchanging character of God. Most prominently, the exodus reminded Israel of God's faithfulness and demonstrated that slavery was against his will and that divine power was available to deliver his people. Similarly, Jubilee was a celebration of canceling debts and freeing slaves that was intended to establish God's liberating character in the social consciousness of his people. These acts of Deliverance culminated in Christ's death and resurrection, which secured victory over every manifestation of sin for his people.

Liberation language describes a series of experiences in the Christian life. Three separate acts of Deliverance start with liberation from sin at Conversion and culminate with Deliverance in God's eschatological kingdom. Between the liberating acts of Conversion and glorification, sinfulness is palpable in the social, economic, and political realms of daily life. Consistent with his unchanging nature, God, by the power of Jesus' resurrection, is the deliverer from each of these dire circumstances.

Liberation's place in the biblical witness is nearly uncontested among African Americans, but the method employed to pursue liberation has been the locus of spirited discussion, especially since the civil rights movement. Wide-ranging proposals notwithstanding, two categories emerge in discussions of pursuing divine Deliverance. The first comprises those who insist that the gospel *is* liberation—with a nearly exclusive gaze toward political and social freedom. The second group constitutes those who hold that liberation is an imperative of the gospel and that the intensity of racial oppression warrants concerted attention to apply the balm of the gospel to this social wound. At its best, the tradition holds salvific, social, and eschatological liberation in tension and shrewdly applies this theme to the Black experience.

***Inherent integration of the anchors.*** African American theological reflection is a celebratory task. Passionate doctrinal expression is a means of extolling the God who can save his people from their sins and overcome life's trials. As the Anchors are assessed throughout the anthology, it is essential to note that thought, action, and worship are intrinsic to Christian faithfulness within historic Black faith. Theological

reflection on the Anchors does not conclude with abstract concepts but with a living witness to biblical teaching. Said differently, for Blacks, Christianity is a practiced faith, so the Anchors have not achieved their purpose until they guide activity in both public and private life. In addition to serving as an instructional means of introducing the theological themes of African American Christianity, this documentary account of Black faith incorporates a wide variety of self-confessed Christians, and these Anchors are a means of demonstrating whether their doctrinal commitments lie within or extend beyond the orthodox faith that African Americans have historically affirmed.

## SCOPE OF THE VOLUME

Bringing lost and obscured literature to light is essential for recovering a historically rooted understanding of African American Christianity. Contributions from Black Catholics notwithstanding, this volume is limited to literature produced by professed Black Christians from Protestant denominations and confessions composed in the United States, or by missionaries who were sent from America to other nations. This volume's focus on African American Christianity means that the expansive literary witness of the broader African diasporic Christian community is not represented despite its profundity.

This anthology includes a variety of literature to garner a more robust sense of Black faith. It includes contributions from pastors, trained theologians, and laypeople.

## PERIODS AND SECTIONS

Each section is based on a historical period and is divided into four literary genres: (1) sermons and oratory, (2) theological treatises, (3) worship and liturgy, and (4) autobiography and correspondence. The first section, "Pre-Emancipation: 1619–1865," contains resources representing African engagement with Christianity on North American soil. This period spans from the first recorded African slaves sold in the New World to the end of the Civil War. The period covered by section two, "Reconstruction and Its Aftermath: 1865–1895," dawned at emancipation and ended with the legal implementation of Jim Crow segregation. In



the famous words of Albert J. Raboteau, this period features literature produced after the “invisible institution” became visible. “The Civil Rights Era” chronicles the witness of African American Christians from 1896–1968. Spanning the period of legal segregation and the civil rights movement, this era ends with the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

The following two sections contain resources from concurrent theological movements, Black evangelicalism and Black theology. Section four, “Black Evangelicalism,” was formalized in 1963, with the formation of the National Negro Evangelical Association, and continues into the present. Section five, “Black Theology: 1969 and Beyond,” began with James H. Cone’s eruption onto the scene with his 1969 book *Black Theology and Black Power*. Cone is widely recognized as the father of Black liberation theology for his influential efforts to wed the Christianity of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black power of Malcolm X. The final section features recent developments during the twenty-first century. This accounts for a burgeoning movement of Black self-awareness and a Christian response of doctrinally Anchored believers who are socially conscious and culturally liberated.

## USING THESE VOLUMES

This volume is intended to be accessible enough to serve as a first-time foray into the African American Christian tradition, but it also provides an overarching narrative for those who are familiar with aspects of the tradition outside a consistent theological framework. With both readers in mind, here are some tips to help every reader get the most out of this book.

***Two volumes working together.*** This book is part of a two-volume set. Each volume can be read independently, but their value is amplified when they are used together. Throughout both books, careful attention is given to tracing the development of the theological Anchors that emerge from the African American Christian tradition. The Anchors appear capitalized as proper nouns when they are assessed. The anthology, volume 2, highlights the theological Anchors as they appear throughout the primary sources. Another feature that integrates the volumes is the reference of over one hundred primary sources in volume 1

that are featured in volume 2. This allows readers to have a firsthand encounter with the literature that drives the theological narrative.

**Explanatory apparatus.** These curated resources are situated within a three-tiered descriptive apparatus that allows the doctrinal development of the African American Christian tradition to guide the reader's understanding of each entry. The first tier consists of chapter introductions of each historical period, which introduce relevant theological developments for the era. The second tier is a preface for each primary source that includes details about the author and the occasion of the piece. Last, each primary source includes marginalia, which assists understanding by providing (1) definitions of rare words and terms that have evolved in meaning, (2) historical details for events and lesser-known names, (3) Scripture references, and (4) occurrences of the theological Anchors of the African American Christian tradition. The book's explanatory apparatus encourages readers to understand each primary source on its own terms and resists projecting contemporary concerns on resources that were produced with a fixed meaning by their authors.

**Representing Black dialects.** To allow African American saints to speak for themselves, both volumes contain previously published representations of Black dialects that remain as they were originally recorded. This authentically captures the strength, resilience, and beauty of African American faith in the words it was expressed in. This editorial decision insists that the strength of Christian faith is not awakened because of complex theological expressions. Faith's power emits from its object and living in faithful obedience to a praiseworthy God. In addition, the grammatical solecisms of Black dialect convey important regional and chronological details that would be otherwise lost.

**A reference work.** This anthology is composed of a wide variety of primary sources and is designed to be a reference work rather than to be read cover-to-cover. The periodization and genre divisions are intended to expedite locating a primary source. This repository of theological materials was carefully curated to provide documentation, excerpts, and primary accounts that are pertinent to various readers' research or interests. This format encourages users to navigate selectively, extracting

valuable insights from a wide array of sources without the need to engage in a linear, exhaustive reading, making it an indispensable tool for academic inquiry, sermonic development, and historical investigation.

***The purpose of a survey.*** Both volumes are surveys. Volume 1 provides a historical-theological narrative spanning several hundred years, and volume 2 offers a sampling of the literature produced by this theological tradition. As a result, neither volume is exhaustive, but they are the seedbed for more focused research and a foray into resources that are yet to receive the attention they deserve. After completing these volumes, I am dedicating my research and writing to this much-needed task of retrieval—and I encourage others to do the same.

Corresponding Chapters/Sections in Volumes 1 and 2

Volume 1 Chapter	Volume 2 Section
1	introduction
2, 3, 4	1
5, 6	2
7, 8, 9	3
10, 11, 12	4
13, 14	5
15	6



## SECTION 1

# PRE-EMANCIPATION

1619–1865



THE PRE-EMANCIPATION ERA accounts for the development of the Black community's oldest institution, the church, spanning from 1619 to 1865. This era began when the first recorded African slaves were sold in the New World and concluded when the Emancipation Proclamation was ratified after the Civil War.

In 1619, Captain John Smith penned the earliest record of Africans in America when he described a scene in Jamestown, Virginia, saying, "About the last of August came in a Dutch man of warre that sold us twenty Negars."<sup>1</sup> While the number of Christians captured in Africa and brought to America is unknown, this chapter documents the literature demonstrating that the Christian faith became an unmistakable pillar in the black community by the time of emancipation.<sup>2</sup>

The first recorded revival among slaves was during the First Great Awakening, which swept through the colonies during the mid- and late seventeenth century. There were ongoing attempts to evangelize slaves throughout the 1600s, but the awakening's emphasis on rebirth, baptism, and expressive, Spirit-filled worship

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<sup>1</sup>John Smith, *The Generall History of Virginia, New-England, and the Sumer Isles* (London, 1624).

<sup>2</sup>For an extended exploration of Christianity in Africa prior to the transatlantic slave trade, see chap. 1 in *Swing Low* vol. 1.



was effective with slaves because these foci paralleled African religious practices. The Christian faith sustained African Americans amid unimaginable suffering. Despite its being used as a tool to oppress Blacks, the Christian faith was reclaimed by African Americans as a means of deliverance and hope.

During the pre-emancipation era, the existence of Black Christianity's written legacy is evidence of a people who overcame all odds. African Christianity was an oral tradition that was passed through generations, and in many respects that orality persisted through the Middle Passage. However, Black Christians increasingly desired literacy as they contested oppressive interpretations of Scripture used to keep slaves docile.

The written tradition emerged from vibrant Christian witness among Blacks, which was chronicled with increasing regularity. Slaves made the Christian faith their own away from the watchful gaze of their masters in what is often called the invisible institution. Under the cover of darkness or in the confines of cramped slave quarters, the Christian faith was contextualized to engage the fears and struggles of Black life. Worship took on a distinctly African tone with the famed Negro spirituals and exhortation by often-illiterate slave preachers and teachers, who memorized biblical narratives and encouraged their hearers to carry on. Faith among Blacks flourished not in didactic statements of faith but through dynamic storytelling and a dramatic embodiment of biblical narratives.

Former slave Clara Young recalled the power of the slave preacher and the orality of Black faith, saying: "De preacher I liked de best was named Mathew Ewing. He was a comely nigger, black as night, and he sure could read out of his hand. He never learned no real readin' and writin' but he sure knewed his Bible and would hold his hand out and make like he was readin' and preadh de purtiest preachin' you ever heard."<sup>3</sup> Others who evangelized slaves, including Sojourner Truth, successfully passed the baton of faith through the oral tradition of their upbringing. When a minister inquired about the textual source of Sojourner Truth's preaching, she confidently explained, "No honey, can't preach from de Bible—can't read a letter." Then she explained: "When I preaches, I has jes one text to preach from, an' I always preaches from this one. My text is, 'When I found Jesus!'"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Fisk University Social Science Institute, *Unwritten History of Slavery: Autobiographical Accounts of Negro Ex-slaves* (NCR Microcard Editions, 1968), 46.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted by Jacquelyn Grant in "Jesus and the Task of Redemption," in *We Belong Together: Churches in Solidarity with Women*, ed. Sarah Cunningham (New York: Friendship, 1992), 41.

The confidence in the oral tradition notwithstanding, the desire to read the Bible firsthand became the primary driving force of Black literacy. In his 1787 speech “An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York,” Jupiter Hammon insisted on the urgency of literacy, saying:

Those of you who can read I must beg you to read the Bible, and whenever you can get time, study the Bible, and if you can get no other time, spare some of your time from sleep, and learn what the mind and will of God is. But what shall I say to them who cannot read. . . . Get those who can read to learn you, but remember, that what you learn for, is to read the Bible. . . . Reading other books would do you no good. But the Bible is the word of God, and tells you what you must do to please God; it tells you how you may escape misery, and be happy for ever. . . . The Bible is a revelation of the mind and will of God to men.<sup>5</sup>

Among Blacks, the urgent desire for literacy was met with resistance because some in the master class insisted that Christianity caused slaves to desire bodily freedom (in addition to spiritual freedom) and led them to revolt. Black literacy came with the additional fear of revolutionary interpretations of the biblical text that further enhanced the motivation to pursue freedom. This sentiment was well founded because the Christian faith was the core motivator that led Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner to revolutionary action.

Among slavery’s proponents, the response to Christianity’s inherent insistence on deliverance was the institution of slave codes, which shaped society to maximize White control and Black subservience—including codifying the prohibition of Black literacy. It was intended that Black Christians remain subject to the biblical interpretation of those who taught them. Moreover, Blacks were prevented from being educated by Whites and from educating each other in several states.

In the face of legal and social pressure, Blacks in the North began a new legacy of literacy, and Blacks in the South learned to read in creative ways despite thorough opposition. This striving produced a remarkably robust written witness of Blacks during the pre-emancipation era. Some learned to read from committed White ministers and teachers who consciously objected to upholding

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<sup>5</sup>Jupiter Hammon, “Address to the Negroes in the State of New York,” in *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*, 2nd ed., ed. Milton C. Sernett (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 39-40.

Black illiteracy on theological grounds. Children taught other children how to read in secret, and a growing number of Blacks attended schools in the North.

This body of literature provides a helpful vantage point of pre-emancipation Black faith. The following excerpts establish the Anchors of the African American Christian tradition with an insistence on a God who is all-powerful and good. Antebellum saints proclaimed the immutability of God as they expected him to act for them as he did when he delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery. The exodus narrative held a place of prominence among Old Testament accounts, and Blacks understand it to be evidence that slavery was against God's will and that it would end someday. The promise of deliverance was certain within the African American Christian tradition.

In addition to being their hopeful source of liberation, God was commonly referenced as the foundation of asserting Black personhood. The insistence of Blacks as image bearers was punctuated by the blood of Jesus being shed for all. The doctrinal conviction of Jesus' death on behalf of sinners, featured in African American Christian literature, was intensified by the Great Awakenings of the period. The right response to the "crimson flood" of Jesus' shed blood—that is, Conversion—is a constant refrain in the literature of this period.

Finally, the twin theological convictions of biblical authority and the liberator God to whom testifies are ever present. An uncomplicated acceptance of the Bible as God's Word is virtually uncontested among Black Christians prior to emancipation. Toil in the fields afforded Blacks the opportunity to dwell on and internalize the stories of God's chosen people, Israel, and his divine intervention on their behalf. Telling and retelling biblical accounts of Israel was far more than entertainment during excruciating days of labor. Slaves began identifying themselves with the Hebrew people and thus declared themselves to be insiders in the biblical drama. Their identification with the story established their identity within the people of God.

While no representative body of literature impeccably represents the written tradition, these resources offer a helpful window into the theological trends that Black Christians emphasized and that served as the doctrinal foundation on which African American Christianity was built.



# SERMONS AND ORATORY

## Sermon from John 3:3 (1776)

*Lemuel Haynes*

**Source:** Lemuel Haynes, *Sketches of the life and character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes, A. M., for many years pastor of a church in Rutland, Vt., and late in Granville, New-York*, ed. Timothy Mather Cooley (New York: Harper, 1837), 49-52. Available at <https://archive.org/details/sketchesoflifech00cool/page/58>.

LEMUEL HAYNES (1753–1833) was a pastor, theologian, and Revolutionary War veteran. He was born in West Hartford, Connecticut, to an indentured Scottish immigrant and an African slave. Unwanted by either parent, five-month-old Lemuel was abandoned and banished to indentured servitude in the home of Deacon David Rose in Grandville, Massachusetts. During his childhood, he developed a passion for reading, especially the Bible and other theological texts. Theologically, Haynes was influenced by George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and Philip Doddridge. His theology was decidedly Calvinistic, which was common for Blacks of the pre-emancipation era as they grappled with the sovereignty of God amid an oppressive social order.

At twenty-one years old, Haynes was licensed for ministry, and he was ordained five years later. He was the first person of African descent to receive ordination in America. He was also awarded an honorary master's degree from Middlebury College because of his renowned grasp of the biblical languages. Haynes spent much of his ministry pastoring West Parish Church of Rutland (now West Rutland's United Church of Christ), a predominantly White church in Rutland, Vermont. He pastored this church for thirty years, and the congregation grew from 42 people to about 350 under his care.

The following sermon was delivered almost verbatim in 1776 and was found among the papers of Reverend Ebenezer Bradford of Rowley, Massachusetts, with the following annotation added on a black sheet of paper: "This sermon was composed by Lemuel Haynes, a young fellow who was brought up a farmer, not favoured with so much as a good common education." This sermon offers a glimpse into Haynes's astute theological mind and warm Calvinism.



## SERMON.

John iii., 3:—“Jesus answered and said unto him. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

This chapter contains a conference between our blessed Lord and Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This great man came to our Saviour by night, and addressed him in this manner: “Rabbi,” says he, “we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles that thou doest except God be with him.”<sup>1</sup> Doubtless he had a rational conviction, from the many miracles that Christ did, that he was come from God. Our blessed Lord did not stand to show who he was, but, like a wise and kind teacher, takes occasion to inculcate the importance of the great doctrine of regeneration; and tells him, with a double asseveration, that, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. But, as great as this man was, we find that he was ignorant in a fundamental point in religion. It appeared a paradox unto him; for he, supposing our Lord must mean a natural birth, asks him, as in ver. 4, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” Christ, in order further to explain his meaning, and to show that it was not a natural birth that he had reference to, adds, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” By which, perhaps, we may understand, that, as water is often made use of in the Scriptures as a symbolical representation of the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of the children of men, so, unless we are born of the water of the Spirit (as divines interpret it), we cannot see the kingdom of God.

Our Lord proceeds to tell him. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.<sup>2</sup> *Q. d.*, It would be to no purpose if a man should have another natural birth, seeing it would not alter his nature; for that which is born of the flesh is flesh; let it be born ever so many times of the flesh, it would still remain fleshly; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” And now it seemed a greater mystery to Nicodemus than ever; therefore he cries out, as in ver. 9, “How can these things be?”

<sup>1</sup>John 3:2.

<sup>2</sup>John 3:6.



Thus you see, as I observed before, that, although Nicodemus was a great man, a ruler of the Jews, he was ignorant about the new birth. And doubtless it is so now. There are many of the great ones of the earth—tell them about experimental religion—tell them that they must feel the Holy Spirit working powerfully on their hearts—that they must be born again—they are ready to cry out, with this master in Israel, *How can these things be?*

But, to return to the words first read . . . in speaking something from these words I shall pursue the following method:—

I. Show the necessity of regeneration, or of our being born again.

II. Explain the nature of the new birth, or what it is to be born again.

III. Show what we are to understand by *seeing the kingdom of God*.

IV. Make some remarks . . .<sup>3</sup>

II. To show the nature of regeneration, or what it is to be born again.

And here,

I. I would consider the agent, or who it is that effects this great work. And if we consider that state that mankind are in by nature,<sup>4</sup> as has been described above, we need not stand long to know who to attribute this work to. It is a work too great to attribute to men or angels to accomplish. None but He who, by one word's speaking, spake<sup>5</sup> all nature into existence, can triumph over the opposition of the heart. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is represented in Scripture as emanating from the Father and the Son, yet coequal with them both. It is God alone that slays the native enmity of the heart—that takes away those evil dispositions that govern the man—takes away the heart of stone and gives a soft heart—and makes him that was a hater of God, an enemy to God, to become friendly to his divine character. This is not wrought by any efficiency of man, or by any external motives, or by any light let into the understanding, but of God. Hence we read that those that receive Christ are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man,

<sup>3</sup>The text proceeds immediately to and concludes with the second point, considering the “necessity of regeneration.”

<sup>4</sup>Haynes implies his position—a classic Calvinist position—on human nature being “totally depraved” and having no ability to pursue God without his initiation.

<sup>5</sup>*Spake* is a way of saying “spoke.”



but of God.—John i., 13. And that it is the gift of God.—Eph. ii., 8. Also that it is God which worketh in us.—Phil, ii., 13.

Thus, I say, the man is entirely passive in this work, but it is all wrought immediately by a Divine agency.\*<sup>6</sup> The man now becomes a new creature. Although he cannot discern what is the way of the spirit (as the wise man observes), or how God thus changes the heart, yet he knows that he has different feelings from what he had before. Therefore,

2. It is necessary that we consider those things that are the attendants or consequences of regeneration or the new birth; for there are no gracious or holy exercises that are prior thereto, to be sure, in the order of nature. Some seem to suppose faith to be before regeneration, but a little reflection upon the matter will show this to be wrong. By *faith* we are to understand a believing of those truths that God has exhibited in his word with a *friendly heart*. Now, to suppose that a man believes with this friendly heart antecedent to regeneration, is to suppose that a man is a friend to God while in a state of unregeneracy, which is contrary to Scripture. Now, if to believe with a friendly and right-disposed heart is absolutely necessary in order to constitute a true faith, and such a heart is peculiar to the regenerate only, then we must be possessed with this heart (which is given in regeneration) before there can flow from it any such exercises. So that the man must become a good man, or be regenerated, before he can exercise faith, or love, or any grace whatever. Hence we read of men's receiving Christ, and then becoming the sons of God.—John i., 12. Therefore, what lies before us is to show what those fruits and effects are, and what are those inward feelings that come in consequence of the new birth. And,



1. He loves God supremely. He loves holiness for what it is in itself, because it agrees with his new temper. He chooses and prefers that to any thing else. He loves the law of God. He loves the gospel, and every thing that is Godlike. He loves the holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. His affections are set on things that are above. His

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<sup>6\*</sup>“In regeneration man is wholly passive; in conversion he is active. Regeneration is the motion of God in the creature; conversion is the motion of the creature to God, by virtue of that first principle whence spring all the acts of believing, repenting, and quickening. In all these man is active; in the other he is merely passive.”—Charnock. [Ed. note: This quote is footnoted with the asterisks in the original.]

treasure is there, and his heart will be there also. He loves the people of God in this world; nay, wherever moral rectitude is to be seen, he falls in love with it. He loves all mankind with a holy and virtuous love. Although he cannot love those that are the enemies of God with a love of complacency, yet he loves them with the love of benevolence. He is of a noble and generous spirit. He is a well-wisher to all mankind. And this supreme love to God and benevolence to man is spoken of in Scripture as the very essence of true religion.



2. He repents of all his sins. He feels guilty before God. He sees and owns that God is right and he is wrong. He sees and gives in that it would be just with God to consign him over to the regions of despair. Now the man which could take no delight in any thing else but sin, hates it beyond any thing whatever. Now he can acknowledge his sin with holy David—"Against thee, and thee only, have I sinned."—"Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities."<sup>7</sup> He sees that the sacrifice of God is a broken and a contrite spirit. Like the publican, afraid to look up, he smites upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."<sup>8</sup>

3. He believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. I just observed what it was to believe. It is believing the record that God has given of his Son with a friendly heart. He gives in to the truths of the gospel with his heart, and he knows the truth by his own happy experience.

4. He is disposed to walk in all the ordinances of God blameless. He evidences by his holy walk that he has a regard for the honour of God. He endeavours to imitate his Divine master in all his imitable perfections. Knowing that he saith "he that abideth in him, ought himself so to walk, even as he has walked."<sup>9</sup> Oh, happy change indeed! The man is made like God in some good measure. He has the same kind of affections and dispositions as there are in God. He has a living principle within him, which is active and vigorous, springing up into everlasting life. . . .

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<sup>7</sup>Psalm 51.

<sup>8</sup>Luke 18:13.

<sup>9</sup>1 John 2:6.

*An Address Delivered on the  
Celebration of the Abolition of Slavery  
in New York (1827)*

*Nathaniel Paul*

**Source:** Nathaniel Paul, *An Address Delivered on the Celebration of the Abolition of Slavery in New York* (Albany: First African Baptist Society, 1827), 3-9, 11. Available at <https://archive.org/stream/addressdelivered00paul#page/n5/mode/2up>.

NATHANIEL PAUL (1793?–1839) was born free in Exeter, New Hampshire, into a family of Baptist ministers and abolitionists, and he embodied both traditions. Paul's family produced six Baptist ministers who served throughout New England. Paul moved to Albany and was the first pastor of Union Street Baptist Church, which functioned as a way station for the Underground Railroad to Canada. He aided passengers of the railroad upon their arrival in Canada by organizing the Wilberforce School, which functioned until 1873. Paul also championed education in Albany, where he worked to improve educational opportunities for Blacks by founding the Union Society for the Improvement of the Colored People in Morals, Education, and Mechanic Arts.

As an abolitionist, Paul made multiple speeches, including an address celebrating the abolition of slavery in New York state. Emancipation had been long awaited in the state, especially since the 1799 act that enforced gradual manumission for slaves over a twenty-eight-year period. State dignitaries attended the festivities, bands played grand musical arrangements, and Paul thrilled the audience with his address, which featured the development of a robust theological ethic that was violated by the practice of slavery. The speech juxtaposed the American contradiction of being a land that cherished freedom yet condoned slavery. Despite exploring the horrors of human bondage, Paul's speech is anchored by deep trust in God amid oppression and elated gratitude for his deliverance.

Through the long lapse of ages, it has been common for nations to record whatever was peculiar or interesting in the course of their history. Thus when Heaven, provoked by the iniquities of man, has

visited the earth with the pestilence which moves in darkness or destruction, that wasteth at noonday, and has swept from existence, by thousands, its numerous inhabitants; or when the milder terms of mercy have been dispensed in rich abundance, and the goodness of God has crowned the efforts of any people with peace and prosperity; they have been placed upon their annals, and handed down to future ages, both for their amusement and profit. And as the nations which have already passed away, have been careful to select the most important events, peculiar to themselves, and have recorded them for the good of the people that should succeed them, so will we place it upon our history; and we will tell the good story to our children and to our children's children, down to the latest posterity, that on the fourth day of July, in the year of our Lord 1827, slavery was abolished in the state of New-York.

Seldom, if ever, was there an occasion which required a public acknowledgment, or that deserved to be retained with gratitude of heart to the all-wise disposer of events, more than the present on which we have assembled.

It is not the mere gratification of the pride of the art, or any vain ambitious notion, that has influenced us to make our appearance in the public streets of our city, or to assemble in the sanctuary of the Most High this morning; but we have met to offer our tribute of thanksgiving and praise to almighty God for his goodness; to retrace the acts and express our gratitude to our public benefactors, and to stimulate each other to the performance of every good and virtuous act, which now does, or hereafter may devolve as a duty upon us, as freemen and citizens, in common with the rest of community.<sup>10</sup>

And if ever it were necessary for me to offer an apology to an audience for my absolute inability to perform a task assigned me, I feel that the present is the period. However, relying, for support on the hand of Him who has said, "I will never leave nor forsake;"<sup>11</sup> and confiding in



<sup>10</sup>Communal solidarity is characteristic of the African American communal reality because the buying and selling of slaves often destroyed nuclear families, so the need for responsibility beyond familial units was necessary for survival. This dynamic is represented in the obligation of these now-free Black people to live in neighboring states.

<sup>11</sup>Hebrews 13:5.



your charity for every necessary allowance, I venture to engage in the arduous undertaking. . . .

I will not, on this occasion, attempt fully to detail the abominations of the traffic to which we have already alluded. Slavery, with its concomitants and consequences, in the best attire in which it can possibly be presented, is but a hateful monster, the very demon of avarice and oppression, from its first introduction to the present time; it has been among all nations the scourge of heaven, and the curse of the earth. It is so contrary to the laws which the God of nature has laid down as the rule of action by which the conduct of man is to be regulated towards his fellow man, which binds him to love his neighbour as himself, that it ever has, and ever will meet the decided disapprobation of heaven.

In whatever form we behold it, its visage is satanic, its origin the very offspring of hell, and in all cases its effects are grievous.

On the shores of Africa, the horror of the scene commences; here, the merciless tyrant, divested of every thing human, except the form begins the action. The laws of God and the tears of the oppressed are alike disregarded; and with more than savage barbarity, husbands and wives, parents and children, are parted to meet no more: and, if not doomed to an untimely death, while on the passage, yet are they for life consigned to a captivity still more terrible; a captivity, at the very thought of which, every heart, not already biassed with unhallowed prejudices, or callous to every tender impression, pauses and revolts; exposed to the caprice of those whose tender mercies are cruel; unprotected by the laws of the land, and doomed to drag out miserable existence, without the remotest shadow of a hope of deliverance, until the king of terrors shall have executed his office, and consigned them to the kinder slumbers of death. But its pernicious tendency may be traced still farther: not only are its effects of the most disastrous character, in relation to the slave, but it extends its influence to the slave holder; and in many instances it is hard to say which is most wretched, the slave or the master.

After the fall of man, it would seem that God, foreseeing that pride and arrogance would be the necessary consequences of the apostacy, and that man would seek to usurp undue authority over his fellow, wisely ordained that he should obtain his bread by the sweat of his



brow;<sup>12</sup> but contrary to this sacred mandate of heaven, slavery has been introduced, supporting the one in all the absurd luxuries of life, at the expense of the liberty and independence of the other.<sup>13</sup> Point me to any section of the earth where slavery, to any considerable extent exists, and I will point you to a people whose morals are corrupted; and when pride, vanity and profusion are permitted to range unrestrained in all their desolating effects, and thereby idleness and luxury are promoted, under the influence of which, man, becoming insensible of his duty to his God and his fellow creature. . . .

Since affliction is but the common lot of men, this life, at best, is but a vapor that ariseth and soon passeth away.<sup>14</sup> Man, said the inspired sage, that is born of a woman, is of few days and full of trouble;<sup>15</sup> and in a certain sense, it is not material what our present situation may be, for short is the period that humbles all to the dust, and places the monarch and the beggar, the slave and the master, upon equal thrones. But although this life is short, and attended with one entire scene of anxious perplexity, and few and evil are the days of our pilgrimage; yet man is advancing to another state of existence, bounded only by the vast duration of eternity! in which happiness or misery await us all. The great author of our existence has marked out the way that leads to the glories of the upper world, and through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, salvation is offered to all. But slavery forbids even the approach of mercy; it stands as a barrier in the way to ward off the influence of divine grace; it shuts up the avenues of the soul, and prevents its receiving divine instruction; and scarce does it permit its miserable captives to know that there is a God, a Heaven or a Hell!



Its more than detestable picture has been attempted to be portrayed by the learned, and the wise, but all have fallen short, and acknowledged their inadequacy to the task, and have been compelled to submit, by merely giving an imperfect shadow of its reality. Even the immortal Wilberforce, a name that can never die while Africa lives, after exerting

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<sup>12</sup>Genesis 3:17-19.

<sup>13</sup>The hidden premise is that 2 Thessalonians 3:10 has been perverted with the practice of slavery with its admonishment, "If you don't work, you don't eat."

<sup>14</sup>James 4:14.

<sup>15</sup>Job 14:1.

his ingenuity, and exhausting the strength of his masterly mind, resigns the effort, and calmly submits by saying, “never was there, indeed, a system so replete with wickedness and cruelty to whatever part of it we turn our eyes; we could find no comfort, no satisfaction, no relief. It was the gracious ordinance of providence, both in the natural and moral world, that good should often arise out of evil. Hurricanes clear the air; and the propagation of truth was promoted by persecution, pride, vanity, and profusion contributed often, in their remoter consequences, to the happiness of mankind. In common, what was in itself evil and vicious, was permitted to carry along with it some circumstances of palliation. The Arab was hospitable, the robber brave; we did not necessarily find cruelty associated with fraud or meanness with injustice. But here the case was far otherwise. It was the prerogative of this detestable traffic, to separate from evil its concomitant good, and to reconcile discordant mischief. It robbed war of its generosity, it deprived peace of its security. We saw in it the vices of polished society, without its knowledge or its comforts, and the evils of barbarism without its simplicity; no age, no sex, no rank, no condition, was exempt from the fatal influence of this wide wasting calamity. Thus it attained to the fullest measure of its pure, unmixed, unsophisticated wickedness; and scorning all competition or comparison, it stood without a rival in the secure and undisputed possession of its detestable pre-eminence.” . . .

Strange, indeed, is the idea, that such a system, fraught with such consummate wickedness, should ever have found a place in this the otherwise happiest of all countries. a country, the very soil of which is said to be consecrated to liberty, and its fruits the equal rights of man. But strange as the idea may seem, or paradoxical as it may appear to those acquainted with the constitution of the government, or who have read the bold declaration of this nation’s independence; yet it is a fact that can neither be denied or controverted, that in the United States of America, at the expiration of fifty years after its becoming a free and independent nation, there are no less than fifteen hundred thousand human beings still in a state of unconditional vasalage.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>More commonly spelled “vassalage,” this word denotes existing in a state of subordination or submission.

*An Address: Delivered Before the Coloured  
Population, of Providence, Rhode Island,  
on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 27, 1828 (1829)*

*Hosea Easton*

**Source:** Hosea Easton, *An Address: Delivered Before the Coloured Population, of Providence, Rhode Island, on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 27, 1828* (Boston: David Hooton, 1829).

HOSEA EASTON (1798–1837) was a Congregationalist minister, writer, and abolitionist from an elite New England family. Born in Middleborough, Massachusetts, in 1798, Easton was the youngest child of James and Sarah Easton. He was born free, but a burden for racial equity developed during his childhood. In one instance, his father protested his family being required to sit in their church's newly erected balcony for Blacks. At another church during his adolescence, the Easton family purchased a pew, to the dismay of White church members. They returned to church the next Sunday to find their pew painted with tar. In time, Easton's family was excommunicated from that church for their insistence on racial equality in the house of worship. As the son of a Revolutionary War veteran, Easton was also grieved that Blacks and Whites, who fought the war for independence together, were not able to enjoy the freedoms they earned in harmony.

Like his older brothers and sisters, Easton was groomed to be an abolitionist in the Northeast, where efforts to oppress Blacks were increasingly complex as slaves were emancipated, educated, and earned financial stability. Some Whites deemed Black uplift a threat to widely accepted Black inferiority, so extralegal oppressive measures increased. Despite familial expectations, Easton decided to pursue vocational ministry. He was burdened by the cultural climate and energized by Scripture, and his ministerial responsibilities accentuated his abolitionism. As the pastor of Talcott Street Congregational Church and Colored Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Easton blended a desire to provide comprehensive pastoral care and social advocacy for people's basic needs. After a 1920 move to Boston, Easton gained stature for his efforts and was asked to deliver his renowned "Thanksgiving Day Address," in which he chided racial wickedness and encouraged Black uplift.

O, Liberty, where are thou! Is this all? No! We will pass on. Leaving behind though the barbarous cruelty imposed upon the natives, and as to the hellish practice of importing a foreign nation to a country of liberty, to be sold into slavery; it were better to be buried in oblivion and remembered no more forever. There are about five hundred thousand of the above-named degraded sufferers, who are said to be free, which assertion I deny. It is true, we live under a milder State Administration at present. It is also true, that we are in some respects exalted to heaven, in point of Liberty, above that of our fellow subjects, who are under the immediate scourge of avarice.<sup>17</sup> Their awful situation, doubtless, many of you have experienced, who compose this respectable auditory—while others of you have been eyewitnesses to the bloody scenes of cruelty and murder. Brethren, what was the sensation of your minds, when you beheld many of the female sex, pregnant with your young, tied to a tree or stake, and whipt by their masters, until nature gave way, and both mother and infant yielded up the ghost, while bearing the hellish scourge of these candidates for hell? What are they, when you saw your brethren shot or beat with clubs? When you saw their master vent his rage, by murdering them by degrees, either by roasting them alive, dissecting them limb by limb, or starving them to death for not complying with their unjust requirements? What were they, when you beheld the youth massacred for the smallest misdemeanor, and their affectionate parents not daring to make the least resistance for fear of falling victims to the same fate? What were they, when you saw the disciples of Christ, denied the privilege of meeting in groves and bylots, to worship their God as guided by his Spirit? What were they, I would ask, when you saw these things and more, in the very heart of our country—A country of Liberty—Near the very seat of Government? Did not the spirit of Liberty cry out to you, for vengeance to fall upon this country, which has so falsified the principles of Liberty, and trampled justice under foot. Now as we compose a part of the number who are said to be free, of course it becomes our duty to consider how far our liberty extends. Their first enquiry is, Are we eligible to an office?<sup>18</sup> No.—Are we considered

<sup>17</sup>Synonyms for *avarice* are “covetousness” or “extreme greed.”

<sup>18</sup>In 1885 Rev. Mahlon van Horne became the first Black man to be elected to the Rhode Island General Assembly.

subjects of government? No.—Are we initiated into free schools for mental improvement? No.—Are we patronized as salary men in any public business whatever? No.—Are we taken into social compact with Society at large? No.—Are we patronized in any branch of business which is sufficiently lucrative to raise us to any material state of honor and respectability among men, and this, qualify us to demand respect from the higher order of Society? No.—But to the contrary. Everything is withheld from us that is calculated to promote the aggrandizement and popularity of that part of the community who are said to be the descendent of Africa. I am sensible the white population will deny the fact above stated. But to confirm the fact, let us notice our ordinary course since the American Independence. . . .

We will not notice our means of acquiring literary information. It is true, that in our northern States, the laws have made provisions for us without distinction. But though we claim our right lawfully, yet, like all our other rights, we are denied enjoyment of them. We send our children to primary schools among white children; and if there is any demeaning place of contempt, to be found in any part of the School Room, there is the place for our children to get their information; while the little flax-headed boys and girls, are learnt by their parents to place a reproach upon them, by calling them Negroes, and the place where they are destined to sit, negro seats. Thus, our poor youth are discouraged, disheartened, and grow up in ignorance; fitted only to be an object of ridicule and contempt through life, by the higher order of Society. Some, doubtless will be ready to say, that our liberty is above this. In answer to whom I will acknowledge that there is an exception in States and Cities. In New York and Connecticut, the coloured population are brought more into public notice, as well as in the cities in New York and Boston; also, in many other places, public support for schools is set apart for the coloured population. In those schools, we have youths well qualified for the common business of life; but when they have obtained their education, they know enough only to feel sensible of their misery. Their minds being expanded, their perception brightened, their zeal ardent for promotion; they look around for business, they find that custom cut them off from all advantages. They

apply to merchants to patronize them as Clerks, they are rejected. They apply to attorneys at law to receive them into their office, they are rejected. They apply to the mariner, they are rejected, except, to go before the mask, cook, or steward. They apply to Mechanics of different occupations, here, too, they are rejected. And for what? Because it is customary. Leaving law, justice, and equity altogether out [of] the question. And should it become customary to cut off a black man's head (as it is already in the south), then of course we must lose our head, if custom says it is right. We see then the situation of our youth, turned out of doors without the least encouragement whatever. Now let us notice the consequence. Those bright minds enlarged by education, being under the necessity of taking up some low calling, which is not calculated to satisfy the extension of them, they become like the starving man, who, for the want of wholesome food, partakes of that which is poisonous and destructive. So it is with our youth, for the want of those encouragements set up before them, that is calculated to draw their attention to the pursuits of honour, respectability, virtue and industry, their expanded minds relapse into sordid dissipation, and fall victim to all the vices and folly incident to discouraged minds; and thus, the more education they have, under such circumstances, the more artful they are in following the haunt of dissipated principles. O, shocking! Is America to answer for all this? When then does justice sleep? . . .

The time has come, when our necessities calls aloud for our exertions, to prepare ourselves for the great events which are about heaving in view. Bretheren, the dreary night of darkness, which our fathers passed through,<sup>19</sup> is about to disperse. And notwithstanding we are a divided people, tossed to and fro, and hunted like partridge upon the mountain, yet the glorious rays of rational intelligence and literary acquirements, are beginning to backen<sup>20</sup> the chaos darkness, which has so long pervaded the minds of our population. Yes, bretheren, let a theme of praise and thanksgiving to God, thrill through every heart, in silent accents; for the sunbeams of Liberty are casting forth their glorious rays through the eastern atmosphere; and we may rationally entertain the hope, that

<sup>19</sup>This is a common allusion to the dreaded Middle Passage, the journey of captured Africans across the Atlantic to America to be enslaved.

<sup>20</sup>*Backen* is to "delay" or to "slow progress."

God in his wise Providence, will cause this glorious sun to arise to its meridian, and burst those fetters which are bound, and unlock the prison doors of prejudice; granting us Liberty to enjoy the blessings of life like other men. . . .



It is not time, my young friends, to spend your time in the dance-hall. It is not time to exercise your ability in gambling. But you must lay aside all unnecessary diversion, and alter your courses; Come out of this degrading course of life; Distinguish yourselves as pious, industrious, and intelligent men and women. This will demand respect from those who exalt themselves above you. I must now leave this subject with you, hoping that this day's labour will not be in vain; for I assure you my heart mourns daily, while beholding the clouds of evil thickening over this Republic. The awful consequences are plain to be seen, by the aid of both ancient and modern history. Let him that readeth understand. But, O, for a Gideon, with his three hundred men, chosen of God, to go up against the towering walls of evil, and cause them to fall, forever fall, to rise no more.



## “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” (1852)

*Frederick Douglass*

**Source:** Frederick Douglass, *Oration Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester* (Rochester: Lee, Mann, 1852), 16-18, 27-30. Available at <https://archive.org/details/orationdelivered00fred>.

FREDERICK AUGUSTUS WASHINGTON BAILEY (1818–1895) was born in Talbot County, Maryland. Douglass, like many slaves, suffered the tragedy of his family heritage being lost because he was bought and sold as a commodity. He did not know his father, and the only sound memory of his mother was her name, Harriet Bailey. He was raised by his grandmother, and the promise of his intellect became evident early in his life. His incredible memory, coupled with his deep conviction to pursue justice and his passion for education, blossomed into use after he escaped from slavery.

After establishing his freedom, he dropped a significant remnant of slavery, his surname, and asserted his autonomy by naming himself



Frederick Douglass. As a free man, Douglass married the woman of his betrothal when he was a slave, Anna Murray, and had four children. Murray preceded him in death in 1882. From 1838 until his death, Douglass wrote and rewrote his autobiography, chronicling how a man was made a slave and how a slave was made a man by debunking all caricatures and exceeding expectations for a Black man in America.

As a political figure, he critiqued, championed, and counseled presidents such as Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant, and Abraham Lincoln. Douglass is arguably the most well-known American of the nineteenth century. His political career and writings etched his name into the annals of the all-time great political philosophers, orators, and religious minds in American history. The following speech captures the essence of Douglass's intellectual prowess as he winsomely confronted the dissonance created by an annual celebration of freedom for a nation full of slaves—especially a nation constituted “under God.”

. . . My subject, then, fellow-citizens, is AMERICAN SLAVERY. I shall see, this day, and its popular characteristics, from the slave's point of view. Standing, there, identified with the American bondman, making his wrongs mine, I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery—the great sin and shame of America! “I will not equivocate; I will not excuse”<sup>21</sup>; I will use the severest language I can command; and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose



<sup>21</sup>This is a direct quote from the first issue of *The Liberator*, published by William Lloyd Garrison, an abolitionist. This publication marked the official beginning of the antislavery movement led by Garrison.

judgment is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slaveholder, shall not confess to be right and just.

But I fancy I hear some one of my audience say, it is just in this circumstance that you and your brother abolitionists fail to make a favorable impression on the public mind. Would you argue more, and denounce less, would you persuade more, and rebuke less, your cause would be much more likely to succeed. But, I submit, where all is plain there is nothing to be argued. What point in the anti-slavery creed would you have me argue? On what branch of the subject do the people of this country need light? Must I undertake to prove that the slave is a man? That point is conceded already. Nobody doubts it. The slaveholders themselves acknowledge it in the enactment of laws for their government. They acknowledge it when they punish disobedience on the part of the slave. There are seventy-two crimes in the State of Virginia,<sup>22</sup> which, if committed by a black man, (no matter how ignorant he be), subject him to the punishment of death; while only two of the same crimes will subject a white man to the like punishment. What is this but the acknowledgement that the slave is a moral, intellectual and responsible being? The manhood of the slave is conceded. It is admitted in the fact that Southern statute books are covered with enactments forbidding, under severe fines and penalties, the teaching of the slave to read or to write. When you can point to any such laws, in reference to the beasts of the field, then I may consent to argue the manhood of the slave. When the dogs in your streets, when the fowls of the air, when the cattle on your hills, when the fish of the sea, and the reptiles that crawl, shall be unable to distinguish the slave from a brute, there will I argue with you that the slave is a man! . . .

## RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

I take this law to be one of the grossest infringements of Christian Liberty, and, if the churches and ministers of our country were not stupidly blind, or most wickedly indifferent, they, too, would so regard it.

At the very moment that they are thanking God for the enjoyment of civil and religious liberty, and for the right to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences, they are utterly silent in respect to

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<sup>22</sup>A reference to slave codes.

a law which robs religion of its chief significance, and makes it utterly worthless to a world lying in wickedness. Did this law concern the “mint, anise and cummin”<sup>23</sup>—abridge the right to sing psalms, to partake of the sacrament, or to engage in any of the ceremonies of religion, it would be smitten by the thunder of a thousand pulpits. A general shout would go up from the church, demanding repeal, repeal, instant repeal! And it would go hard with that politician who presumed to solicit the votes of the people without inscribing this motto on his banner. Further, if this demand were not complied with, another Scotland would be added to the history of religious liberty, and the stern old Covenanters would be thrown into the shade. A John Knox<sup>24</sup> would be seen at every church door, and heard from every pulpit, and Fillmore would have no more quarter than was shown by Knox, to the beautiful, but treacherous queen Mary of Scotland.<sup>25</sup> The fact that the church of our country, (with fractional exceptions), does not esteem “the Fugitive Slave Law” as a declaration of war against religious liberty, implies that that church regards religion simply as a form of worship, an empty ceremony, and not a vital principle, requiring active benevolence, justice, love and good will towards man. It esteems sacrifice above mercy;<sup>26</sup> psalm-singing above right doing; solemn meetings above practical righteousness. A worship that can be conducted by persons who refuse to give shelter to the houseless, to give bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and who enjoin obedience to a law forbidding these acts of mercy, is a curse, not a blessing to mankind. The Bible addresses all such persons as “scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, who pay tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith.”<sup>27</sup>

### THE CHURCH RESPONSIBLE.

But the church of this country is not only indifferent to the wrongs of the slave, it actually takes sides with the oppressors. It has made itself

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<sup>23</sup>A partial quotation of Matthew 23:23.

<sup>24</sup>John Knox (1514–1572) was a Scottish Reformer renowned for establishing Presbyterianism in Scotland.

<sup>25</sup>Mary Tudor (1516–1558) was the queen of England and Ireland from July 1553 until her death. She is known for her aggressive attempt to reverse the English Reformation.

<sup>26</sup>An allusion to Matthew 9:13.

<sup>27</sup>Matthew 23:23.

the bulwark of American slavery, and the shield of American slave-hunters. Many of its most eloquent Divines<sup>28</sup> who stand as the very lights of the church, have shamelessly given the sanction of religion and the Bible to the whole slave system. They have taught that man may, properly, be a slave; that the relation of master and slave is ordained of God; that to send back an escaped bondman to his master is clearly the duty of all the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; and this horrible blasphemy is palmed off upon the world for Christianity.

For my part, I would say, welcome infidelity! welcome atheism! welcome anything! in preference to the gospel, as preached by those Divines! They convert the very name of religion into an engine of tyranny, and barbarous cruelty, and serve to confirm more infidels, in this age, than all the infidel writings of Thomas Paine, Voltaire, and Bolingbroke, put together, have done! These ministers make religion a cold and flinty-hearted thing, having neither principles of right action, nor bowels of compassion. They strip the love of God of its beauty, and leave the throng of religion a huge, horrible, repulsive form. It is a religion for oppressors, tyrants, man-stealers, and thugs. It is not that “pure and undefiled religion”<sup>29</sup> which is from above, and which is “first pure, then peaceable, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”<sup>30</sup> But a religion which favors the rich against the poor; which exalts the proud above the humble; which divides mankind into two classes, tyrants and slaves; which says to the man in chains, stay there; and to the oppressor, oppress on; it is a religion which may be professed and enjoyed by all the robbers and enslavers of mankind; it makes God a respecter of persons, denies his fatherhood of the race, and tramples in the dust the great truth of the brotherhood of man. All this we affirm to be true of the popular church, and the popular worship of our land and nation—a religion, a church, and a worship which, on the authority of inspired wisdom, we pronounce to be an abomination in the sight of God. In the language of

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<sup>28</sup>*Divines* is likely a reference to prominent framers of the American Constitution and self-proclaimed religious leaders whose hypocrisy is evident in the dismissal of the slave's plight.

<sup>29</sup>James 1:27.

<sup>30</sup>James 3:17.

Isaiah, the American church might be well addressed, “Bring no more vain ablations; incense is an abomination unto me: the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth. They are a trouble to me; I am weary to bear them; and when ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you. Yea! when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. YOUR HANDS ARE FULL OF BLOOD; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge for the fatherless; plead for the widow.”<sup>31</sup>

The American church is guilty, when viewed in connection with what it is doing to uphold slavery; but it is superlatively guilty when viewed in connection with its ability to abolish slavery.

The sin of which it is guilty is one of omission as well as of commission. Albert Barnes but uttered what the common sense of every man at all observant of the actual state of the case will receive as truth, when he declared that “There is no power out of the church that could sustain slavery an hour, if it were not sustained in it.”<sup>32</sup>

*Welcome to the Ransomed, or,  
Duties of the Colored Inhabitants of the  
District of Columbia (1862)*

*Daniel Alexander Payne*

**Source:** Daniel Alexander Payne, *Welcome to the Ransomed, or, Duties of the Colored Inhabitants of the District of Columbia* (Baltimore: Bull & Tuttle, 1862), 6-10. Available at [www.loc.gov/item/92838813/](http://www.loc.gov/item/92838813/).

DANIEL ALEXANDER PAYNE (1811–1893) was a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the first African American college president in the United States. He was a seminal figure in the African Methodist Episcopal Church throughout his lifetime both as a bishop and as an educator. He was responsible for organizing missionaries

<sup>31</sup>Isaiah 1:13-17.

<sup>32</sup>Albert Barnes (1798–1870) was an Anglo Presbyterian pastor and theologian in Philadelphia. He famously declared, “There is no power out of the church that could sustain slavery an hour, if it were not sustained in it” from his pulpit.

throughout the South during the Reconstruction era, which dramatically increased the denomination's membership.

Daniel Payne preached "Welcome to the Ransomed" on April 13, 1862, to mark the occasion of emancipation in Washington, DC. He delivered the sermon in the Ebenezer Chapel in Georgetown. This sermon marked a day of thanksgiving for people of color in the city. A group of pastors came to Payne and asked him to make the sermon into a pamphlet because of its significant dictates for people of color in Washington and throughout the nation. Payne agreed, and the sermon was expanded and published.

In *Welcome to the Ransomed*, Payne lays out the duties of free Blacks in the city. He highlights the benefits of freedom for the Christian life, family, and work, and emphasizes the importance of education. Payne's sermon is deeply theological and biblically informed as he encourages former slaves to take full advantage of their freedom. A strong emphasis on prayer marks the sermon, along with the importance of interceding for government officials and the president of the United States.

We are gathered to celebrate the emancipation, yea, rather, the *Redemption* of the enslaved people of the District of Columbia, the exact number of whom we have no means of ascertaining, because, since the benevolent intention of Congress became manifest, many have been removed by their owners beyond the reach of this beneficent act.<sup>33</sup>

Our pleasing task then, is to welcome to the Churches, the homesteads, and circles of free colored Americans, those who remain to enjoy *the boon of holy Freedom*.

Brethren, sisters, friends, we say welcome to our Churches, welcome to our homesteads, welcome to our social circles.

Enter the great family of Holy Freedom; not to *lounge in sinful indolence*, not to *degrade yourselves by vice*, nor to *corrupt society by licentiousness*, neither to *offend the laws by crime*, but to the *enjoyment of a well regulated liberty*, the offspring of generous laws; of law as just as generous, as righteous as just—a liberty to be *perpetuated* by equitable law, and sanctioned by the divine; for law is never equitable, righteous,

<sup>33</sup>"This beneficent act" is the Emancipation Proclamation.

just, until it harmonizes with the will of Him, who is “*King of kings, and Lord of lords,*”<sup>34</sup> and who commanded Israel to *have but one law for the home-born and the stranger.*



We repeat ourselves, welcome then ye ransomed ones; welcome not to indolence, to vice, licentiousness, and crime, but to a well-regulated liberty, sanctioned by the Divine, maintained by the Human law.



Welcome to habits of industry and thrift—to duties of religion and piety—to obligations of law, order, government—of government divine, of government human: these two, though not one, are inseparable. The man who refuses to obey divine law, will never obey human laws. *The divine first, the human next.* The latter is the consequence of the former, and follows it as light dots the rising sun.

We invite you to our Churches, because we desire you to be religious; to be more than religious; we urge you *to be godly.* We entreat you to never be content until you are emancipated from sin, from sin without, and from sin within you. But this kind of freedom is attained only through the faith of Jesus, love for Jesus, obedience to Jesus. As certain as the American Congress has *ransomed* you, so certain, yea, more certainly has Jesus redeemed you from the guilt and power of sin by his own precious blood.



As you are now free in body, so now seek to be free in soul and spirit, from sin and Satan. *The noblest freeman is he whom Christ makes free.*



We invite you to our homesteads, in order that we may aid you as well by the power of good examples as by the beauty of holy precept, in raising up intelligent, virtuous, pious, happy families. We invite you to our social circles, in order that you may have none of those inducements which grow out of a mere love of society, to frequent the *gambling hells,* and grogeries,<sup>35</sup> which gradually lead their votaries to infamy and the pit that is bottomless.



Permit us, also, to advise you to seek every opportunity for the cultivation of your minds. To the adults we say, enter the Sunday Schools and the Night Schools, so opportunely opened by Dr. Pierson,<sup>36</sup> in behalf

<sup>34</sup>Paraphrase of 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16.

<sup>35</sup>*Grogeries* are either places that sell alcohol or low-class bars.

<sup>36</sup>Dr. H. W. Pierson was a strong advocate for African American education and was an agent of the American Tract Society, which helped to organize schools for African Americans.

of the American Tract Society. In these latter you can very soon learn to read the precious word of God, even before you shall have a familiar knowledge of the letters which constitute the alphabet.

*Rest not till you have learned to read the Bible.* 'Tis the greatest, the best of books. In it is contained the Divine law. O! meditate therein by day and by night, for "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;—more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."<sup>37</sup> *"In keeping of them there is great reward."*<sup>38</sup> Yield uniform, implicit obedience to their teachings. They will purify your hearts and make them the abodes of the Ever-Blessed Trinity.

When you shall have reached this point, you will be morally prepared to recognize and respond to all the relations of civilized and christianized life.

But of the children take *special care*. Heaven has entrusted them to you for a *special purpose*. What is that purpose? Not merely to eat and to drink, still less to *gormandize*.<sup>39</sup> Not merely to dress finely in broad-cloths, silks, satins, jewelry, nor to dance to the sound of the tamborine and fiddle; but *to learn them how to live and how to die—to train them for great usefulness on earth—to prepare them for greater glory in heaven.*

Keep your children in the schools, even if you have to eat less, drink less and wear coarser raiments; though you eat but two meals a day, purchase but one change of garment during the year, and relinquish all the luxuries of which we are so fond, but which are as injurious to health and long life as they are pleasing to the taste.

Let the education of your children penetrate the heart.—That education which forgets, or purposely omits, the culture of the heart, *is better adapted to devilism than manhood*. But the education which reaches the heart, moulds it, humbles it before the Cross, is rather the work of the homestead than the common school or the college. It is given by the *parents* rather than the schoolmaster—by the *mother* rather than the father.

<sup>37</sup>Psalm 19:7-10.

<sup>38</sup>Psalm 19:11.

<sup>39</sup>To *gormandize* means to eat gluttonously or ravenously.





How important, then, that the mothers be *right-minded*; that our young women, of whom our mothers come, be brought up with a high sense of personal character—be taught to prefer virtue to gold, and death itself rather than a violated chastity. The women make the men; therefore the women should be greater than the men, in order that they be the mothers of great men. I mean good men, *for none are great who are not good*.

But this requires the transforming grace of God; requires that our mothers be women of strong faith and fervent daily prayers; requires that they live beneath the wings of the Cherubim—at the foot of the Cross—loving the God-man “whose favor is life, and whose loving kindness is better than life.”<sup>40</sup>



Such mothers will care for the heart education of their children, and will consequently lay continuous siege to the Throne of God in behalf of their sons and daughters, even as the Syrophenician mother implored the compassionate Jesus in behalf of her afflicted daughter, or as Queen Esther did Ahasuerus in behalf of her menaced kinsmen.<sup>41</sup>

Such mothers will carefully train their children, as Moses was trained by his mother, preserving him pure from *the vices of a Court* and the baneful examples of lordly superiors;<sup>42</sup> or, like Susanna Wesley, will educate their sons, as she did John and Charles, in the atmosphere of such spiritual excellence, and with such a moral power, as will make them ministering angels of good to man and glory to God Most High.

Lastly—Let us advise you respecting money. Some people value it too much, others too little. Of these extremes take the medium; for money has its proper value. That *value lies in its adaptedness to promote the ends of Christian enlightenment*; to purchase the best medical aid and other comforts in the days of affliction; to administer to the wants of old age, and to enable us to assist in making mankind wiser and better.

But how are we to get money? Get it by diligent labor. Work, work, work! Shun no work that will bring you an honest penny. 'Tis honorable to labor with our own hands. God works, and shall man be greater than God? Fools only think labor dishonorable. Wise men feel themselves

<sup>40</sup>Psalm 63:3.

<sup>41</sup>Mark 7:24-30; Esther 7.

<sup>42</sup>Exodus 2:1-10.

honored in following the example of God, whose works adorn and bless both heaven and earth.

But when you get the pennies save them. Then you will soon have dollars. The dollars will enable you to buy comfortable homes for yourselves and your children.

You can save your pennies—yea, dollars—if you will run away from whiskey, rum and tobacco. A few years ago an intelligent minister said that the colored people of the District of Columbia spent ten thousand dollars a year for tobacco.—What a sum for poison! Better take that money to build churches and school houses; better take it to obtain and pay thoroughly educated teachers for your pulpits and your school houses—the *schoolmasters* as well as the preachers.

Work for money; work every day, work diligently, and *save your money when you get it*.

Be *obliging* and *faithful* to your employers, and you will be sure to keep your places. Never be above your business.—Many a man has ruined himself and his family by this foolish pride.

Ever since the first stone in the foundations of the Universe was laid by God's own hand till now, he has been working, and will continue working through endless ages. Follow his glorious example. Work, work, work, for an honest penny; but when you get it, pause and think three times before you spend it; but when you spend it, be sure it will yield a permanent benefit.



That the hearty welcome which we have given you, our *ransomed* kinsmen, may be rendered a blessing, and that the advices which we have tendered may be as good seed sown in good ground, we shall continue to make supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings to Him whose care reaches all, because His love embraces all.

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