REJECTED OF MEN: THE CHANGING RELIGIOUS VIEWS OF WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON AND FREDERICK DOUGLASS

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ABSTRACT

REJECTED OF MEN: THE CHANGING RELIGIOUS VIEWS OF WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON AND FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Ву

William Lloyd Van Deburg

During the ante-bellum period of American history, a group of reformers known as the Garrisonian abolitionists sought to effect a moral revolution in the minds and lives of the nation's citizenry. In their campaign to eradicate the national sin of slavery, as they termed it, the Garrisonians censured the actions of all those who would not bear unqualified testimony against the evils of the southern labor system. By so doing, they alienated a large segment of the nation's clergy.

Two of the major participants in the antislavery struggle, William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass, were so greatly influenced by their involvement in the crusade against slavery that their religious beliefs changed significantly over the decades. The refusal of the majority of the nation's "orthodox" churchmen to join the abolitionists in denouncing slavery led Garrison to reexamine the eminently orthodox beliefs of his youth while causing him to turn to the nation's more liberal religionists for aid and religious instruction. Scorned by white churchmen both as a black Christian and as a Garrisonian abolitionist, Douglass found it impossible to respect the religious profession of Christians whose characters were tarnished by anti-Negro prejudice. Eventually this feeling contributed importantly to his rejection of the "wonder-working power" of the Christians' God.

Using manuscript materials, contemporary newspapers, and the published works of the two abolitionists, this study traces the religious evolution of Garrison and Douglass from the orthodoxy of youth to the religious liberalism of later life. While no attempt is made to forward the idea that a single, overriding factor or event can explain all of the changes which were effected in their theological beliefs, it is suggested that to be "rejected of men" -- to be scorned and rebuked by the very segments of society from which they had hoped to receive aid and comfort -- was definitely a traumatic experience for both men. The experience of rejection not only made the abolitionists wary of all pronouncements emanating from these quarters, but also served to increase their receptivity to ideas and concepts forwarded by men whose religious beliefs were markedly different from those to which they had adhered in their earlier years. The rejection experience closed off certain avenues of belief and opened up others which may never have been seriously considered had the rejection experience not occurred.

In addition to tracing the changing religious views of the two men, this study also speaks of the complex relationship which existed between Garrison and Douglass and suggests that their rejection experiences were not wholly unique. To be "rejected of men," in any age, tends to make an individual consider the possibility of breaking old ties and of abandoning long-accepted beliefs.

REJECTED OF MEN: THE CHANGING RELIGIOUS VIEWS OF WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON AND FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Вy

William Lloyd Van Deburg

· A THESIS

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Department of History

1973

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Copyright by William Lloyd Van Deburg 1973 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

--Isaiah 53:3-4

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Whoever may hereafter collect my writings together, in order to form some estimate of my character, will, I trust, be able to testify, that I was no respecter of persons, but was uniform in my condemnation of corrupt principles, however high the source from which they emanated.

--William Lloyd Garrison January 31, 1835

During the ante-bellum period of American history, a group of reformers known as the Garrisonian abolitionists sought to effect a moral revolution in the minds and lives of the nation's citizenry. Even though they realized that the institution of Negro slavery was deeply embedded in the collective American conscience -so deeply instilled in fact, that the normal workings of that conscience seemed at times to be nearly inoperative in regard to it -the Garrisonians were determined to lead the nation to repentance. In their campaign to eradicate the national sin of slavery, as they termed it, the reformers evidenced little "respect of persons"-censuring the actions of all those who would not bear unqualified testimony against the evils of the southern labor system. By so doing, they not only alienated those members of the clergy who sought to avoid the sort of tumult which the abolitionists were creating, but also challenged the moral leadership of that influential body as a whole.

This study contends that two of the major participants in the antislavery struggle, William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass, were so greatly influenced by their involvement in the crusade against slavery that their religious beliefs changed significantly over the decades. The refusal of the majority of the nation's "orthodox" churchmen to join the abolitionists in denouncing slavery led Garrison to reexamine the eminently orthodox beliefs of his youth while causing him to turn to the nation's more liberal religionists for aid and religious instruction. Scorned by white religionists both as a black Christian and as a Garrisonian abolitionist, Douglass found it impossible to respect the religious profession of Christians whose characters were tarnished by anti-Negro prejudice. Eventually this feeling contributed importantly to his rejection of the "wonder-working power" of the Christians' God.

Douglass and Garrison were not alone in championing the antislavery cause against clerical opposition, and it is therefore quite likely that other abolitionists experienced similar modifications of religious belief. It is also apparent that a gradual transformation of religious thought from the trusting conservatism and orthodoxy of youth to the more reflective, liberal faith of adulthood is a widespread phenomena which can by no means be attributed solely to the contact which one has had with an unpopular reform movement. Certainly it is to be lamented that a true appreciation of the religious evolution through which men like Douglass and Garrison have passed is all too often made impossible by the tendency of twentieth-century historians, writing for a largely

manner the problem of religious change. Although undoubtedly aware that the beliefs which an individual treasures as a child or as a young adult are not necessarily those to which he adheres in adult-hood or in old age, scholars often attempt to deal with personal religious faith in a rather haphazard and unproductive manner. By citing only certain major events in the development of a historical figure's religious character or by merely giving a brief overview of his beliefs, biographers frequently fail to inform their readers that religious thought, like political, social, or economic thought, is an ever-changing, multifaceted quantity.

While much progress has been made in this respect by
Garrison's most recent biographers, there still remains no single
work which deals exclusively with the Boston editor's changing religious views. The religious beliefs of Frederick Douglass have
been even more drastically slighted. When one considers the importance of understanding both the nature of the personal ties which
existed between these two key figures in the abolitionist movement,
and the relationship of the Garrisonians to organized religion, it
becomes apparent that a study dealing solely with the religious
life of the two reformers is long overdue.

To be "rejected of men"--to be scorned and rebuked by the very segments of society from which they had hoped to receive aid and comfort--was definitely a traumatic experience for both Douglass and Garrison. The experience of rejection not only made the abolitionists wary of all pronouncements emanating from these quarters, but also served to increase their receptivity to ideas and concepts forwarded by men whose theological beliefs were

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markedly different from those to which they had adhered in their earlier years.

Before examining the religious views of the two abolitionists in detail, certain intellectual and social movements of the era
must be outlined. Without an understanding of the prevailing religious climate, a great deal of insight into their changing beliefs
would be lost.

. . . .

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." By the year 1800, these words from John Donne's Devotions had acquired a far richer meaning than his seventeenth-century world could have imagined. Across the Atlantic a new nation was involved in the fundamental process of growth from a status akin to childhood, wherein cultural cues were taken directly from the mother country, to a condition of budding adolescence. The youthful society of early nineteenthcentury America had already begun to be more circumspect in accepting imported systems of belief and structures of institutional organization. Within the new Republic, men of ideas greatly influenced national events and were, in turn, strongly affected by the culture in which they lived. As with all men born into this society, William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass were subjected to social forces that would color their personalities and beliefs in later years.

(Under its new constitution, the United States was a secular state, but one which did not give an exaggerated preference to secularism.) Embued with the prevailing belief that free, uncoerced consent was the proper basis for all human organizations, the

framers of the Constitution were in agreement with denominational leaders who desired to propagate their views unobstructed by legal statute. The delegates to the Constitutional Convention, themselves sufficiently representative of the various American denominations, assured later generations that no religious test would be required as a qualification for "any Office or public Trust under the United States." Freedom of religious practice and the prohibition of church establishment were set forth in the First Amendment to the Constitution. President Washington did not express a novel sentiment when he paid homage to "the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men" in his first Inaugural Address. He was merely drawing upon the religious foundations previously evidenced in Article VI of the Constitution, in Article III of the Northwest Ordinance, and in the Declaration of Independence. 1

The tone of early state constitutions was similar to that of the federal Constitution with the exception that the "no religious test" doctrine did not prevent governors or state legislatures from disqualifying prospective appointees to state service because of their religious beliefs. The makers of the revolutionary constitutions, while promising freedom of religion, did not expect the states to be totally neutral in such matters. They usually took it for granted that there was a consensus of opinion in

Wilber G. Katz, Religion and American Constitutions

(Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 22; Anson

Phelps Stokes, Church and State in the United States, I (New York:

Harper & Brothers, 1950), 516-517; Sidney E. Mead, The Lively

Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America (New York:

Harper & Row, 1963), p. 61; Edward Frank Humphrey, Nationalism and

Religion in America, 1774-1789 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965),

Pp. 453-454; Roy F. Nichols, Religion and American Democracy

Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), p. 37.

support of Protestant Christianity. Only Rhode Island and Virginia conceded full and perfect religious freedom. In the constitutions of several states, Roman Catholics and Jews were disfranchised or excluded from public office. Acknowledgement of God's existence and belief in a future state of rewards and punishments were prerequisites to the right of suffrage in others. As Merrill Jensen has noted, "the steps in the direction of religious freedom and the complete separation of church and state were thus halting, but the direction was sure and the purpose was clear."

The years after 1776 were ones of transition and change in which old and new answers to vital questions existed side by side. Eighteenth-century patterns of belief, formed largely from English models, persisted, but were coming under attack. The presence of an ever increasing variety of racial and religious elements within the new nation gradually accustomed Americans to the possibility of living on at least tolerable terms with men of differing faiths. The popular belief that the right to pursue liberty and happiness included the right to worship in one's own way made it still more difficult to preserve religious uniformity within this heterogeneous population.

Thomas Cuming Hall, The Religious Background of American Culture (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1930), p. 188; Herbert Wright, "Religious Liberty Under the Constitution of the United States," Virginia Law Review, XXVII (1940), 77-78; Evarts B. Greene, Religion and the State: The Making and Testing of an American Tradition (Ithaca: Great Seal Books, 1959), p. 82; Sanford H. Cobb, The Rise of Religious Liberty in America (New York: Macmillan Company, 1902), p. 507; Humphrey, Nationalism and Religion, pp. 490-499; Merrill Jensen, The New Nation: A History of the United States During the Confederation, 1781-1789 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), p. 134.

Russel Blaine Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), pp. 4, 9; Greene, Religion and the State, p. 65.

As the various denominations struggled to break their Old World ties and to perfect new plans of church organization, major efforts toward a revitalization of American religious life, as had occurred in the 1740's, were necessarily delayed. This postponement had serious consequences for the nation's churches. By 1783 it was the unanimous testimony of the clergy that a rising tide of iniquity was sweeping the land, causing people to indulge in hitherto unknown vices and to neglect a proper cultivation of piety. Various causes for the decline in public virtue were readily apparent. Churches had been destroyed and congregations divided during the war for independence. The breaking of churchstate bonds had encouraged the growth of numerous sects while postwar inflation made the financial support of both old and new groups a difficult matter. Other factors much less visible to the contemporary layman figured significantly in what came to be known as "the decline of Puritanism." Calvinism had long been confronted by opposing systems of belief in both the New World and in Europe, but after 1750 internal dissension combined with a number of particularly virulent heresies to make it lose its grip on American society.4

The essential nature of these changes in Puritanism first became evident during the middle years of the preceding century.

After the death of John Winthrop in 1649, New England intellectual development consisted of a virtually continuous series of crises

William Warren Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 53; Nye, Cultural Life, pp. 204-205; J. Franklin Jameson, The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1926), pp. 91-93.

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and failures, of contradictory attempts to reach back to the faith of an earlier day and forward toward certain revisions that would more easily facilitate adjustments to the rapidly changing patterns of American life. The harmful consequences of the Half-Way Covenant, the growing sense of Puritan "tribalism," and the "heretical" beliefs held by clerics such as Boston's Jonathan Mayhew were not eradicated by the spiritual force of the Great Awakening. In fact, this revivalistic movement which swept the nation during the third through sixth decades of the eighteenth century, cresting in the early 1740's, had its own telling effects upon Calvinist orthodoxy. Even Jonathan Edwards, who did more than any other man of his day to make American Calvinism appear both beautiful and viable, left a mark of change rather than reaction on New England theology. Despite his belief in the revival as a movement inspired by God to combat the excesses of rationalism and Arminianism. Edwards' philosophy of mystical idealism and his appeal to emotionalism departed from both the practice and the theology of the Puritan fathers. With his assistance, the Great Awakening resulted in a restatement of Calvinism in terms that gave the individual greater responsibility for working out his own salvation, yet without asserting that man could be saved by his own act or be redeemed without experiencing the transforming grace and power of the Holy Spirit.5

Loren Baritz, City On A Hill: A History of Ideas and Myths in America (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 47; Frank Hugh Foster, A Genetic History of the New England Theology (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), p. 43; Max Savelle, Seeds of Liberty: The Genesis of the American Mind (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), pp. 28, 31-32, 47-53, 66, 69; Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), pp. 161-186; Charles Grandison Finney, Lectures on Revivals of Religion, ed. by William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1960), p. xiii.

Edwards gave American religion a new and powerful impetus which continued to be felt for decades, but a weakening of this thrust began almost immediately after he had completed his work. Theological debates among Edwards' successors became increasingly abstruse as their discussions revolved around ever more minute distinctions, definitions, and shades of meaning. As Vernon Parrington has noted, "theological fame in Massachusetts came to be measured by the skill with which the logician made out to stand on both sides of the fence at the same time."

The nower of Puritan theology had always rested upon its ability to work certain ideas about the nature and operation of man and the universe into a coherent and plausible system. Since Puritanism was not only a religious creed, but also a total organization of human emotional and intellectual life, any dislocation of the key elements in the synthesis it had achieved would inevitably produce fatal consequences. While Calvinist theology was gradually degenerating into a succession of formulations which produced quibbling among the clergy and skepticism within the laity, an important balance was tipped which helped bring about the internal collapse of Puritanism. As drawn by theologian Joseph Bellamy and poet Michael Wigglesworth, the Calvinist God became the "Absolute Monarch of the Universe," an infant-damning judge of a far more rigid and less complex character than shown by the delicately

Joseph Haroutunian, Piety Versus Moralism: The Passing of the New England Theology (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), p. xxii; Herbert Wallace Schneider, The Puritan Mind (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1958), p. 221; Sidney Earl Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor, 1786-1858: A Connecticut Liberal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), pp. 95-96; Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, Vol. I: The Colonial Mind (New York: Harvest Books, 1954), p. 316.

balanced picture of earlier years. Consequently, many Americans decided that this portrait, along with the Calvinist belief in predestination and hell's cruel punishments, needlessly made God a figure of evil and labeled man a morally helpless puppet. 7

As Calvinism lost its dynamism, an increasing number of people turned their thoughts away from other-worldly pursuits and became preoccupied with life in the ever expanding mercantile society. Under the sheltering wing of secular influences and modernizing tendencies, the way was opened for the flowering of the more liberal ideas that had long been filtering in from across the Atlantic. By 1800 the lines of battle between liberal and conservative theology were clearly drawn. Liberal Calvinists, many of them holding academic or clerical positions in the Boston-Cambridge area, were strongly influenced by the humanized deity described by Mayhew and Charles Chauncy. The deity of the liberals was not a God of wrath. but a benevolent purveyor of mercy, compassion and love. In contrast to the orthodox Calvinist belief in salvation by God's grace. the liberals asserted that the essential powers of spiritual regeneration merely lay dormant in human nature, needing only to be awakened and emancipated. Tacitly accepting the doctrine that man was not as depraved, nor God as exalted as had previously been believed, many Congregational ministers at the turn of the century

Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., The Puritans (New York: American Book Company, 1938), p. 4; Clarence H. Faust, "The Decline of Puritanism," in Transitions in American Literary History, ed. by Harry Hayden Clark (Durham: Duke University Press, 1954), pp. 3, 11, 14, 16, 24-25; Finney, Lectures, p. xiii; Schneider, Puritan Mind, pp. 232-233.

were, for all practical purposes, unitarian in their convictions.

The revision of orthodox Calvinist assumptions was not, however, wholly the product of inroads made by unitarian tenets.

Jonathan Edwards' departure from the practices of the Puritan fathers was carried on by his pupil and friend, Samuel Hopkins.

"Hopkinsianism," as his beliefs came to be called, held that the
atoning power of Christ's death was not limited to an elect, but was
available to all men. "Disinterested benevolence," a concern for
the greatest good and happiness of all, became the center of his
theology as well as his key to the realization of important ethical
values.9

Also sharing in the movement away from strict Calvinism was Timothy Dwight, Edwards' grandson and president of Yale University. Rallying Christians to the defense of the Biblical faith, Dwight continually assailed the forces of infidelity and liberal religion. While calling for a return to the steady society of his forefathers, he extolled a theology which was a common sense combination of personal responsibility and dependence upon God. Under Dwight's leadership, old lines of cleavage in doctrine and practice began to fade in importance. Fine theological points were overlooked in the battle

Nye, Cultural Life, pp. 205-208, 222-223; Clinton Rossiter,

The First American Revolution: The American Colonies on the Eve of
Independence (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956), p. 69;
Savelle, Seeds of Liberty, pp. 32-33; G. Adolf Koch, Republican
Religion: The American Revolution and the Cult of Reason (Gloucester:
Peter Smith, 1964), pp. 294-295.

⁹Sweet, American Culture, pp. 198-199, 235; Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), p. 77.

against Satanic foes. 10

After Dwight, Nathaniel W. Taylor, Professor of Didactic Theology at Yale, continued to push New England theology toward Arminianism. Virtually repudiating the orthodox doctrine of predestination, (Taylor) declared that man, as a free and thinking creature, was wholly capable of accepting goodness and rejecting wickedness. This trend of thought, continued by Lyman Beecher and Charles Grandison Finney, approached the Methodist position that anyone who willed to do so could choose to be holy rather than sinful while minimizing the Calvinistic emphasis on the independent workings of the Holy Spirit in the conversion process. 11

A primary cause of the "irreligion" so laboriously lamented by moderate and [conservative Calvinists] during the last two decades of the eighteenth century was held to be the growth of deism, an imported religio-philosophical movement rooted in the Enlightenment's faith in reason and science. Both unitarian and deist doctrine held that God was a benevolent and just Deity, that the aim of religion was the love of God and the practice of the good life, and that Jesus was a humble, philanthropic being inferior to and distinct from the Creator. Mayhew, Chauncy, and other advocates of early unitarianism cannot, however, be placed in the deist camp because, despite their essential rationalism, they retained a belief

Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor, pp. 47-49; Bernard Weisberger, They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact Upon Religion in America (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), p. 63; Charles E. Cunningham, Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817: A Biography (New York: Macmillan Company, 1942), pp. 327-328.

The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), p. 27; Schneider, Puritan Mind, p. 236; Nye, Cultural Life, p. 226.

in many of the more seemingly irrational elements of revealed Christianity. Radical deism, on the other hand, held that religious ideas should be tested by scientific methods, completely ruling out any belief in revelation. Some of the more extreme American deists even regarded organized churches as dangerous to human freedom.

Hating "priests, priestcraft and mystery-mongering," deists asserted that the basis of true religion was personal rather than institutional and was more concerned with reason than with faith. Popularized and defended by the pens of Thomas Paine and Ethan Allen, deism seemed to be sweeping forward so rapidly that Christian America would soon be engulfed in a sea of infidelic oblivion. 12

Since, initially, the forces of Congregationalism could not seem to pull themselves away from their own internal doctrinal squabbles long enough to meet and repel the deistic challenge, it was left to the Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians to lead the most militant opposition to deism. Nevertheless, Calvinist and Arminian alike seemed to sense that they were struggling for the exclusive right to speak for the same faith whereas the deists were dangerous aliens in their Christian society. During the 1790's, days of fasting, humiliation, and prayer were proclaimed, commencement

¹² Nye, Cultural Life, pp. 208-211; Peter Gay, ed., Deism:

An Anthology (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1968), p. 13; Herbert M.

Morais, Deism in Eighteenth Century America (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960), pp. 120-121, 154, 177-178; Savelle, Seeds of Liberty, pp. 40, 42-43; Sweet, American Culture, pp. 91-92. As a student at Yale during the mid-1790's, Lyman Beecher witnessed the rising tide of deism. He later wrote: "The college church was almost extinct. Most of the students were skeptical, and rowdies were plenty. Wine and liquors were kept in many rooms; intemperance, profanity, gambling, and licentiousness were common.... That was the day of the infidelity of the Tom Paine school...most of the class before me were infidels, and called each other Voltaire, Rousseau, D'Alembert, etc., etc." Lyman Beecher, Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D. D., ed. by Charles Beecher, I (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1864), 43.

speakers condemned the "gross and monstrous" deistic philosophy, and countless sermons asserted the superiority of Biblical revelation as a guide to living. 13

Actually, as Perry Miller has noted, deism was an "exotic plant" which never struck roots in the American environment. The deists claimed more followers than they actually had while clerics tended to exaggerate deism's threat to revealed religion. Largely confined to a small minority of intellectual leaders, deism had a limited appeal to the common man. Its philosophical rationalism could not compete with the emotions released during the early years of the nineteenth century when the Second Great Awakening revitalized American Protestantism. 14

The revivalism that so markedly affected deism and orthodox Calvinism became a dominant factor in American social and intellectual life during the sixty years preceding the Civil War. Under the old Calvinist orthodoxy, individuals were predestined either to be led to salvation or damned to eternal punishment. The appeals of the revivalist were expressed in the vocabulary of a contrasting Arminianism. Salvation was not reserved for an elect, but was available to all who repented of their sins, threw themselves on God's mercy and accepted Christ as their personal Savior. Much of the dynamic power of early nineteenth-century revivals can be

¹³Koch, Republican Religion, pp. 247, 275-278; Gay, Deism, p. 11; Morais, Eighteenth Century, pp. 159-161.

Perry Miller, "From the Covenant to the Revival," in <u>The Shaping of American Religion</u>, ed. by James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison, I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 353; Nye, <u>Cultural Life</u>, pp. 213-215; John Allen Krout and Dixon Ryan Fox, <u>The Completion of Independence</u>, <u>1790-1830</u> (New York: Macmillan Company, 1944), pp. 165-167; Koch, <u>Republican Religion</u>, p. 298.

accounted for by the fact that they were addressed to those already more or less within the churches and because they were able to operate within a society where a general consent to the principles of Protestant Christianity was already taken for granted. Productive of what Ralph Gabriel has termed "Romantic Christianity," revivalism emphasized the emotional rather than the rational elements in American Protestantism. 15

There had been indications as early as 1790 that the evangelism of the 1740's might once again become an important factor in American religious life. The movement for a renewed emphasis upon vital religion appeared simultaneously in various parts of the country and within different denominations. Almost imperceptibly, people began to take a greater interest in religious affairs. New churches were established and new members enrolled. Within the Eastern colleges, the Awakening was carried on by an educated leadership which welcomed the upsurge in religious interest as a weapon against deism. In the West, however, conditions were far different. With little in the way of an organized ministry to keep theological order, the emotional elements of revivalism as proclaimed by itinerant evangelists exerted a powerful appeal to the frontier settlers. Nearly 1,000 camp meetings were held prior to 1820, each offering

Revolution to the Civil War (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), pp. 5-7, 10, 14; Nichols, American Democracy, p. 58; Josef L. Altholz, The Churches in the Nineteenth Century (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), pp. 23-24; Charles C. Cole, Jr., The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1826-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 7; Ralph Henry Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought (New York: Ronald Press, 1956), p. 34. See also Ralph H. Gabriel, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth-Century America," Church History, XIX (March, 1950), 34-47.

mated 10,000 to 20,000 people took part in the Cane Ridge, Kentucky, revival. It was in the South, however, that the revivals consistently drew the largest crowds. Gradually growing more conservative in its theology under the influence of its slave system, the South moved away from the broader, more tolerant version of Christianity that it had held during much of the eighteenth century to what Russel Nye has called "an evangelized neo-Calvinist orthodoxy."

There was little doubt that the Second Great Awakening furthered the steady advance of theology toward Arminianism and stimulated the religious life of the nation as a whole. What was not so
apparent to contemporaries was the effect that it had on American
social structure. The Awakening gave both meaning and direction to
people suffering in various degrees from the social strains encountered in a youthful country that was progressing rapidly into new
geographical, economic, and political areas. Despite the revival's

¹⁶ Cole, Social Ideas, pp. 73-74; Catharine C. Cleveland, The Great Revival in the West, 1797-1805 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), p. 34; Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), p. 33; Weisberger, They Gathered at the River, p. 50; William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religions in America (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), pp. 325-326; Sweet, American Culture, pp. 146-148; W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), pp. 78-82; Nye, Cultural Life, pp. 216-218, 232-234. See also Charles A. Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955). Gardiner Spring witnessed the revival as a student at Yale in 1803. Later, as pastor of the Brick Church in New York City, he wrote: "From the year 1800 down to the year 1825, there was an uninterrupted series of these celestial visitations Spreading over different parts of the land. During the whole of these twenty-five years there was not a month in which we could not Point to some village, some city, some seminary of learning, and Say, 'Behold what God hath wrought!'" William Speer, The Great Revival of 1800 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1872), p. 57.

divisive effects on several of the denominations, it had an important nationalizing influence which helped to create a more fully integrated society. This process was not an exclusive one, but was complementary to the nationally creative forces of economic interaction and political involvement. 17

To a great extent, the revival also laid the foundations for the various humanitarian reform movements of the pre-Civil War years. While the intense fervor of the Awakening did not continue unabated throughout the entire period, the revival set forces into motion that would long influence American life. Converts increased rapidly as the concept and purpose of the minister changed from pastor to soul-winner under the evangelical influence. Many of these new Christians soon felt the call to the ministry which, in turn, created a demand for new colleges. Between 1780 and 1830, forty new institutions of higher education were established, of which only eleven were state-operated. These same years saw the rise of the home missionary movement and its natural extension, the benevolent society. Connected with the missionary societies were evangelical periodicals founded for the dual purpose of reporting the successful work of the missionaries and defending the faith. Between 1815 and 1826 many Presbyterians and Congregationalists, aided by a smaller number of Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopalians seeking to supply the religious needs of the country, united to form five Sreat interdenominational societies. Held together by the idea of

¹⁷william G. McLoughlin, Jr., Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham (New York: Ronald Fress, 1959), P. 9; Donald G. Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis," American Quarterly, XXI (Spring, 1969), 27, 39-40.

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benevolence, an infinite concern for the souls and needs of others, as the highest Christian virtue, they worked outside regular church organizations to promote what they considered to be the fundamentals of evangelical Protestantism. 18

The benevolence and reform movements of the era had a direct and vital relationship to revivalism's emphasis on the inestimable worth of each individual soul. Since all mortal souls were equal in the sight of God, Christians were obliged to see to it that the underprivileged, the outcast, and the downtrodden had a chance to live worthy lives in this world as well as in the next. The fusion of these beliefs with a number of other concepts contributed to the development of the vibrant and compelling doctrine of the free individual, which held that mankind was moving away from the necessity of external restraint by man-made laws as it moved toward individual liberty based upon self-control. 19

The Puritans had looked upon society as an aggregate of free-standing individuals, joined in a compact for God's purposes. This trend of thought was significantly reinforced by the arrival in America of the Quakers and the various pietist sects who were even

Charles Roy Keller, The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), p. 235; Cleveland, Great Revival, pp. 156-159; William Warren Sweet, Revivalism in America (New York: Abingdon Press, 1944), pp. 148-149; Cross, Burned-Over District, p. 28; Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, pp. 31-32; Morais, Eighteenth Century, pp. 174-175; Clifford S. Griffin, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIV (December, 1957), 423-426; Clifford S. Griffin, Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960), Pp. xii, 25, 36. See also Charles I. Foster, An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), pp. 121-178.

¹⁹ Sweet, Revivalism, p. 152; Gabriel, American Democratic Thought, pp. 19, 34.

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more rigorously individualistic than the Calvinists. During the later years of settlement, the proponents of Enlightenment philosophy posited a liberation of mankind from the restraints of tradition, dogma, and authority. Enlightened man had confidence in his ability to find rational solutions to his problems and to gain knowledge and control over himself and his universe. The early inneteenth-century frontier was also an important component in the individualist formulation. The scattered population, the simplicity of society, and the relative weakness of institutions on the frontier of settlement encouraged men to be both self-reliant and individualistic. Nevertheless, without Evangelical Protestantism's belief in the freedom of the will, the doctrine of the free individual would not have had the same dynamism or appeal. 20

American individualism was not, however, a cult of solitude but a collective individualism. In both the religious and secular spheres it was participatory and cooperative, seldom evidencing strong tendencies toward withdrawal or isolation. During this period, both evangelical churchmen and laymen agreed that government and religion were similarly rooted in the individual. While admiring the virtues of simplicity, directness and common sense, neither group had much patience with dogma or tradition. Citizens of the young republic tended to think of the individual not as a wholly separate figure, but as one of many.²¹

Russel B. Nye, This Almost Chosen People: Essays in the History of American Ideas (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1966), pp. 209-211; Gabriel, American Democratic Thought, Pp. 21-22, 38.

Nye, Almost Chosen, p. 208; Nye, Cultural Life, p. 221;

Seymour Martin Lipset, The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective (New York: Basic Books, 1963),

The early years of the new century were important ones for the individual members of several Protestant denominations as well as for society as a whole. Presbyterians and Congregationalists attempted to meet the challenge of the frontier by a Plan of Union. Adopted in 1801, the Plan provided for the establishment of union congregations in communities where members of the two communions were found living side by side. These churches would then be permitted to call either a Presbyterian or a Congregational pastor. Although it was not intended that either denomination should absorb the other, the practical effect was an assimilation of Congregational churches into Presbyterianism. From the standpoint of dealing with the spiritual needs of the frontier, Congregationalists were handicapped by their loose form of church polity and by a leadership that tended to think in sectional rather than national terms. Presbyterians were greatly affected by those aspects of the Second Great Awakening that tended toward divisiveness. Troubled by the intrusion of Unitarian, Universalist, and Methodist doctrines into their own church, "Old School" Presbyterians fought for a strict adherence to the Calvinistic tenets of the Westminster

pp. 163-164. See also T. Scott Miyakawa, Protestants and Pioneers:

Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1964). Perry Miller has described the
way in which Charles Finney's evangelism fit this pattern of thought:
"By his oratory and his example, he brought the communities together
and yet placed upon individuals responsibility for their own
actions... It would be false to say that in the second of his injunctions he was advocating what modern economic theory terms 'individualism.' With that he was not concerned. He was, rather,
demonstrating a method by which all might participate in the mystery
of communion, even to self-abasement before the eyes of the fellowwhip. Yet each person, out of his own resources and courage, might
triumph because he achieved the progress to the anxious seat for
and by himself." Miller, Life of the Mind, pp. 34-35.

Confession. "New School" men, composed largely of Presbyterianized Congregationalists, were willing to accept liberalized modifications of some of Calvinism's more rigid rules. The antipathy between the two groups, further aggravated by schismatic movements
and by the effects of the Plan of Union, culminated in a series of
heresy trials. In 1837 the Plan was abrogated and the New School
Presbyterian Church seceded from the General Assembly to form a
separate body. 22

During the period 1800-1830, Baptists and Methodists increased their membership dramatically. Unimpeded by bulky ecclesiastical machinery or complicated doctrine, the Baptists tripled their numbers within thirty years. Between 1800 and 1803, 113 churches and 10,000 members were added to the church in Kentucky alone. By the 1820's the settled portion of the West was covered with a network of Baptist Associations. (As defenders of the Arminian principles of free grade and individual responsibility, Methodists were insatiable opponents of the Calvinistic tenets of limited grace and predestination.) Aided by a theology that was hospitable to the central ideas of revivalism, Methodist circuit riders spread their message into every corner of the young nation. By 1844, just sixty years after the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized, the Methodists had grown to be the largest Protestant religious body in America. Even in New England, their total membership was second only to the Congregationalists. 23

²² Sweet, American Culture, pp. 99-102, 206-209; Sweet, Revivalism, p. 142; Nye, Cultural Life, pp. 218-219, 227-230.

Nye, <u>Cultural Life</u>, p. 219; Sweet, <u>American Culture</u>, Pp. 110-111, 114-115, 119, 225; Sweet, <u>Revivalism</u>, p. 129; Cleveland, <u>Great Revival</u>, p. 131; Weisberger, <u>They Gathered at the River</u>,

The Protestant Episcopal Church was not well equipped for frontier missionary endeavor. Tied to their parishes, lacking in popularity with the masses, and fearing the emotions released by the Second Great Awakening, Episcopal ministers made little progress in frontier regions. Episcopalians frowned on lay preachers and held their educational standards for the clergy at a level which made the rapid recruitment of ministerial candidates almost impossible. Until the close of the War of 1812, the denomination was in no position to be assertive or aggressive, even if there had been a forward-looking tendency on the part of its leaders. During the post-revolutionary years it was difficult to convince Americans that the Episcopal Church was anything other than an English institution.²⁴

American Quakers faced a number of problems during the opening years of the nineteenth century. There was a growing difference between city Quakers and those who resided in rural districts.

Evangelicalism appealed to many city Quakers because it emphasized the necessity of personal religious experience, but in some quarters the evangelical doctrines were seen as a rejection of the fundamental principle of the Inner Light. By the end of the 1820's this difference of opinion, along with what was seen as a growing spirit of

pp. 42-43. See also William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. I: The Baptists, 1783-1830, A Collection of Source Materials (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), pp. 18-57 and William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. IV: The Methodists, 1783-1840, A Collection of Source Materials (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), pp. 51-70.

Pp. 104-110; See also William Wilson Manross, The Episcopal Church in the United States, 1800-1840: A Study in Church Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 37-68.

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worldliness among the city dwellers, resulted in a serious schism within the Society of Friends. 25

As Perry Miller has noted, the emergence of Unitarianism out of Calvinism was "a very gradual, almost an imperceptible, process."

Until the last years of the eighteenth century there was no clear line of demarcation between orthodox and liberal within Congregationalism. Despite a tacit acceptance of liberal doctrine by many Congregational churchmen, King's Chapel in Boston was New England's only professedly Unitarian church at the beginning of the new century. In 1803, however, William Ellery Channing was ordained and installed as minister of Boston's Federal Street Church. Within a few years he became the primary spokesman for the Unitarian movement. 26

Universalism paralleled Unitarian development in New England, but tended to draw its converts from the rural and working classes rather than from the more educated sectors of society. By 1805, the son of a Baptist farmer-preacher, Hosea Ballou, had become the recognized leader of American Universalism. Rejecting the theories of total depravity, endless punishment in hell, the Trinity, and the miracles, Ballou gave the Universalists their first consistent and complete philosophy. The Universalists were in fundamental agreement with Unitarianism, holding that God was too good to damn man,

²⁵ Sweet, American Culture, pp. 229-232. See also Robert W. Doherty, The Hicksite Separation: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Schism in Early Nineteenth Century America (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1967).

Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards to Emerson," New England Quarterly, XIII (December, 1940), 605-606, 612; Sweet, American Culture, p. 192; George M. Stephenson, The Puritan Heritage (New York: Macmillan Company, 1952), p. 115.

while the Unitarians insisted that man was too good to be damned. 27

The fact that Black Americans were seldom welcomed as equal participants in the nation's churches helps to account for the founding of independent Negro churches during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Although the great majority of Black churchgoers were Baptists or Methodists, Negroes could be found in almost all of the denominations. At least two independent congregations were established in the South before the end of the Revolutionary War, but real development did not begin until 1787. Some of the new churches employed white ministers, but the trend toward racially separate bodies was well under way by 1800. Many churches were established by Black Christians who desired to conduct religious services according to their own particular needs. The members of these churches found both spiritual comfort and an increased opportunity for social and political expression within the new institutions. Although it further separated the races, the Negro church proved to be the most dynamic social institution in the antebellum Black community. 28

Early Negro churchmen such as Richard Allen, first bishop of the nationally-organized African Methodist Episcopal Church,

²⁷ Sweet, American Culture, pp. 196-198; Nye, Cultural Life, p. 227. See also Daniel Walker Howe, The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1850-1861 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

²⁸Leon F. Litwack, North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 187-188, 195-196; Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 422, 425; John W. Cromwell, "The Earlier Churches and Preachers" in The Negro Church, ed. by W. E. Burghardt DuBois (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1903), p. 30; Ruby F. Johnston, The Development of Negro Religion (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), pp. 11-12.

preached a message of patience and moderation. God would eventually liberate the chattel, but until then, slaves had to be obedient and trust in the Almighty. Free Blacks had to refrain from manifesting any ill will toward their former masters. Nevertheless, before the end of the 1820's, Negro ministers had begun to condemn the slave institution as "the scourge of heaven, and the curse of the earth."

Despite this tendency toward a more aggressive spirit, Black churchmen failed to agree on the proper social and political role of their institutions. Some ignored the vital issues of the day and concentrated on proclaiming the hope of a less bitter existence in the next world. 29

Despite the diversity of American religious profession and practice, the centrifugal tendencies evidenced in several of the denominations, and the rude shocks made by eighteenth-century rationalism and "infidelity" on others, the young nation remained predominately a religious-minded land with an emotional, moralistic, pietistic spirit that would color its social, political, and economic beliefs for many generations. As the French traveler Alexis de Tocqueville noted in 1831, "America is still the place where the Christian religion has kept the greatest real power over men's souls."

Benjamin E. Mays, The Negro's God as Reflected in His Literature (New York: Atheneum, 1969), pp. 34-35, 42; Litwack, North of Slavery, pp. 189-190.

Nye, <u>Cultural Life</u>, p. 219; Alexis de Tocqueville, <u>Democracy in America</u>, ed. by J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner, trans. by George Lawrence (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 268.

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER II

FANNY GARRISON'S BOY

"O that my mother were living!" is often the exclamation of my heart. Alas! she cannot come to me. But why do I say "alas!" Would I, even if I could, call her away from the joys and glories of a better world, to this transient, polluted, dying state of existence? Oh, no! Rest in heaven, dear mother! I would go to thee, but not have thee come to me.... Thy dutiful, penitent, affectionate child hopes to spend with thee a blissful eternity!

> --William Lloyd Garrison June 21, 1834

Many of the more radical and individualistic aspects of the religious upheavals of the 1740's and 1750's were preserved and carried into the later years of the century by the New England Baptists, a sect to which William Lloyd Garrison's mother was converted while living with her parents in Nova Scotia during the last years of the eighteenth century. Francis Maria Lloyd's decision to abandon Anglicanism for the soul-searching rigors of the Baptists greatly angered her iron-willed father, eventually causing him to turn her out of his home. His strident opposition tended to strengthen rather than to diminish her newly acquired convictions. In 1798 Fanny married Abijah Garrison, a sea-faring man whose irregular habits she hoped to cure by exposing him to the regenerating powers of religion. Abijah was somewhat frightened by his wife's staunch righteousness and piety. Her ways were certainly not those to which

he had been accustomed. A life of church-going and prayer meetings depressed him. It was not long before their home life became a battle of wills. While Fanny worked to convert the maverick seaman to Baptist ways, Abijah turned for comfort to waterfront cronies and drink. As he grew increasingly unmanageable, Fanny clung ever closer to the promises of her religion. She was always happiest when she could forget her worldly problems and, with her mind "engaged in religion," contemplate her heavenly reward. In later years, recalling the "rude blast of misfortunes" which followed her marriage, she asserted that had it not been for an overruling Providence, she would have rapidly descended into a state of abject depression. "I was taught to see that all my dreams of happiness in this life were chimerical," she wrote, "the efforts we make here are all of them imbecility in themselves and illusive, but religion is perennial. It fortifies the mind to support trouble, elevates the affections of the heart, and its perpetuity has no end."

In the spring of 1805 the troubled couple moved from Granville, Nova Scotia to Newburyport, Massachusetts. It was here, in

John L. Thomas, The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), pp. 11-15, 19; George M. Fredrickson, ed., <u>William Lloyd Garrison</u> (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), pp. 4-5; Mary Howitt, "Memoir of William Lloyd Garrison," People's Journal, II (September 12, 1846), 142; Frances Maria Garrison to Maria Elizabeth Garrison, May 24, 1820, in Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children, I (New York: Century Co., 1885), 39. While working in Lynn, Massachusetts in 1814 Fanny wrote: "O that I could once more be restored to my friends again and have just enough to supply my real Wants--with my tender of spring around me the Company of my Dear Christian Freinds--And my mind engaged in Religion--happy thought although Visionary at present...." Frances Maria Garrison to William Lloyd Garrison, September 11, 1814, in Walter McIntosh Merrill, ed., Behold Me Once More: The Confessions of James Holley Garrison (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1954), p. 10.

early December, that William Lloyd Garrison was born. The Garrison family, which by this time also included a daughter, Caroline Eliza, and a son, James Holley, shared a small frame house with David Farnham, a captain in the coastal trade, and his wife, Martha. Both being ardent religionists, Fanny and Martha soon came to be the best of friends. Constant in their attendance at the services of the local Baptist church and occasionally hosting evening meetings in their own parlor, the two women seemed determined to have their children grow up in an atmosphere of dedication and service to the Lord.²

Anglicanism served to strengthen her belief in the correctness of her faith, then undoubtedly the trials and tribulations faced by the Newburyport Baptists also caused her to adhere more closely than ever to the Baptist communion. A veritable island in a sea of Congregational and Presbyterian churches, the Baptist Church of Christ was formed in the face of obstacles which would have discouraged less hearty religionists. When a young licentiate minister named Joshua Chase preached the first sermon to the Newburyport Baptist Society on Sunday July 22, 1804, he was not only declaring war against the forces of sin and godlessness, but was also launching an attack upon the settled habits and opinions of a community which had experienced little prior contact with people of his religious persuasion. While the first baptismal service was held in October 1804, it was not until May 2, 1805 that a fellowship of

Abijah Garrison to Robert and Mary Angus, April 4, 1805, in Garrison and Garrison, <u>Life</u>, I, 17-18; Thomas, <u>Liberator</u>, pp. 15, 18; Garrison and Garrison, <u>Life</u>, I, 20, 24, 27.

christ in Newbury and Newburyport. Initially the meetings were held in a schoolhouse on Marlborough Street and at several other locations around town, but by the fall of 1808 the Newburyport Baptists could boast of a newly constructed \$16,000 brick meeting-house. Unfortunately, a fire destroyed the church building in 1811, forcing them to meet in the city court house until they could afford to build a new house of worship the following year. 3

Fanny went to this resolute body of believers for spiritual comfort when, shortly after the birth of Maria Elizabeth in July, 1808, Abijah Garrison left Newburyport--never to return to it or to his family again. The solace which she found there encouraged her to strive harder than ever to inculcate in her children a deep reverence for the things of God. She also found that, among her Baptist friends, there were those who would willingly help her in her hour of need. The struggle for existence could indeed become a severe and bitter experience for a fatherless family of four unless they received some outside assistance. Such aid was received from

³E. Vale Smith, <u>History of Newburyport</u>: <u>From the Earliest Settlement of the Country to the Present Time</u> (Newburyport, 1854), pp. 311-313; John J. Currier, <u>History of Newburyport</u>, Mass., 1764-1905, I (Newburyport, 1906), 287-289.

Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 24. At the time, Abijah was out of work due to the harmful effects which Jefferson's Embargo had on Massachusetts' shipping. Without a job, and apparently disinclined to find one, he spent much of his time drinking rum with his cronies. In the early summer of 1808, the death of Caroline, the Garrison's eight-year-old daughter, brought further depression into the household. Even the birth of another daughter a few weeks later did little to assuage Fanny's grief. When, in a sudden fit of temper, she disrupted one of Abijah's social evenings at home by breaking the liquor bottles and forcibly ejecting his companions, her husband walked out and never returned. See Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 24-26; Thomas, Liberator, p. 19.

Martha Farnham, who assured Fanny that as long as the Farnhams had a roof over their heads, the Garrisons were welcome to share it.

In later years, a deacon of the church named Ezekiel Bartlett played a similar role, caring for William while Fanny worked as a house-keeper in Lynn. Therefore, whether under the care of Fanny, "Aunt" Martha Farnham, or Deacon Bartlett, young William, or Lloyd as his mother always called him, was assured of being raised in an atmosphere filled with reverence toward God. Although poor in material goods, young Garrison suffered from no shortage of religious instructors. 5

Fanny, however, remained the primary influence on the development of Lloyd's religious character. Almost puritanical in her abhorrence of sin and in her stern and uncompromising moral conviction, she sought to mold his religious beliefs in the image of her own. By sending him each week to the Baptist church and by leaving him in the care of devout Christians in her absence, she tried to ensure that the worldly pleasures which had been so dear to her husband would not entrap her son. Her efforts were not in vain. As companion, teacher, and protector, Fanny succeeded in leaving an indelible mark on the boy's mind.

⁵Garrison and Garrison, <u>Life</u>, I, 26-27; Howitt, "Memoir," p. 142.

Thomas, Liberator, pp. 20-21; Archibald H. Grimké, "Biographical Oration," Alexander's Magazine, I (January, 1906), 17.

John Thomas has noted that one of Garrison's earliest memories was that of his mother bent in prayer with her "Dear Christian Friends" in the parlor. In 1834, Garrison wrote: "I had a mother once, who cared for me with such a passionate regard, who loved me so intensely, that no language can describe the yearnings of her soul—no instrument measure the circumference of her maternal spirit.... Her mind was of the first order—clear, vigorous, creative, and lustrous, and sanctified by an ever-glowing piety. How often did she watch over me—weep over me—and pray over me! (I hope, not in vain.) She

As Lloyd grew older he joined the choir of the Baptist church and occasionally acted as chorister. Blessed with a rich voice, he enjoyed vocal music and even enrolled in a singing school to improve upon his natural talent. In later life, many of the hymns which he sang were associated in his memory with the circumstances under which he first learned them or with the fact that they were favorites of his mother. As an adult, he continued to sing these songs of his youth each Sunday morning. Accompanying himself on the piano, he would make the strains of the old hymns ring throughout the house--rousing those members of the family who were still lingering in their beds.

During his youthful years, Lloyd was rather indifferently exposed to formal education. Deacon Bartlett, who sawed wood, sharpened saws, made lasts, and even sold apples from a little stand by his front door in order to eke out a meager living,

has been dead almost eleven years; but my grief at her loss is as fresh and poignant now, as it was at that period." Oliver Johnson has written that Lloyd inherited his mother's intuitive reverence for God, her fine moral and spiritual sensitivity, and her abhorrence of oppression in all of its forms. With brother James, Fanny had much less success. Thomas, Liberator, p. 21; Garrison to Helen E. Benson, June 21, 1834 in Walter M. Merrill, ed., The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, I (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Fress, 1971), 368-369; Oliver Johnson, William Lloyd Garrison and His Times (Boston: B. B. Russell & Co., 1880), p. 24. See also Merrill, Behold Me Once More.

⁷Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 29-30; Fanny Garrison Villard, William Lloyd Garrison on Non-Resistance (New York: National Press Printing Co., Inc., 1924), pp. 8-9. In 1879, Garrison's son, Francis, wrote: "There were many of the old hymns which Father enjoyed for their grand movement, as well as for the associations which they always awakened of his early days, when his mother sang them, but he would frequently say apologetically as he commenced to sing them, 'Of course I don't accept the theology of the words, but we won't mind that!'" Francis Jackson Garrison to Elizabeth Pease Nichol, June 15, 1879, Houghton Library, Harvard University. See also Garrison and Garrison, Life, IV, 313.

attempted to provide young Garrison with a grammar school education, but, after a three month trial, found that he needed Lloyd's assistance in helping to ease the family's burden of poverty. Following the War of 1812, Fanny attempted to place Lloyd in a suitable trade, but the youngster did not seem to be cut out for cabinetmaking, shoemaking, or clerking. Not until 1818, when he was apprenticed to Ephraim W. Allen, editor of the Newburyport Herald, did he find a job which held his interest. Prior to this time, the bulk of his reading material had consisted of the sermons and religious tracts which had been available to him at Bartlett's. While boarding with the Allen family, he broadened the scope of his experience by reading constantly and indiscriminately. In addition to contemporary political tracts, he read the works of Shakespeare, Pope, and Byron as well as the Waverly novels and the poetry of Mrs. Felicia

During his seven year apprenticeship at the <u>Herald</u>, Lloyd found himself surrounded by several upright Christian men. Their example encouraged him to remain strong in the faith. Allen himself was a regular churchgoer, but did not become attached to any particular denomination until he joined the Second Congregational Church in 1832. More closely tied to the Church was Garrison's closest friend, William Gross Crocker, an ardent Baptist and later a missionary to Liberia. The man most highly esteemed by the young apprentice however, was Tobias Miller. Working at the <u>Herald</u> to earn his tuition at Andover Seminary, Miller already exhibited many of the traits which would later make him a successful city

^{8 &}lt;u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 28, 36, 42; Thomas, <u>Liberator</u>, pp. 25, 27.

missionary in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. According to Garrison, he had "wonderful self-command, patience, cheerfulness, urbanity, and philosophic composure, far beyond his years." In his daily walk and conversation he was a pattern of uprightness. As true to his highest convictions of duty "as the needle to the pole," no one was ever "more inflexible in pursuit of the right" and yet "more yielding in the matter of accommodation where no principle was involved" than Toby Miller. Late in life, the former apprentice noted that Miller's "beautiful spirit and fine example had a great influence upon my mind; and I rather feel grateful to him and shall ever cherish his memory with deep feeling."

by associating with companions of such high moral character, Lloyd was merely heeding the advice which filled the letters sent to him by his mother. On In a letter of August, 1817, she wrote, "Your good behavior will more than compensate for all my trouble; only let me hear that you are steady and go not in the way of bad company, and my heart will be lifted up to God for you, that you may be kept from the snares and temptation of this evil world."

⁹Smith, History of Newburyport, p. 260; Speech at Boston, October 14, 1878, in Daily Evening Traveller, October 15, 1878; Thomas, Liberator, p. 28; Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 41, 55; Garrison to Frank W. Miller, April 30, 1870 in Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 41. Russel Nye has written that Miller and Garrison engaged in "long, involved theological discussions" as they worked in Allen's shop. At age 16 Garrison seriously considered giving his life to missionary work. Russel B. Nye, William Lloyd Garrison and the Humanitarian Reformers (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), p. 10.

¹⁰ In their biography, the Garrison brothers wrote of Fanny: "She attended church three times on Sunday, although she had to walk nearly two miles each time; and before the end of her first year in Baltimore she had established a women's prayer-meeting, which met every Saturday afternoon, and had the satisfaction of seeing it well attended." Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 32.

Fanny had always been deeply concerned for her son's spiritual welfare, constantly urging him toward higher realms of spiritual perfection. As early as the summer of 1814 she had warned him. "Don't go to the water for should you be drowned your soul must go to god to be judged. O my dear child should you be called away unprepared how dredful would be the thought ... and don't let my ears here that Loyd has done wrong for god sees all your way and knows all your thoughts." Admonitions of this character continued to flow from Fanny's pen as long as she lived. "O that I may meet you at the right of the Father receiving that blessed sentence which shall be pronoun'd on all the redeem'd of the Lord...," she wrote in February, 1821. "Remember your Creator in the days of your Youth for there is a blessed promise to them that seek the Lord when they are young." In April she urged Lloyd to "seek that friend that sticketh closer than a brother...." If he would only look to Jesus his young soul would enjoy "that grace and faith which works by love and [purifies] the heart."11

Nothing short of the news that he had experienced the joys of eternal salvation seemed to be able to satisfy her. "[T]ell me in your next [letter] whether your mind has ever been seriously impress'd about the Salvation of your immortal soul...," she wrote, "Should I hear that news--and you realize it in your own soul--it would soothe my dying pillow...." Not even the success which Lloyd had in penning articles for the Herald changed the tone of his

ll Frances Maria Garrison to William Lloyd Garrison, August 29, 1817, in Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 33; Frances Maria Garrison to William Lloyd Garrison, July 18, 1814, February 3, 1821, April 7, 1821, November 28, 1821, Garrison Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

mother's letters. When he told her that by engaging in this sort of literary endeavor his leisure time had been usefully and wisely employed, she merely replied that, had he been searching the Scriptures and praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead his mind into "the path of holiness," his time would have been even more wisely spent—and his "advance to the heavenly world more rapid." 12

To all outward appearances, Lloyd was a dutiful follower of his mother's advice. By teaching him to believe that virtue was its own reward and that piety was the final test of character, Fanny had bequeathed to her son a deep concern with both spiritual and physical purity. Her constant urgings to "shun every appearance of evil" were strictly obeyed. By the time that he completed his apprenticeship in December 1825, he was known in Newburyport as a steady, responsible young man, a devout Baptist, and a conservative in manners, dress, and politics. Lloyd attended worship services regularly and sang in the choir. While he never became a member of the little Baptist church, he delighted in weighty sermons, studied the Bible, and pondered the doctrine of plenary inspiration. Al-

¹² Frances Maria Garrison to William Lloyd Garrison, December 30, 1822, Garrison Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College; Frances Maria Garrison to William Lloyd Garrison, June 3, 1823, in Walter M. Merrill, "Prologue to Reform--Garrison's Early Career," Essex Institute Historical Collections, XCII (April, 1956), 151-158; Garrison to Frances Maria Garrison, May 26, 1823, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. In February, 1821 Garrison's sister, Maria, also urged him to seek the Lord. "O my dear brother." she wrote, "be a good boy go to Jesus he will strengthen you go to him with a poor and contrite heart and as the publican did say god be merciful to me a sinner and he will not despise you. He says in his prescious word (the bible) come unto me all that are heavy laden and I will give you rest then go to the foot of the cross and cry Lord save or I perish I warn I intreat you to go and you never will repent of it." Maria Elizabeth Garrison to William Lloyd Garrison, February 3, 1821, Garrison Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

the only acceptable form of baptism. A strict Sabbatarian, Garrison also believed that the clerical order and the organized church were divinely instituted. Having become familiar with the Bible at an early age, he could repeat scores of scripture verses from memory. 13

One of Garrison's anonymous pieces for the Herald was a religiously symbolic story about a shipwreck which one historian has referred to as a "thinly disguised drama of salvation." After he left Allen's paper to take over the operation of friend Isaac Knapp's Essex Courant, which he renamed The Free Press, Garrison continued to evidence his piety in print. Following the death of Thomas Jefferson in July, 1826, the young editor wrote that, although he had always disapproved of the ex-President's political ideas, he admired his great talents. Now that Jefferson was dead, Garrison suggested that Americans remember his virtues and forget his faults. As for himself, the ardent Federalist found it increasingly difficult to forget the Virginian's faults when paper after paper continued

¹³Frances Maria Garrison to William Lloyd Garrison, March 24, 1823, in Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 49; Nye, Humanitarian Reformers, p. 11; Thomas, Liberator, pp. 28-29; Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 56; Liberator, November 9, 1849. Garrison never became a church member and was never baptized. He did, however, feel that he was following "the path of holiness." In 1841 he declared: "I believe in an indwelling Christ, and in his righteousness alone; ... I glory in nothing here below, save in Christ and him crucified; ... I profess to have passed from death unto life, and know by happy experience that there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Garrison to Elizabeth Pease, March 1, 1841, in Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children, III (New York: Century Co., 1889), 3. See also Silvan S. Tomkins, "The Psychology of Commitment: The Constructive Role of Violence and Suffering for the Individual and for His Society" in The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists, ed. by Martin Duberman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 281; Thomas, Liberator, pp. 229, 232; Liberator, August 26, 1842.

to eulogize him. He was especially annoyed by Allen's eulogy in the Herald. Condemning it as rhapsodical, impious, and offensive, Garrison could not but wonder how a paper which twenty years ago had viewed the leader of the Democratic-Republicans as "the Great Lama of Infidelity--as the giant who would carry away the gates of christianity, and open the floodgates of vice" could so prostitute itself as to publish a glowing tribute to the man. To Garrison's mind, Jefferson's religious sentiments were "notorious." They were indefinite, unsound, and "inculcated a loose morality." 14

When the <u>Free Press</u> failed in September, 1826, Garrison journeyed to Boston. There, after a period of adjustment to life in the metropolis, he found inexpensive lodgings with Rev. William Collier, a Baptist city missionary who published a struggling temperance journal called the <u>National Philanthropist</u>. Collier's Federal Street boardinghouse served as a haven for missionaries, visiting clergymen, itinerant evangelists, and Christian reformers of all types. His paper extolled the virtues of Bible societies, home missions, and Sabbath observance while denouncing the evils of drink, gambling, prostitution, and theatergoing. Shortly after arriving at Collier's, Garrison was hired to work as a typesetter on the paper. On January 4, 1828 he was entrusted with the editorship of the <u>Philanthropist</u>. 15

¹⁴ Newburyport Herald, May 31, 1822; Thomas, Liberator, pp. 34-35; Walter M. Merrill, Against Wind and Tide: A Biography of Wm. Lloyd Garrison (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 16; Newburyport Free Press, July 20, 1826. In the columns of the Free Press Garrison also denounced the sins of Sabbath-breaking, free thought, dueling, prostitution, theater-going, and tippling. Thomas, Liberator, p. 49.

¹⁵ Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 79-80; Thomas, Liberator, p. 61.

Under his direction the tipplers of the world were denounced with a vengeance. To dramatize the dangers of alcohol, Garrison reprinted lurid tales of spontaneous combustion, stories of starving families victimized by the drunkard's curse, and reams of temperance verse. He filled the columns of his paper with as many tragic examples of the evils of liquor as he could find. He told about the woman who had broken her husband's rum jug only to be brutally beaten with the jagged pieces. He recounted the tale of the drunkard who was seen late at night stumbling down a dark country road and whose body was found several days later at the foot of a cliff. He gave an account of a brandy-drinking contest which ended with the senseless meandering through the night of two of the participants and the death of the third. In addition to printing items of this type, Garrison's paper carried articles urging the dismissal of drinkers from their jobs, the prohibition of liquor on ships, and the abolition of certain social customs -- such as the offering of the social glass to visitors and the treating of soldiers to a round of drinks. 16

Liquor was not the only thing proscribed in the pages of the National Philanthropist. The young editor also launched attacks on immorality, war, tobacco, Sabbath mail deliveries, lotteries, and "religious infidelity." He condemned the "indelicate" offerings of Mrs. Knight at the Federal Street Theater as well as the "bill of licentiousness" offered the public by an Italian dance troupe at

¹⁶ Merrill, Wind and Tide, p. 19; Thomas, Liberator, p. 67. In 1846, Mary Howitt wrote that it was while he was at the Philanthropist, "a paper devoted to the subject of total abstinence, and the first paper in the world which was the advocate of this cause," that Garrison "became himself, from principle, a tee-totaller." Howitt, "Memoir," p. 145.

the Tremont. He denounced the immorality shown so graphically in the lives and works of Tom Moore and Lord Byron. The appalling sight of "profligate coxcombs and dissipated dandies" enjoying a Sunday stroll moved him to demand a more rigid enforcement of the blue laws. In the lumbering Sunday mail coaches he could see only "skepticism and depravity" stalking the land. With such numerous and widespread evils to eradicate, he could not help wondering how some Christians could spend their time engaged in doctrinal disputes "while infidelity is seeking to subvert the purity of our institutions and the permanency of our liberties." 17

While in Boston, Garrison's personal behavior was as upright as that which he urged upon others. Although he occasionally attended worship services at Rev. Howard Malcom's Federal Street Baptist Church, his favorite preacher was Lyman Beecher. Attracted to Hanover Street Church in part because of its pastor's position on the temperance question, but still more because of Beecher's great oratorical powers, Garrison enjoyed listening to the evangelical reformer fulminate against Catholics, Unitarians, and assorted theological liberals. Perhaps becoming curious to hear some of the preaching which Beecher so stridently condemned, the young editor also went to hear William Ellery Channing and John Pierpont speak. As might be expected, he came away with a feeling of sadness that the two Unitarian divines were so unsound in their theological

¹⁷ Nye, Humanitarian Reformers, p. 13; Thomas, Liberator, p. 68; Merrill, Wind and Tide, pp. 20-21. In April, 1828 Garrison wrote: "It is impossible to estimate the depravity and wickedness of those who, at the present day, reject the gospel of Jesus Christ, when the proofs of its divine origin have been accumulating for eighteen centuries till the mass of evidence exceeds computation..."

National Philanthropist, April 18, 1828; Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 84.

views and had wandered so far from the true faith. 18

In 1829 Garrison wrote an article on the differences between Beecher and Channing. After a brief examination of their contrasting literary styles, he concluded that "the mind of Channing is uncommonly fertile and chaste, but lacks robustness and vigor, the mind of Beecher is not less creative, and its profundity more than counterbalances the absence of refinement." As a divine, neither Channing, nor any other preacher could equal Lyman Beecher. His "overwhelming superiority" could not be attributed to an eloquent voice or a commanding physical presence, but was the result of his ability to speak the truth--truth "delivered in childlike simplicity and affection." His style of reasoning was "lucid almost beyond example." In his exposition of the doctrines of the Holy Bible there was nothing that was "dark, or doubtful, or repulsive." The decrees of God, His justice and mercy, and the "reasonableness" of His requirements were all explained in a manner that was both "harmonious and rational." Beecher gave such a "blaze of evidence" in support of his assertions that the plan of redemption, though "stupendous as heaven," was easily "understood and appreciated" by all of his listeners. 19

By the time that the young editor from Newburyport moved from Boston to Bennington, Vermont in the late summer of 1828, he had added an antislavery plank to his personal reform platform.

While at the Philanthropist he had been converted to gradual abolitionism by the Quaker editor of the Genius of Universal Emancipation,

¹⁸ Johnson, Garrison and His Times, p. 44; Nye, Humanitarian Reformers, p. 13; Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 78.

¹⁹ Journal of the Times, January 30, 1829.

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Benjamin Lundy. He had also served on a committee to gather signatures for antislavery petitions to Congress and had even criticized Reverend Malcom for claiming that slavery was too delicate a subject to be meddled with by the people of the North. In the first issue of the Bennington <u>Journal of the Times</u> Garrison wrote that both he and his new paper were devoted to the suppression of intemperance and its associated vices, the "perpetuity of national peace," and the "gradual emancipation of every slave in the republic." Subsequent issues of his paper showed that the twenty-three-year-old editor's devotion to reform was indeed growing stronger even while he expanded his interest to encompass new areas of concern. 20

Two weeks after his arrival in Bennington, Garrison printed a notice of a meeting to be held for the purpose of preparing a petition to Congress demanding the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. Without waiting for the approval of the meeting, he composed a petition and mailed it to every postmaster in the state, requesting that the documents be returned with as many signatures as possible before the middle of December. Late in January, 1829, Garrison's petitions, bearing the names of some 2,300

Garrison to editor of the Boston Courier, August 12, 1828 in Merrill, Letters, I, 66-68; Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 97-98; Journal of the Times, October 3, 1828. In 1851 Garrison noted: "My attention was first called to the subject of slavery in the year 1827. So completely was the slave population lost sight of here at the North, that, in the days of my boyhood, I scarcely knew that a slave was to be found on the American soil. As it respects the free colored population, I was educated in the spirit of prejudice against them as deeply, perhaps, as any other child in the Commonwealth. I well recollect how strongly repugnant to my feelings was their very presence." Speech at Boston, January 24, 1851, in Liberator, January 31, 1851. For a more extensive discussion of Garrison's meeting with Benjamin Lundy and the influence which the quaker editor had on him see Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 87-95; Thomas, Liberator, pp. 74-83.

Vermont residents and praying that Congress would remove the cancer of slavery from "the vitals of the republic," were placed before the House Committee for the District of Columbia. 21

About this same time. Garrison launched a violent attack against three New England congressmen, James W. Ripley of Maine, Jonathan Harvey of New Hampshire, and Rollin C. Mallary of Vermont for opposing a resolution which instructed the Committee for the District of Columbia to consider the feasibility of abolishing the slave trade in the nation's capital. "Oh shame! Where is thy blush?" he asked. Who were these sanctimonious hypocrites who had the audacity to cast their votes in such a manner? Who were these "poltroons," these "dough faces" who dared quote the Holy Scriptures to prove that it was permissible to destroy the souls of their fellow men? Ripley and Mallary protested against his abusive language, but to no avail. The young editor merely sneered at their contention that Northern agitation of the slavery question would destroy Southern good will. "Are we -- in the Fifty Third Year of the Independence of the United States -- are we to gravely discuss the question, whether all men are born free and equal, as if it were a new doctrine?" he asked. "Are we to learn, whether the colored of of our race are really brutes or human beings?"22

Despite the new emphasis which he placed on antislavery,
Garrison was not about to forget the other issues which had so

²¹Thomas, <u>Liberator</u>, p. 87.

²² Ibid., pp. 87-88; Journal of the Times, January 30,1829, February 20, 1829. John Thomas has noted that Garrison chose the phrase "colored of our race" to show that his case for universal brotherhood rested on the belief in a single creation. God had created all men at the same moment, and they were all equally His children. Thomas, Liberator, p. 88.

concerned him in earlier years. In the columns of the Journal, he lashed out against Sunday mail delivery, the doctrine of universal salvation, intemperance, and war. He became especially critical of Unitarian doctrine -- on one occation referring to a discourse by John Pierpont as containing "novel, illogical, subtle, and inconclusive arguments." Included among the projects which he promoted, thinking that they would help the people of Bennington steel themselves against such evils, were a lyceum, a temperance hall, a new heating plant for the church, and bigger and better Sunday Schools. As long as sin continued to buffet and tempt the souls of men, he would refuse to remain a passive spectator of the "contest between right and wrong--virtue and vice--truth and error." As he wrote in a December, 1828 editorial, "While drunkenness and intemperance abound, I will try to reclaim the dissolute, and to annihilate the progress of vice. While profanity, and sabbath-breaking, and crime, wound my ear and affect my sight, I will reprove, admonish, and condemn.... While a soul remains unenlightened, uneducated, and without 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God, '... I will contribute my little influence to the diffusion of universal knowledge."23

While in Bennington, Garrison continued to live an upright Christian life. On Sundays he sat under the preaching of Rev.

Daniel A. Clark of the First Church. He made his home at Deacon

Journal of the Times, October 31, 1828, December 26, 1823, January 30, 1829; Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 114; Thomas, Liberator, pp. 85-86. After the pastor of Boston's Hollis Street Church complained that Garrison's references to his speech had been unjust, the young editor not only printed Pierpont's letter, but also gave copious extracts from the address in question. Garrison declared that he enthusiastically admired everything in Pierpont except his theology. Journal of the Times, November 14, 1828. See also Garrison to Jacob Horton, June 27, 1829, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

Erwin Safford's boardinghouse with pupils who were attending the Bennington English and Classical Seminary. His friends continued to be drawn from the ranks of the regenerate—chief among them being James Ballard, principal of the seminary. It was not long, however, before an older acquaintance, Benjamin Lundy, appeared at the editor's doorstep and convinced him that he could best serve both God and suffering man as the resident editor of the Genius. On March 29, 1829 the editor of the Journal published his valedictory. In it he stated that he had been invited to "occupy a broader field, and to engage in a higher enterprise." The field would embrace the entire country and the enterprise would be in behalf of the slave population. He declared that if he could be the "humble instrument" of breaking at least one chain and thereby restoring a single captive to liberty, he would feel that he had been amply repaid for his labors. 24

man who had merged his own religious paper, the <u>Investigator</u>, with the <u>National Philanthropist</u>. The two men discussed the merits of various antislavery projects and called upon a number of prominent ministers in an attempt to enlist their support for the cause of emancipation. They accomplished little of lasting value, but their activities did help win Garrison an invitation from the Congregational Societies of the city to deliver the annual Fourth of July address in Park Street Church. The invitation provided him with an opportunity to present his case against slavery to the most powerful

Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 116-117, 121-122; T. D. Seymour Bassett, ed., "A Letter by William Lloyd Garrison, Written from Bennington, Vermont, on March 30, 1829," Vermont History, XXXVII (Autumn, 1969), 258; Journal of the Times, March 27, 1829.

and influential elements in Boston society. 25

In his lengthy speech, Garrison spoke of the ills which beset the nation on the fifty-third anniversary of its birth. In his estimation, the prevalence of infidelity, the ravages of intemperance, the desecration of the Sabbath, the profligacy of the press, and the corruption of party politics all constituted grave threats to the continued existence of the republic. Nevertheless, the greatest evil of all was slavery, an institution which he likened to "a gangrene preying upon our vitals -- an earthquake rumbling under our feet, a mine accumulating materials for a national catastrophe." The system of chattel labor was a curse that was debasing in its effect, cruel in its operation, and "fatal in its continuance." The physical conditions under which the bondsmen existed in the southern states was deplorable. Moreover, it seemed to Garrison that the condition of the slaves "in a religious point of view" entitled them to a "higher consideration" than they had been receiving from the nation's "Christians and Philanthropists." In fifty-three years of independence. American Christians had done comparatively little for the Negro. The black men in bondage were seldom remembered by the churches of the land. From one end of the country to the other, charitable societies formed "golden links of benevolence" and scattered their contributions "like rain-drops over a parched heath," but brought no sustenance to the perishing slave. It could truly be said that the "blood of souls" was upon the garments of the American Church, yet it refused to take notice of the stain.

What could be done to remedy this long-standing contradiction

²⁵ Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 124; Nye, <u>Humanitarian</u> Reformers, p. 23.

between American profession and practice? Garrison called upon the nation's churches to place themselves in the vanguard of the great antislavery enterprise. If the power of prayer was omnipotent, let the churches pour out their supplications to heaven in behalf of the slave, he said. If the human soul was immortal and priceless, let the churchmen combine their energies to rescue the suffering chattel and save his soul from "remediless woe." If the churches were interested in works of benevolence, let antislavery charity-boxes stand uppermost among those for missionary, tract, and educational purposes. If Christians were ashamed of being so long asleep to the cause of humanity, let them shake off their slumbers and "arm for the holy contest." 26

Those who took the time to analyze Garrison's address closely could see the direction in which his mind was moving. His emphasis was now clearly on the sin of slavery rather than on the assorted vices with which he had been concerned at the Philanthropist. Moreover, by the time that he left Boston to join Lundy in Baltimore, he had decided that neither colonization nor gradual emancipation was the correct way to deal with the chattel system. The doctrine of immediate emancipation, borrowed from the British

Speech at Boston, July 4, 1829, in William Lloyd Garrison, Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison (Boston: R. F. Wallcut, 1852), pp. 52-53, 60; Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 127-137. During a Fourth of July celebration at Newbury-port in 1828, Garrison read a "spirited ode" which spoke of his belief in a God who was always to be found on the side of liberty and justice. It read in part:

And now, while our cannon ring out to the skies Their eloquent peals in the accents of thunder, In clouds let the incense of gratitude rise To Him who alone burst our shackles asunder;

National Philanthropist, July 11, 1828; Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 96-97.

abolitionists, now seemed to be the only key that would free the slave from his dank prison. 27

Garrison made his priorities clear in a salutatory address which appeared in the Genius in early September, 1829. Ten months ago, the new managing editor noted, he had vowed to direct his energies toward the overthrow of three great national evils—slavery, intemperance, and war. His resolution was unchanged. In concentrating his efforts upon the extinction of slavery, he did not mean to lose sight of the other two abominations. Nevertheless, honesty forced him to admit that in the future they would, of necessity, receive less of his "attention and aid" than slavery. After stating his new views on colonization and immediate emancipation, he concluded by promising to "give no quarter to the open advocates of slavery, nor easily excuse those pseudo-philanthropists who find an apology for its continuance in the condition of the slaves." 28

²⁷For a discussion of what Garrison meant by "immediate emancipation" see Thomas, <u>Liberator</u>, pp. 103-105.

²⁸ Genius of Universal Emancipation, September 2, 1829; Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 142-144. Responding to a somewhat critical article which appeared in the Newburyport Herald of May 25, 1830, Garrison wrote: "My 'stubbornness' and 'dogmaticalness' consist in ardently cherishing, and fearlessly avowing, the following notions: -- That 'all men are born equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights' -- consequently, that a slave-holder or slave-abettor is neither a true patriot, a good citizen, nor an honest man, in all his transactions and relations, and that slavery is a reproach and a curse upon our nation: -- That intemperance is a filthy habit and an awful scourge, wholly produced by the moderate, occasional and fashionable use of alcoholic liquors -- consequently, that it is sinful to distil, to import, to sell, to drink, or to offer such liquors to our friends or laborers, and that entire abstinence is the duty of every individual: -- That war is fruitful in crime, misery, revenge, murder, and every thing abominable and bloody -- and, whether offensive or defensive, is contrary to the precepts and example of Jesus Christ, and to the heavenly spirit of the gospel--consequently, that no [professor] of christianity should march to the battle-field, or murder any of his brethren for the

That Garrison was a man of his word was evident from the vehement manner in which he blasted the pro-slavery forces in subsequent issues of the paper. The more that he saw of the infamous institution -- and there were many evidences of it on the streets of Baltimore -- the more heated his invective grew. His abusive attacks on the slave traders operating in the Baltimore--Washington area brought angry letters and threats of reprisal. His abusive editorials and immediatist doctrines cost the struggling journal much good will and many subscriptions. Nevertheless, he refused to be silenced. Until his career at the Genius was ended by his 49 day imprisonment for libeling Francis Todd, a Newburyport shipowner, Garrison continued to spare neither North nor South in his censures. Not even the Church and clergy escaped criticism. American religion, he said, continued to complacently tolerate "open adultery, oppression, robbery, and murder." Seldom, if ever, lifting up "a warning voice, or note of remonstrance" against slavery, it restrained no human lust, but merely engendered selfishness and cruelty. The religion of America had exchanged its "garments of humiliation" for the "splended vestments of pride." It was a creed which had neither courage, faithfulness, or self-denial -- deeming it better to heed the words of men than the pronouncements of God. Garrison predicted that if the moral laxity of the nation's churches was allowed to retain its stranglehold on the impulse toward reform, the present generation would have a "solemn account to give in the

glory of his country. These are the first fruits of my bigotry, fanaticism, rashness, and folly." Garrison to editor of Newburyport Herald, June 1, 1830, in Merrill, Letters, I, 100.

great and terrible day of judgment."29

After his release from jail on June 5, 1830, the young reformer continued to lament the lack of interest which America's Christians had shown in the Negro's plight. He believed that as long as the Church refused to act on the subject, all plans for the emancipation of those in bondage would prove to be ineffectual. It was necessary that the American Church be thoroughly purified "as by fire" so that it could lend its wholehearted support to the antislavery cause. One way of effecting such a purification was to exclude slaveholders from the Christian communion. Garrison noted that, while it seemed almost morally impossible for a man to be a slaveholder and "a follower of the Lamb" at the same time, it was a fact that many professed Christians did hold property in slaves. These men styled themselves as ambassodors of Christ and professed to love their neighbors as themselves. In actuality they spent their days dealing in "bones, and sinews, and souls" -- whipping and branding the Negroes simply because they were of a different skin color and because the laws of the State and the corrupt usages of society justified such conduct.

As for himself, Garrison would hold no fellowship with

Reformers, p. 27; Genius of Universal Emancipation, October 23, 1829; Speech at Boston, October 14, 1878 in Daily Evening Traveller, October 15, 1878. See also Genius of Universal Emancipation, September 16, 1829, October 16, 1829, November 27, 1829. While at the Genius, Garrison also denounced Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson for their "infidelity," lamented the fact that the Marquis de Lafayette was given a fête on the Sabbath, and expressed his dislike of Lydia Maria Child's "religious notions." At the age of 23 he wrote: "It is impossible to estimate the depravity and wickedness of those who at the present day reject the gospel of Jesus Christ." See Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 157; Genius of Universal Emancipation, October 30, 1829, February 5, 1830, February 12, 1830; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Garrison and Whittier," Independent, LIX (December 7, 1905), 1312-1313.

slaveholders. He would not make a truce with them for even a single hour. "I blush for them as country men," he wrote, "I know that they are not christians; and the higher they raise their professions of patriotism or piety, the stronger is my detestation of their hypocrisy." Such men were dishonest and cruel. God, the angels, the devils, and indeed the entire universe knew that they were "without excuse." The time would come when the forces of slavery would be crushed—for "the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken it." All oppression would then cease and every man would be free from fear. Even if the men of the present generation did not live to see that glorious day, they could still hasten its arrival by their prayers, their toil, and their sacrifice in the cause of emancipation. By doing so they would be abundantly rewarded. The "King of Heaven" would bestow that "noblest of panegyrics" upon them—"well done, good and faithful servants!"

It did not take long for Garrison to discover that he could not continue to forward such inflamatory sentiments and still expect the nation's churchmen to rally to his side in the fight against slavery. In August, 1830 he announced that he intended to found a new journal devoted to "the abolition of slavery, and the moral and intellectual elevation of our colored population." After mailing copies of his prospectus to antislavery sympathizers in various cities, he set out upon a speaking tour to raise funds for the new project. In September, after lecturing in Philadelphia,

New York, Hartford and other Northeastern cities, Garrison proceeded to Newburyport. Resolved that his native town should be the first

Garrison to George Shepard, September 13, 1830, in Merrill, Letters, I, 107-109. See also Matthew 25:14-30.

place in Massachusetts to hear his lectures on slavery, he contacted Dr. Daniel Dana, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. Dana agreed to let the young reformer speak in his meetinghouse, but when the audience gathered for the first lecture they found the doors of the sanctuary locked. Dana had been overruled by the church trustees. It seemed that no one who had been convicted of criminal libel against such a respectable and influential citizen as Francis Todd could expect to be greeted with open arms by those entrusted with preserving the morals and good name of the community. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Luther F. Dimmick, pastor of the Second Congregational Church promised Garrison the use of his meetinghouse only to find himself as helpless in the hands of his trustees as Dana had been. After one lecture, Garrison found the church doors barred against him. Disappointed and irritated by the reception which he had received from the churchmen, he wrote the editor of the Herald that, if he had visited Newburyport to plead the cause of twenty enslaved white men. "every hall and every meetinghouse would have been thrown open, and the fervor of my discourses anticipated and exceeded by my fellow townsmen." The fact was, however, that he had returned to the town of his birth to acquaint its citizens with the plight of some two million Negroes who were "groaning in bondage." This problem, it seemed, excited "no interest nor pity" in the hearts of the Newburyport people. However unfortunate the situation, Garrison claimed to "entertain no ill-will" against those who had exerted their influence, "with a malignity and success which are discreditable to themselves and the place," to silence him.

They would answer to God and to posterity for their conduct. 31

Immediately upon his return to Boston in the fall of 1830, Garrison paid a visit to Lyman Beecher. Expecting to find a supporter for his newspaper project, he instead found that the minister was indifferent to his appeal. Beecher was alarmed by the young reformer's demand for immediate and unconditional emancipation. "Your zeal," he said, "is commendable, but you are misguided. If you will give up your fanatical notions and be guided by us [the clergy], we will make you the Wilberforce of America." Having been confident of winning Beecher's sympathy and support, Garrison was disappointed and saddened by the minister's remarks. He had listened to Beecher's preaching with much profit and delight and had longed to hear his eloquent voice pleading the cause of the imbruted slave. Garrison could not understand how Beecher or any other Christian minister could advocate gradualism as the solution to the problem of slavery-it was as if they favored telling the drunkard, the thief, and the wife beater that they must refrain from these crimes gradually and aim at some indefinite, far-off reformation of character. 32

After experiencing this rebuff to his immediatism, Garrison sought the cooperation of Jeremiah Evarts, Secretary of the Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, but received the same response-as did letters to William Ellery Channing, Justin Edwards, Daniel Webster, and Jeremiah Mason. Later in the year, an old acquaintance

Garrison and Garrison, <u>Life</u>, I, 199-202, 207-209; Garrison to editor Newburyport <u>Herald</u>, September 30, 1830, in Merrill, <u>Letters</u>, I, 111.

³² Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 215; Johnson, Garrison and His Times, pp. 44-45; Truman Nelson, ed., Documents of Upheaval: Selections from William Lloyd Garrison's The Liberator, 1831-1865 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), pp. xii-xiii.

in the temperance cause, Deacon Moses Grant, even refused to grant him enough credit to obtain the ream or two of paper which he needed to produce a specimen number of his journal. Grant did not take this course of action out of any fear that Garrison would fail to make good his debts, but did so because he was opposed to the issuance of an antislavery paper of the type proposed. 33

swered, not by the members of Boston's orthodox religious establishment, but by Abner Kneeland and his First Society of Free Enquirers. After an unfruitful search for a suitable place in which to hold his lectures, Garrison had been forced to place an advertisement in the Boston Courier seeking "a Hall or Meetinghouse... in which to vindicate the rights of TWO MILLIONS of American citizens who are now groaning in servile chains in this boasted land of liberty." In response to his plea, Kneeland, a former Universalist minister turned rationalist and pantheist, offered him the use of the Society's rooms in Julien Hall. Reluctantly, the young Baptist reformer accepted this kind offer from a man whose "infidelic" views he had so uncharitably denounced in the pages of the National Philanthropist.

May, Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1869), pp. 20, 30.

Merrill, Wind and Tide, pp. 40-41; Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 211. In his first lecture, Garrison acknowledged his indebtedness to the First Society of Free Enquirers and spoke of the shame which he felt because the churches of Boston had allowed themselves to be surpassed in charity and toleration. He explained that he was very far from sympathizing with the Society's views on religion and asserted that slavery could be abolished only through the power of the Christian religion. Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 212.

Among those in attendance at Garrison's lecture on October 15 were Samuel Joseph May, a Unitarian minister from Brooklyn, Connecticut; his cousin, Samuel E. Sewall, a fellow Unitarian and a Boston lawyer; and Sewall's brother-in-law, A. Bronson Alcott. May in particular was taken with the young orator. In later years he recalled, "Never before was I so affected by the speech of man. When he had ceased speaking I said to those around 'That is a providential man; he is a prophet; he will shake our nation to its centre, but he will shake slavery out of it."" At the conclusion of the address, May, Sewall, and Alcott introduced themselves to Garrison -- May saying, "Mr. Garrison, I am not sure that I can indorse all you have said this evening. Much of it requires careful consideration. But I am prepared to embrace you, I am sure you are called to a great work, and I mean to help you." After Sewall seconded this pledge, Alcott invited the group to his home where they discussed immediatism far into the night. Before morning Garrison had three new converts. While Alcott eventually lost sight of abolition among his other enthusiasms, May and Sewall became Garrison's strongest Boston supporters. 35

The events of October, 1830 made it increasingly clear to the young reformer that it was possible to overlook theological differences as great as those which separated him from May, Sewall, or Kneeland in order to further the antislavery cause. It was

Reformers, p. 31; Thomas, Liberator, p. 126; May, Recollections, pp. 18-20. In their biography, Garrison's sons described their father's feelings: "It is difficult to overrate the value of Mr. May's and Mr. Sewall's friendship to him at that period. The former's hearty and enthusiastic response to his appeal at Julien Hall had been as unexpected and delightful as his own self-consecration to the cause had been to Lundy, two years previous." Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 217.

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obvious that liberal religious convictions did not necessarily make a man unsympathetic to the plight of the slave. As he wrote the following year, "Universal emancipation from despotism is, and ought to be, common ground.... If the religious portion of the community are indifferent to the cries of suffering humanity, it is no reason why I should reject the co-operation of those who are more deeply interested, though they make no pretension to evangelical piety." 36

³⁶ Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 226-227, 307; Liberator, March 5, 1831.

CHAPTER III

A SLAVEHOLDING RELIGION

The cowskin makes as deep a gash in my flesh, when wielded by a professed saint, as it does when wielded by an open sinner

--Frederick Douglass January 27, 1846

Within the young nation lived a group of Americans who were more interested in making the bondsmen's chains secure than in exposing the sinful nature of the chattel system. Frederick Douglass was the human property of several of these slaveholders during his years in bondage and his attitude toward religion was greatly influenced by the slave experience.

Born in 1817, Douglass, or Frederick Augustus Washington
Bailey as he was then known, spent his early childhood in Talbot
County on the eastern shore of Maryland. Separated from his slave
mother by the workings of the chattel labor system, young Frederick
was cared for by his grandparents, Betsey and Isaac Bailey. It is
not known whether the Baileys introduced their grandson to any of
the major tenets of Christianity, but it has been recorded that he

In a letter to an unidentified correspondent, Douglass wrote (May 24, 1880): "I don't know the date of my birth. I have a strong impression, I can hardly tell how it was made, but think it was by some word said by old master's daughter when I was a very little fellow, that I was born in February 1817, so that I am now in my 64th year." Journal of Negro History, XXXVI (January, 1951), 83.

became acquainted early in life with the superstition inherent in many nineteenth-century southern folk beliefs. In later years

Douglass recalled the local superstition which held that "Grandmother Betty" had only to touch the seedling sweet potatoes when they were about to be placed in the ground for them to grow and flourish. Her "good luck" was actually due to a careful nurturing of the roots, but it was nevertheless reason enough for her to be held in great esteem and to be sent for "in all directions" simply to help with the planting each year. 2

Even though he lived a somewhat sheltered life at the Bailey's, Frederick gradually became aware of the realities of the slave system. Initially, this occurred through the realization that there existed a person known as "Old Master" who claimed ownership over grandmother, their "little hut," and even himself. This knowledge sometimes threw a shadow across his otherwise relatively untroubled childhood, but was merely the precursor of even more foreboding revelations about life in perpetual servitude. He feared that such an existence would become intolerable because it would eventually necessitate an unwelcome separation from his beloved, though surrogate, parents.

The day of reckoning came when Douglass reached the age of seven and was taken some twelve miles from his birthplace to the residence of Captain Aaron Anthony. Captain Anthony owned three farms and thirty slaves, but spent the major portion of his time as

Frederick Douglass, My Bondage and My Freedom (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969, Reprint of the 1855 edition), p. 36.

³Grandfather Isaac Bailey was a free Negro.

Douglass, Bondage, pp. 38-42, 45.

general overseer of the twenty or thirty farms and the thousand slaves of Colonel Edward Lloyd. Douglass characterized the Lloyd "home plantation" as "a little nation of its own, having its own language, its own rules, regulations and customs"—a secluded and out-of-the-way place, largely untouched by the social and intellectual currents of the day. Religion, too, was apparently excluded from the mainstream of plantation life. In his autobiography Douglass bitterly noted that "the poor have the gospel preached to them, in this neighborhood, only when they are able to pay for it. The slaves, having no money, get no gospel.... The rich planter can afford to learn politics in the parlor, and to dispense with religion altogether."

Nevertheless, the slave community did have its own divine of sorts. Crotchety, crippled "Uncle" Isaac Copper was both the slave's doctor of divinity and doctor of medicine. Not long after his arrival at Lloyd's, Frederick and twenty or thirty other black children were sent to this local figure to learn The Lord's Prayer. Douglass found his instructor seated on a large three-legged oaken stool, armed with several good-sized hickory switches which he used to enforce attention and good behavior. After receiving general instructions, the children were commanded to kneel down and to repeat each portion of the prayer after Copper. A strict taskmaster, Uncle Isaac seldom found any means of maintaining discipline short of switching. Quite understandably, Frederick was often a truant from these "prayer meetings." He later wrote that such devotions

⁵Philip S. Foner, <u>Frederick Douglass</u> (New York: Citadel Press, 1964), p. 15.

Oouglass, Bondage, pp. 61-65.

combined too much of the tragic and the comic to make them very salutary "in a spiritual point of view."

The youngster soon learned that the master class of the plantation used even more force than Uncle Isaac to discipline the bondsmen. Frederick witnessed numerous acts of cruelty on the Lloyd plantation. He covertly observed the brutal whipping of his aunt for secretly meeting with her lover, saw Anthony reject a plea of mercy from a bloodied slave girl who feared the consequences of returning to the purvue of her cruel overseer, and witnessed the whipping of a mother of five for the crime of "impudence." Before he left the Lloyd plantation, these incidents, as well as the murders of several "impudent" slaves, had given Douglass a vivid and memorable picture of slavery in Maryland.

Such acts of brutality inevitably led young Frederick to inquire into the origin and nature of slavery. He wanted to know why some people were slaves and others masters, whether there was ever a time when the institution did not exist, and how it began. As he later wrote: "The very first mental effort that I now remember on my part, was an attempt to solve the mystery, Why am I a slave?... When I saw the slave-driver whip a slave-woman, cut the blood out of her neck, and heard her piteous cries, I went away into the corner of the fence, wept and pondered over the mystery." Since his questions concerning these matters were put to children only a little older and better informed than himself, Frederick did

^{7&}lt;u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 70-72.

^{8&}lt;sub>Ibid.</sub>, pp. 82-83, 85-88, 92-95.

Douglass to Thomas Auld, September 3, 1848, in Anti-Slavery Bugle, September 29, 1848.

not solve the problem easily. He was told that "God, up in the sky" had made all things. Black people were created to be slaves and white people to be masters. God was good and knew what was best for all of His creatures. Douglass was not completely satisfied with these answers. They came, he wrote, "point blank, against all my notions of goodness." How could it be good to have his aunt suffer under the whip? How did people know that God made black people to be slaves? How could there be, as he knew there were, blacks who were not held in slavery or whites who were not slaveholders? More agreeable was the concept that God would eventually banish "bad" masters to an evil place where they would be "burnt up," but he still could not reconcile slavery with his crude notion of goodness. After considerable thought and the chance overhearing of a slave conversation detailing the process of their forefather's enslavement in Africa, Frederick came to the conclusion that "it was not color, but crime, not God, but man, that afforded the true explanation of the existence of slavery." Thus, he began early to develop the idea that slavery existed in opposition to the will of his Creator.

During his stay at Lloyd's, Frederick was in continual contact with the forces of superstition. Located only a short way from the great house of the plantation was the Lloyd family cemetery. Strange sights had been seen there by some of the older slaves. Douglass often listened to tales of shrouded ghosts riding upon great black steeds, of great balls of fire which flew through

Douglass, Bondage, pp. 89-90; Frederick Douglass, Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (New York: Collier Books, 1962, Reprint of the 1892 edition), p. 50; Douglass to Thomas Auld, September 3, 1848, in Anti-Slavery Bugle, September 29, 1848.

the air at midnight, and of the startling and dreadful sounds that had often been heard coming from the burying ground. The cemetery was a gloomy and forbidding place which, along with the stories connected with it, was enough to discourage the slaves from approaching the area. As Douglass later noted, "it was difficult to feel that the spirits of the sleeping dust there deposited reigned with the blest in the realms of eternal peace."

After a year's residence on the Lloyd plantation, the eightyear-old slave boy learned that the first phase of his "education" was over. He was being sent to a new master in Baltimore. Frederick's treatment while at Lloyd's was not exceptionally harsh when compared to that of the adult bondsmen. An occasional cuff from the ill-tempered "Aunt" Katy and a "regular whipping" from Captain Anthony, "such as any heedless and mischievous boy might get from his father," was all that he could account for in the line of corporal punishment. His work load was not excessive and was suited to his age and capabilities, but he did complain of hunger and a lack of warm clothing. 12 Perhaps the personal deprivations of the slave life were not as telling on Douglass' mental makeup as were the observed cruelties and emotional torments which accompanied such an existence. He had seen natural affections and relationships crushed or distorted when they were deemed to be inconsistent with slavery. He had perceived the debasing effects of slavery on master and chattel alike. He had witnessed the telling effects of long hours of hard, unremitting labor on the part of the field hands.

ll Douglass, Life, p. 41.

¹² Douglass, Bondage, pp. 75-76, 129-132.

Indeed, he was "as well aware of the unjust, unnatural and murderous character of slavery, when nine years old" as he was in later life. Therefore, it is immaterial how young Frederick was treated during his first years as a slave, for the emotional bruises of the slave life were duly inflicted. As Charles W. Chesnutt has written, "It is enough to say that this lad, with keen eyes and susceptible feelings, was an eye-witness of all the evils to which slavery gave birth." 13

Frederick's new master was Hugh Auld, the brother of Anthony's son-in-law, Captain Thomas Auld. For the next seven years Douglass served as a house boy and then as a laborer in Auld's shippard.

While Hugh Auld cared very little about religion, his wife, Sophia, introduced the slave boy to a new experience--life in a Christian environment.

Remarkably pious, in Douglass' estimation, Mrs. Auld frequently attended worship services, read her Bible diligently, and often sang hymns to herself when her husband was away from home.

Unused to the supervision of slaves, Sophia Auld lacked the "supercilious contempt for the rights and feelings of the slave, and the petulance and bad humor which generally characterize slaveholding ladies." There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. No beggar left her door hungry or ill clad. Indeed, as Douglass later noted, it was impossible to witness her fervent piety and watchful uprightness without thinking and feeling that she was a Christian. 14

¹³ Ibid., pp. 60, 80-81, 133; Charles W. Chesnutt, Frederick Douglass (New York: Small, Maynard & Company, 1899), pp. 8-9.

¹⁴ Douglass, Bondage, pp. 142-143, 153.

The initial experience of hearing "Miss Sopha" read the Bible aroused in Frederick the desire to learn the art of reading. Late one Sunday night Mrs. Auld's reading awakened the young slave. Somehow he learned that the scripture she was studying was the first chapter of Job. Years later he still remembered his sympathy for the "good old man" and his great anxiety to know more about him. This feeling led Douglass to ask Sophia to teach him to read—a process which was begun in earnest only to be thwarted by Hugh Auld. His reaction to his wife's declaration that she felt it her duty to teach Frederick to read the Holy Scriptures was simply, but forcefully put: "Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world." 15

Douglass' search for wisdom and spiritual enlightenment next took him to his white playmates and to a popular school book of the day called The Columbian Orator. His young friends, who taught him to read, told him repeatedly that they did not believe God ever made anyone to be a slave. Surely he had as much right to freedom as they did. The dialogues and speeches in the Orator enforced Frederick's already strong belief that God had not ordained and sanctified the institution of slavery. Once again he had discovered the true foundation of the slave system in the pride, power, and avarice of man, not in the will of God. 16

Despite the improved living conditions of his Baltimore

¹⁵ Speech at Belfast, Ireland, January 6, 1846, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress; Douglass, Bondage, pp. 145-146.

Douglass, Bondage, pp. 155-160. After his death, Jane Marsh Parker wrote that Douglass had purchased The Columbian Orator "with his carefully hoarded pennies" so that he could "learn something to speak at the Sabbath-school exhibitions of the free negroes, which he attended by stealth, and where he was beginning to shine as an orator." Jane Marsh Parker, "Reminiscences of Frederick Douglass," Outlook, LI (April 6, 1895), 553.

home, Frederick gradually became disconsolate with his lot. To a large extent, prolonged reflection on his unfree state explains this change. The more that he read and thought about it, the more he came to abhor slavery and to detest his enslavers. Another, and perhaps more satisfactory explanation for this hardening of attitude was that the atmosphere of Christian love and kindness which he had entered upon his arrival in Baltimore seemed to have dissipated.

One of Auld's neighbors first gave young Douglass an unfavorable picture of Christian charity. Mrs. Hamilton owned two slaves, Henrietta and Mary. These young house slaves were brutally treated and kept in a half-starved condition by a woman who, almost in the very moments of her "shocking outrages of humanity and decency," would "charm you by the sweetness of her voice and her seeming piety." In his autobiography, Douglass wrote that Mrs. Hamilton could lash her chattels as punishment for indolence one moment, and in the next, continue to sing hymns "as though her righteous soul were sighing for the holy realms of paradise." 18

More importantly, however, was the fact that a marked change had taken place in Sophia Auld's character since she had become a slaveholder. Douglass later noted that under the influence of slavery her "tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness." She acquiesced in Hugh's views on the education of bondsmen and eventually became even more violent in her opposition to Frederick's attempts to read than was

¹⁷ Douglass, Bondage, pp. 159-162.

^{18 &}lt;u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 148-150.

her husband. This shift in character undoubtedly upset the young slave, causing him to become "wretched and gloomy" beyond his ability to describe. 19 It now seemed that both non-Christian and supposed Christian masters found pleasure in his enslavement and misery.

Saddened and disillusioned, Frederick, now 13 years of age, found a religious solution to his problems in the sermons of a white Methodist minister named Hanson. Preaching the doctrines that all men, great and small, bond and free, were sinners in the sight of the Supreme Being, that they were, by nature, rebels against His Divine Government, and that all must repent of their sins and be reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ, Reverend Hanson made Douglass feel that he had a friend in God. Having been rather indifferently exposed to theological concepts, Frederick did not have a very distinct idea of how he could obtain God's gift of salvation until he consulted a black man named Charles Johnson. This understanding individual told Douglass to pray and, more importantly, he told him what to pray for. After weeks of being tormented by doubts and fears. Frederick finally found his burden lightened by "that change of heart which comes by 'casting all one's care' upon God, and by having faith in Jesus Christ, as the Redeemer, Friend, and Savior of those who diligently seek Him."20

This salvation experience brought Douglass into "a new world, surrounded by new objects." He felt a deep love for all mankind and was determined to have the whole world converted. Along

¹⁹ Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave (New York: Signet Books, 1968, Reprint of the 1845 edition), pp. 52-53; Douglass, Bondage, pp. 144-145, 153-154, 160.

Douglass, Life, p. 90; Douglass, Bondage, p. 166.

with these feelings came an increased desire to know more of the truths found in the Bible. From the mud and filth of the gutter he gathered scattered passages of scripture, washed and dried them, and "read the words of heavenly wisdom, which they contained, with a glad heart."

While thus seeking religious knowledge, Douglass met a man who he was later to call his "spiritual father." 22 Charles Lawson. a devout. elderly, black man lived near the Auld residence and was employed as a drayman. His real calling, however, appeared to be more in the clerical line. Fervent in prayer and trusting in his faith. "Uncle Lawson" took Frederick with him to prayer meetings and met with the new convert on Sundays for "refreshing times" of "singing, praying and glorifying God." Lawson told Douglass that the Lord had a great work for him to do in preaching the gospel. Although Frederick expressed doubts as to the feasibility of this suggestion. Uncle Lawson convinced him that the Lord would "bring it to pass in his own good time" and that Douglass must continue to read and study the scriptures. When Frederick explained that he was a slave for life, Uncle Lawson declared that "the Lord can make you free, my dear. All things are possible with him, only have faith in God." Thus assured, and comforted, Douglass prayed that God would, "of His great mercy, and in His own good time, deliver me

²¹ Douglass, Bondage, p. 167; Speech at Belfast, Ireland, January 6, 1846, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

In his autobiography, Douglass also noted that Charles Lawson was, "in christian graces, the very counterpart of 'Uncle' Tom. The resemblance is so perfect, that he might have been the original of Mrs. Stowe's christian hero." Douglass, Bondage, p. 183.

from my bondage."23

Since he served as the young slave's "chief instructor, in matters of religion," it is very likely that Uncle Lawson was the major influence behind Frederick's decision to become affiliated with a local church. By joining the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1831, Douglass allied himself with a rapidly growing body of believers which had nevertheless experienced many trials and difficulties in attempting to offer "acceptable worship to God." 24

Methodism had been established in Maryland during the 1760's--its influence spreading rapidly. Endeavoring to preach the same gospel to all classes and colors, Methodist preachers fraternized with Negroes and established mixed congregations. During this early period, American Methodism lacked an educated leadership, their preachers stressing the aspects of religious faith that they and the masses could readily understand. Emotionalism marked their worship services. 25

²³The Aulds knew that Frederick had "become religious" and seemed to respect his "conscientious piety," but when Hugh Auld became aware of, and averse to, the frequent meetings with Lawson, he threatened to whip Douglass if he ever visited the old man again. Despite his knowledge of Frederick's continued attendance, Auld never executed the threat. Douglass, Bondage, pp. 167-169, 172.

Douglass, Bondage, p. 168. Sophia Auld was a member of the Wilk Street Methodist Episcopal Church, where she attended class meeting every Monday evening under the leadership of Rev. Beverly waugh. Douglass had heard Rev. Waugh "exhort and pray" in the Auld home, but it is likely that Lawson influenced his choice of churches more than either Waugh or Mrs. Auld. See Douglass, Bondage, p. 168; Douglass, Narrative, p. 58.

²⁵N. C. Hughes, Jr., "The Methodist Christmas Conference: Baltimore, December 24, 1784-January 2, 1785," Maryland Historical Magazine, LIV (September, 1959), 273; James M. Wright, The Free Negro in Maryland 1634-1860, Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, Vol. XCVII, No. 3 (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1921), pp. 47, 210.

Near the end of the Revolution, Methodists began to attack the institution of slavery. By the time of the Baltimore Christmas Conference in 1784 there were in America eighty-four Methodist preachers and almost 15,000 communicants, many of whom agreed with the sentiments of the conference that slavery was "contrary to the Golden Law of God." At this formative meeting of the Methodist Episcopal Church, drastic rules were adopted which directed slaveholding members of Methodist churches to free their chattels within a prescribed period of time or suffer exclusion from the communion. 26

Although some Maryland masters freed their slaves, a greater number in Virginia, where almost half of all American Methodists lived, raised a storm of protest. With an extant antislavery sentiment, the opportunity to control the communion, and the desire to begin their church with a clean moral slate, the conference members quite naturally overextended their moral demands. The Methodists had increased their numbers so rapidly that they had not been able to create that special sense of community which could have helped to assure compliance with the rather stringent demands of 1784. (The rules on slavery were suspended six months after the adjournment of the Baltimore Conference.²⁷

Despite this lapse of principle and the reluctance of the Methodists to ordain Negroes as ministers, black men continued to

Wright, Free Negro, pp. 47-49; Hughes, "Christmas Conference," p. 276; Carter G. Woodson, The History of the Negro Church (Washington, D. C.: Associated Publishers, 1921), pp. 29-30; L. C. Matlack, The Antislavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1881), p. 59.

²⁷Donald G. Mathews, Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 11-13; William B. Gravely, "Early Methodism and Slavery: The Roots of a Tradition," Wesleyan Quarterly Review, II (May, 1965), p. 87.

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flock to the Methodist Church in unprecedented numbers. In 1787

Negroes constituted fifteen percent of the church membership.

Constant evangelization increased their rolls to twenty percent or 13,500 by the turn of the century. In 1816 almost one-fourth of the some 214,000 American Methodists were black. Thirty thousand of these Negro communicants were in the South and were gathered primarily from the slave population. By 1844 one-third of all southern Negro Christians were Methodists.

At the time of the Christmas Conference, Baltimore was one of the nation's five largest cities and the fastest growing urban center in the land. Thickly populated with Methodists, Baltimore represented the geographic heartland of the Methodist movement. Prior to the Revolution, the building of the city's Methodist church establishment was a joint effort of black and white Christians. Together they founded the Strawberry Alley church, which Douglass joined on November 13, 1831, and the Lovely Lane church, which was the site of the 1784 conference. 29

Soon after the war, white Christians drew the color line

Wright, Free Negro, p. 211; Mathews, Slavery and Methodism, pp. 63, 66-67; Joseph C. Hartzell, "Methodism and the Negro in the United States," Journal of Negro History, VIII (July, 1923), 301; Dwight W. Culver, Negro Segregation in The Methodist Church (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 42.

Hughes, "Christmas Conference," p. 281; Wright, Free Negro, p. 212; Annie Leakin Sioussat, Old Baltimore (New York: Macmillan Company, 1931), pp. 147-148; In 1891 Douglass described the Strawberry Alley church as it was when he first became a member: "I remember well the little, unpretentious house in which we used to gather. It was looked upon as a large church for us then, but would not be noticed now beside the many handsome edifices that have since been erected. Then we had no regular pastors. Ministers would be sent to us from the white conference, and if a colored preacher could be found sufficiently capable and intelligent to instruct us and preach to us, he was looked upon by the colored people as a marvel." Baltimore Sun, September 7, 1891.

across Baltimore Methodism. They began to shun their black brothers in Christ and tended to control the church organization without consulting them. Those Negroes who felt the growing discrimination most keenly withdrew, worshipped apart, and eventually formed the nucleus of the African Methodist Episcopal Bethel Society and Bethel Church. Blacks who declined to secede were specially provided for within the parent Methodist church. In 1792 they were given a building on Sharp Street. Separate preaching services and class meetings were held for them by the same staff of preachers which served the white churches. Substantial growth followed, making Sharp Street Church the principle Negro church in Baltimore for years. The congregation was incorporated under black trustees in 1832, but was still served by white pastors. 30

Frederick had only a short time to enjoy the fellowship of the Baltimore Methodists and to revel in the pleasures of his newfound spiritual life. In March, 1833 he was sent to a new master in St. Michaels, Maryland. The change of ownership as a consequence of the death of Captain Anthony and a subsequent family quarrel placed Douglass in the possession of Thomas Auld, Anthony's son-in-law. To the sixteen-year-old slave it seemed that each time "the young tendrils" of his affection became attached to a certain locale, they were rudely broken by some outside power. He was "beginning to look away to heaven" for the rest denied him on earth. 31

Wright, Free Negro, pp. 212-218. Douglass joined the Sharp Street church in 1836, eventually becoming a choir member and class leader. See Benjamin Quarles, Frederick Douglass (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 11; Richard T. Greener, "Reminiscences of Frederick Douglass," Champion Magazine, I (February, 1917), 291.

³¹ Frederick found that the habit of "tippling" among the St. Michaels oyster fishermen had become so pervasive by 1833 that

Captain Auld and his new wife, Rowena, were not generous to their slaves. For the first time in seven years Frederick felt intense pangs of hunger and was driven to begging and stealing to keep mind and body intact. The young Christian hated to steal, but after weighing the matter carefully, he decided that such a course was justifiable. He stole with "a clear apprehension of the claims of morality." He realized that his thievery was an abomination according to the law and gospel that he heard from the slaveholding pulpit at St. Michaels, but he had already begun to attach less importance to the pronouncements from that quarter, on that point, while still retaining his deep reverence for religion. 32

To Douglass, Thomas Auld appeared to be an intensely selfish man who was wholly caught up in the pride of mastery and the love of domination—a human being incapable of a noble deed. Understandably, Douglass hoped that by making a formal profession of religion at an August 1833 Methodist camp meeting, Captain Auld would be led to reform his "cruel" and "cowardly" ways. Nevertheless, as the young slave watched his master proceeding through the emotion—laden throes of the conversion experience, he could not help wondering whether the end result would be as favorable to Auld's slaves as it apparently was to Auld's soul. "If he has got religion," Douglass thought, "he will emancipate his slaves; and if he should not do so much as this, he will, at any rate, behave toward us more kindly, and feed us more generously than he has heretofore done." Douglass

it was admitted by the few "sober, thinking people who remained there, that St. Michaels had become a very unsaintly, as well as an unsightly place." Douglass, Bondage, p. 186-187.

³² Douglass, Bondage, pp. 188-191.

Several incidents occurring after his conversion illustrate Thomas Auld's lack of Christian compassion. In St. Michaels, Frederick was forbidden to continue the Sabbath school activities in which he had participated when living in Baltimore. When a young white man named Wilson asked him to help organize a Sabbath School for the instruction of slaves who wanted to learn to read the New Testament, Douglass jumped at the opportunity. With some twenty students, a dozen dog-eared spelling books, and a few testaments, the two instructors earnestly began their project. At their second

³³ Ibid., pp. 191-196.

³⁴Of Rowena Auld, Douglass wrote: "A great many times have we, poor creatures, been severely pinched with hunger, when meat and bread have been moulding under the lock, while the key was in the pocket of our mistress. This had been so when she knew we were nearly half starved; and yet, that mistress, with saintly air, would kneel with her husband, and pray each morning that a merciful God would bless them in basket and in store, and save them, at last, in his kingdom." Douglass, Bondage, pp. 189-190, 196-197.

meeting, however, they learned that the wrath of an outraged Christian is sometimes akin to demonic terror. They had scarcely begun the day's lesson when a mob, led by Captain Auld and two other Methodist class leaders, broke up the meeting. Armed with "sticks and other missiles." these "professedly holy men" warned the two instructors never to meet for such a purpose again. One of the intruders charged Douglass with trying to be another Nat Turner. They had scarcely begun the day's lesson when a mob, led by Captain Auld and two other Methodist class leaders, broke up the meeting. Armed with "sticks and other missiles." these "professedly holy men" warned the two instructors never to meet for such a purpose again. One of the intruders charged Douglass with trying to be another Nat Turner. As Douglass later noted, the incident "did not serve to strengthen my religious convictions."

Auld's treatment of a slave woman named Henny certainly did
not increase Douglass' respect for his master's profession of religion. This cousin of Frederick's had lost the use of her hands in
an accident and, hence, was a burden to Captain Auld. (He showed
his vexation at her disability by repeatedly whipping her in a most
brutal manner—all the while quoting the scripture passage, "that
servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself,

Douglass, Bondage, pp. 199-200; Baltimore Sun, September 7, 1891; Douglass, Narrative, p. 68. To guard against the spread of any spirit of disaffection or rebellion, tumultuous meetings of slaves had long been forbidden in Maryland, but there was never anything in the laws of the state to prevent bondsmen from quietly holding religious services on their master's estate. After the Southampton insurrection, a new statute was enacted which forbade Negroes to assemble or to attend meetings for religious purposes which were not conducted by a white clergyman or some respectable white person of the neighborhood. The 1831 Act did not, however, unduly interfere with religious exercises held by slaves at home with their master's consent. Negroes in Annapolis and Baltimore could hold their own services up to the hour of ten at night with written permission of a white minister. Jeffrey R. Brackett, The Negro in Maryland: A Study of the Institution of Slavery, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Vol. VI (Baltimore: N. Murray, 1889), pp. 110, 199-200.

³⁶Garrison West, a member of the mob, was Douglass' class leader in St. Michaels. Deemed by Frederick to be a Christian until he took part in breaking up the school, he "led" the young slave "no more after that." Douglass, Bondage, pp. 200, 266.

neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." Eventually, on the pretext that "he could do nothing with her," Auld abandoned the crippled Henny, setting her adrift to fend for herself. 37

Douglass also felt the cruelties of the Christian master in a more personal way. Once, when a carriage lamp was discovered to be missing, Captain Auld went to the stable area with a cart whip and, with its heavy lash, beat Frederick over the head and shoulders to make him tell how it was lost. This punishment continued until the slaveholder had wearied himself. This was not an isolated incident. After nine months at the Auld residence, Douglass had received "a number of severe whippings."

Undoubtedly, Frederick felt that he would have received scarcely better treatment from the Christian guests whom Captain Auld entertained. In his autobiography, Douglass complained about the lack of compassion shown the bondsmen by visiting ministers.

To him, they seemed "almost as unconcerned about our getting to heaven, as they were about our getting out of slavery." The lone exception to this characterization was an English-born cleric by the name of George Cookman. Unlike the other ministers on the St.

Michaels circuit, Cookman took an interest in the temporal and spiritual welfare of the slaves. A colonizationist, Rev. Cookman gave the general impression that he was laboring to convince local

³⁷Douglass, Bondage, p. 201; National Anti-Slavery Standard, December 23, 1841; Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, April 16, 1846, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 15, 1846; Douglass, <u>Narrative</u>, pp. 68-69. The scripture passage is essentially that found in Luke 12:47.

Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, April 16, 1846, in Liberator, May 15, 1846; Douglass, Bondage, p. 203.

masters to free their bondsmen, and that he did this as a religious duty. When Cookman was a guest of the Aulds, the slaves were assembled for a morning prayer service and given words of "exhortation and of encouragement."

Douglass received little spiritual encouragement from his next master. On January 1, 1834 he was sent to Edward Covey, the local "slave breaker." Captain Auld had become increasingly disgusted with Frederick's "carelessness" in handling the horses. He finally decided that a year's service at Covey's would remove any lingering intransigence that the repeated whippings had failed to remove. Like Auld, Covey was said to "enjoy religion" and was a class leader in the Methodist Church. As Douglass observed, "few men would at times appear more devotional than he." The Covey house rang with prayers and hymns, morning and evening. At first, Frederick was called upon to lead the devotional singing, but the repeated floggings which he received at the hand of the slave-breaker led him to feel that such worship was a mockery. As often as possible, he avoided taking an active part in the exercises.

These contradictions between the ideal of Christian virtue and the reality of Christian behavior caused Douglass much mental and spiritual anguish. His autobiographical account of this period contains telling passages describing how his mind passed over "the whole scale or circle of belief and unbelief, from faith in the

Douglass, Bondage, pp. 198-199. When ministers other than Cookman visited the Auld home, the slaves were sometimes called in to prayers and sometimes not. Douglass, Narrative, p. 68.

⁴⁰ Douglass, Narrative, pp. 69-70, 74; Douglass, Bondage, pp. 203, 217; Frederic May Holland, Frederick Douglass: The Colored Orator (New York: Haskell House Publishers, Ltd., 1969, Reprint of the 1895 edition), p. 19.

overruling providence of God, to the blackest atheism." At times he was certain that he had no friend on earth and doubted whether he had one in heaven. On other occasions he beseeched the God of the oppressed to deliver him from the living hell of slavery.

Continued observation confirmed Douglass' suspicion that, in actuality, Covey's religion was "a thing altogether apart from his worldly concerns." How else could one explain the contradiction between his benevolent behavior during the prayer meetings and the cold-hearted deeds perpetrated during the week? (Covey could "cut and slash" Douglass' body during the week, but would not hesitate, on Sunday, to teach him the value of his soul and "the way of life and salvation by Jesus Christ.") Could a true Christian be a slave breeder as well as a slave breaker? Could the chosen of God be accused of causing another human being, whatever his skin color, to be broken "in body, soul, and spirit"? 42

This line of thought did not, however, prohibit Frederick from completely renouncing any remaining religious tenets which forbade him protection against a cruel master. The indifference with which Thomas Auld met his plea for relief from Covey's abuses severed the last link in this "slaveholding" theology. Douglass' new assertiveness was shown in his oft-recounted fight with the slave breaker. His success in this encounter not only showed how far he had "backslidden" from the "slave's religious creed," but also rekindled his hopes of someday escaping from the house of bondage and

Douglass, Bondage, pp. 228, 234; Douglass, Narrative, p. 76.

Douglass, Narrative, p. 75. Of Covey's religion, Douglass wrote: "He knew nothing of it as a holy principle, directing and controlling his daily life, making the latter conform to the requirements of the gospel." Douglass, Bondage, pp. 217-218, 240-241.

recalled to life his crushed self-respect. 43

Yet Douglass did not renounce "the Christian creed" for that of superstition. While at Covey's he came into contact with Sandy Jenkins, a slave who believed in the magical powers of certain herbs. This ex-African told Douglass that if he would only carry a particular root with him it would be impossible for any white man ever to whip him again. While Douglass did finally agree to try Jenkins' charm simply to please the well-meaning fellow, he did so with the feeling that the whole idea was absurd and ridiculous, "if not positively sinful." He felt a powerful aversion to all pretenders to "divination" and considered it "beneath one of my intelligence to countenance such dealings with the devil, as this power implied." In any case, Covey's brutish nature soon drove any belief in the potency of the root far from Douglass' mind.

His term of service fulfilled, Douglass left the Covey farm on the first of January, 1835. He was now hired out to William Freeland, who lived about three miles from St. Michaels. Unlike his recent experience, he now found himself as the slave of a man who made no pretensions to or profession of religion. To Douglass, Freeland was, despite his irreligion, "the best master I ever had,

Bondage, pp. 228-232, 241-249. Douglass described the fight with Covey in the chapter of his autobiography entitled "The Last Flogging." Of its conclusion he wrote: "Covey at length (two hours had elapsed) gave up the contest. Letting me go, he said, --puffing and blowing at a great rate--'now, you scoundrel, go to your work; I would not have whipped you half so much as I have had you not resisted.' The fact was, he had not whipped me at all. He had not, in all the scuffle, drawn a single drop of blood from me. I had drawn blood from him; and, even without this satisfaction, I should have been victorious, because my aim had not been to injure him, but to prevent his injuring me."
Douglass, Bondage, p. 246.

^{44&}lt;u>Ibid., pp. 238-239.</u>

until I became my own master." Under the improved mental and physical conditions that he found in his new surroundings, Douglass once again revived his plans to conduct a Sabbath school. He was not long in rounding up more than forty young slaves willing to meet secretly in order to learn the skill of reading the Bible. He also devoted three evenings each week to this project during the winter months. 45

Douglass seems also to have revived his plans to become a preacher. In his autobiography he wrote that the improved conditions at Freeland's rekindled the dreams implanted in his mind by "Father Lawson." Sometimes, when all were asleep, Douglass would try to prepare for the pulpit by going out to the pigs and talking to them as "Dear Brethren." Apparently, neither this activity nor his Sabbath School was disrupted during his stay with the non-Christian Freeland.

In contrast to the character evidenced by his new master was that of two Christians living in the vicinity. They made

Douglass aware that Captain Auld and Edward Covey were not wholly atypical of Maryland masters when it came to heartlessness and cruelty. The first of these men was described as being "both pious and cruel after the real Covey pattern." A Methodist minister and a "most zealous supporter of the ordinances of religion, generally,"

Rev. Daniel Weeden nevertheless held to the belief that a good slave must be whipped to be kept obedient and a bad slave must be whipped to be made obedient. The bloodied back of his slave women, Ceal,

^{45 &}lt;u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 264-265, 267-268; Douglass, <u>Narrative</u>, p. 86.

⁴⁶ Douglass, Bondage, p. 264; Holland, Colored Orator, pp. 25-26.

was proof positive that he was not lax in putting his theory into practice. 47

A counterpart to Weeden was Rev. Rigby Hopkins, who also lived near St. Michaels. His system of slave government incorporated the practice of whipping the chattels in advance of their deserving punishment. By whipping for small offenses, he sought to prevent the commission of large ones. Hopkins, like Weeden and Covey, was shunned by those slaves who had the privilege of "finding their own masters" at the end of each year. Yet, despite his cruelties, there was, according to Douglass, not a man who made higher professions of religion, was more active in revivals, or who "prayed earlier, later, louder, and longer" than this "reverend slave-driver." 48

Entrapped in these surroundings, Douglass once again drifted into a period of spiritual depression. He wondered why his countless prayers to the God of the oppressed, asking for freedom from slavery, had not been answered. "Where now," he asked, "is the God of justice and mercy?" However perplexed and disconsolate these thoughts rendered him, Douglass was buoyed and sustained by the consoling thought that "the day of the oppressor will come at last." He was fully convinced that the admonition of the St. Michaels' pulpit to the bondsmen to be content in their bondage, recognizing God as the author of their enslavement and regarding their condition as a merciful and beneficial arrangement, was being wasted on himself and most of the other slaves. He considered himself to be "quite free from slave-holding priestcraft." As he later noted, Father

⁴⁷ Douglass, Bondage, pp. 258-259.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 259, 261; Douglass, Narrative, p. 88.

Lawson's vision of what he ought to be and might be, "in the providence of God," had not been extinguished by his years in bondage. 49

Shortly after his removal from Freeland's and his return to the supervision of Hugh Auld in Baltimore, Douglass escaped to the North by impersonating a free American sailor. 50 Baffled and discouraged at times while a slave, he had asked himself whether his condition might not actually be God's work and purpose for his life. He had prayed for liberty and trusted in God for freedom, but he could not accept the line of reasoning which argued that a religious conversion freed the slave from the fetters of sin, that such freedom was the only truly significant kind, and that ownership of the body under these circumstances was a mere irrelevancy. Complimentary to his faith in the Supreme Being was a belief in the adage that God helps those who help themselves. As a slave, Douglass never missed an opportunity to acquire the knowledge that would prepare him for freedom and give him the means of escape from bondage. As he later wrote, "The contest was now ended; the chain was severed; God and right stood vindicated. I was a FREEMAN, and the voice of peace and joy thrilled my heart."51 Perhaps now, without

⁴⁹ Douglass, Bondage, pp. 272, 275-276, 295-296. In a speech at Market Hall, New York City, on October 22, 1847, Douglass noted: "For a long time when I was a slave, I was led to think from hearing such passages as 'servants obey, &c.' that if I dared to escape, the wrath of God would follow me." National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 28, 1847. He was referring to verses such as Ephesians 6:5, Colossians 3:22, Titus 2:9, and I Peter 2:18.

⁵⁰For a more detailed account of his escape see Douglass, Life, pp. 197-201.

Douglass, Bondage, p. 337; J. W. Cooke, "Freedom in the Thoughts of Frederick Douglass, 1845-1860," Negro History Bulletin, XXXII (February, 1969), 8-9; Chesnutt, Frederick Douglass, p. 12.

his chains, the professors of religion in the North, unlike those of the South, would treat him as a brother, would not forbid him the rights and privileges of a fellow Christian, and would not cause him to doubt the benevolence of his Creator.



CHAPTER IV

ORTHODOXY-HETERODOXY

So with Paul, I make this simple answer to all inquiries respecting my religious sentiments--"by the grace of God, I am what I am."

--William Lloyd Garrison June 28, 1838

Despite the rebuffs which he had received from Beecher and several other churchmen, William Lloyd Garrison still hoped that American Christians would awaken to their duty, go to the aid of the downtrodden slave, and prove to all that their religion was powerful enough to accomplish the great work of emancipation. The delusions of the hour, he thought, would soon pass away. Meanwhile, he would continue to urge men of all denominations to unite with him under the banner of antislavery. As he noted in the first issue of The Liberator, which finally appeared on January 1, 1831, men "of all religions and of all parties" were more than welcome to join him in defending "the great cause of human rights."

Johnson, Garrison and His Times, pp. 46-47, 49; Liberator, January 1, 1831. In the prospectus for the new weekly, Garrison had appealed "to the American people--to philanthropists and patriots, to moralists and Christians" for patronage. In 1832 he told of the "mighty" influence of the nation's clergymen. To convert one minister to abolitionism was "nearly the same as to convert a whole church and congregation." Oliver Johnson held that it was in the power of the churches, "if they had had any heart for the work," to make the movement their own--to lead and guide it from beginning to end. "This, indeed," he wrote, "was what Mr. Garrison desired and expected." Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 201; Garrison to John B. Vashon, August 15, 1832, in Journal of Negro History, XII (January, 1927), 34; Johnson, Garrison and His Times, p. 49. See also Garrison to The Liberator, October 2, 1832 in Liberator, October 27, 1832.

If most of the nation's more orthodox religionists failed to respond favorably to Garrison's pleas for assistance during the first years of The Liberator, it was not because they found his religious views unacceptable or because they were afraid of joining in a cause led by an infidel. During the early 1830's, the Boston editor was a pillar of rectitude in religious matters. The pages of his new weekly gave evidence both of his piety and of his devotion to the antislavery cause. In his !"Moral" column, Garrison sought to inspire in his readers a desire to live a pure and upright Christian life. In January 1831 he told the story of a thief who continued to steal corn from a neighbor's field until his eightyear-old son informed him that the Supreme Being was a witness to all of man's deeds. "God sees me" was a thought which would keep men from "evil acts" if they would only strive "to feel its truth." Later in the year, The Liberator reminded its readers that the disciples had "returned to Jesus" and "told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught."2 If modern day believers would go to the "Master's feet" every evening and tell Him where they had been, what they had seen, and by what motives they had been actuated in carrying out their daily business, their behavior would undoubtedly improve. While "reading over each day's page of life" with the realization that Christ was "reading it too," men could detect many "errors and defects" in their behavior which would otherwise pass unnoticed. On other occasions the column discussed Christian consistency. According to The Liberator, a Christian had no right "any where, or under any circumstances" to be

²See Mark 6:30, Luke 9:10.

"any thing else than a Christian." No believer could more surely put an end to his faith than by "frequenting any circle which he must enter without his religion." That it was immoral to act in such an unspiritual manner was obvious if one studied Christ's words in Matthew 10:33: "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

Garrison's poetry, which appeared quite frequently in the columns of his paper during this period, also testified to the fact that the young editor was no purveyor of irreligion. In "The Prince of Philanthropists," he sang the praises of a Savior who delighted in "doing good" even though He usually received more scorn than gratitude from those He sought to help:

Wealth, complexion, grandeur, station,
Vain distinctions were to thee:
Love like thine, nor caste nor nation
Bounded its infinity.
Thou didst heal the lame--the dying;
Feed the multitude with bread;
Nor a suppliant denying;
Raising up to life the dead!

The manner in which Garrison treated the divinity of Christ in this poem was calculated to please even the most orthodox evangelical Christian:

As the WAY to glory leading,

As the TRUTH that sets us free,
As the LIGHT from heaven proceeding,
Chiefly do we honor thee.

'FOLLOW ME!'--Yes, precious Saviour,
In thy footsteps will we tread;
By thy grace, our whole behaviour,
Shall be worthy of our HEAD!

Several of Garrison's poems spoke of the vanities of the

^{3&}lt;u>Liberator</u>, January 15, 1831, December 17, 1831, January 7, 1832.

Liberator, March 8, 1834.

world and the blissful state of existence which awaited the child of God upon the termination of his earthly journey. In 1831 he wrote:

Happy is he who disdains the earth,
And plumes his hopes for a heavenly birth,-Whose treasures are wisely laid above,
Seal'd by the bond of eternal love,-Where neither moth nor rust doth infest,
Nor thieves break through to disturb the blest!

On another occasion he expressed these sentiments in a more personal manner:

I mourn not--care not, if my humble name,
With my frail body, perish in the tomb;
It courts a heavenly, not an earthly fame,
Which through eternity shall brightly bloom:
And in 'the last great day,' a golden crown award!

In his correspondence, Garrison often contrasted the glories of heaven with the afflictions of earthly existence. He believed that it was impossible for a Christian to be perfectly happy on earth. As an "exile" from his heavenly home, the believer quite naturally experienced sadness, loneliness, and "a restlessness of mind" that could never be fully satisfied until he heard the "notes of angels" and was able to "mingle with the ransomed above." All of man's earthly achievements were petty, imitative, and ultimately worthless, but God's heavenly kingdom was a realm of "unutterable and inconceivable blessedness." This being the case, Garrison asserted that he did not covet earthly treasures. He sought only to be continually engaged in "laying up those which shall never perish."

In 1834 he wrote: "My soul leaps at the prospect of its being

⁵Liberator, August 13, 1831.

⁶ Liberator, January 8, 1831. See also Liberator, March 7, 1835.

ultimately released from its brittle tenement of clay.... Soulenrapturing is the thought of heaven! What peace, and joy, and safety, and love, reign there!"

Garrison's correspondence also contained many allusions to his belief in the triumph of the spirit over death through a belief in the Savior. He held that "We shall never be able to exclaim,"

'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' until we have first died unto sin--crucified the old man with his lusts--put on the new man who is after Christ--and risen in spirit with Him who is able to save all who believe in him." To Garrison, the grave had no power over the soul. It received only "a body of dust--a tenement of clay." It was the place where men laid down their infirmities, diseases, and sorrows that they might "rise up to a new and glorious life." There a man could shed his imperfect earthly tabernacle and be transformed into an "angel of light."

"Jesus Christ has triumphed over death and hell," he wrote, "and so may we by putting him on, and walking in newness of life."

⁷Garrison to Helen E. Benson, August 29, 1834 in Merrill, Letters, I, 407; Garrison to Ebenezer Dole, June 29, 1832, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to George W. Benson, August 11, 1834, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to Samuel J. May, February 18, 1834, in Merrill, Letters, I, 285; Garrison to Helen E. Benson, May 1, 1834, in Merrill, Letters, I, 337; Garrison to Anna E. Benson, May 20, 1834 in Merrill, Letters, I, 345.

^{**}Garrison to Sarah T. Benson, December 24, 1836, in Louis Ruchames, ed., The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, II (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 193; Garrison to George W. Benson, May 31, 1834, in Merrill, Letters, I, 353; Garrison to Henry E. Benson, December 17, 1836, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 190. In an 1837 letter, Garrison noted that one of his "cherished maxims" was that it could "never be a calamity for a good man to go to heaven, either sooner or later." Urging that men "feel no concern whatever" as to the time of their "exit" from the world, he wrote, "Let us only--by dying to self--be prepared to enter those mansions prepared for the righteous in glory and all will be well." Garrison to George W. Benson, January 4, 1837 in Ruchames, Letters, II, 200-201.

During the early 1830's, the young abolitionist evidenced a deep faith in the righteousness and power of his Creator. For the success of his antislavery exertions he claimed to "rely exclusively on the blessing of God"--the one Being in the universe who could see "the end from the beginning." With His divine assistance the abolitionist cause would be sustained. As he wrote in 1833, "Our trust for victory is solely in GOD. We may be personally defeated, but our principles never." Unlike many religionists, Garrison maintained this strong faith both under conditions of adversity and in times of apparent success. In discussing the actions of a New York anti-abolition mob in the summer of 1834, he wrote that, in the day of "great crisis," it was incumbent upon all abolitionists to be "watchful unto prayer" and to put unlimited confidence in the Lord of Hosts. When they were called upon to "pass through many perils" they would be able to "encounter them victoriously" if they allowed the love of God to "reign supremely" in their hearts. Later in the year, when surveying the progress which the cause had made since 1831, the ebullient Garrison repeatedly thanked God for the rapid advancement of the antislavery sentiment and for allowing him to become "a signal instrument in the accomplishment of this astonishing change." As he had noted on an earlier occasion, even though the friends of abolition were multiplying rapidly, the final battle against slavery could not be won unless the antislavery forces persevered, remained true to their principles, and continued to look "to Him who alone is able to give us the victory."

⁹Garrison to George W. Benson, January 12, 1835 in Merrill, Letters, I, 434; Garrison to Sanuel J. May, February 14, 1831 in Merrill, Letters, I, 115; Liberator, December 14, 1833, December 27, 1834; Garrison to Samuel J. May, July 23, 1834, in Merrill, Letters,

Garrison's characterization of God as a helpmeet of the righteous complemented his belief in the Holy Scriptures as the Christian's chief weapon against sin. Take away the Bible, he wrote, and the war against oppression, infidelity, intemperance, and crime would quickly come to an end. The believer would then have "no authority to speak, and no courage to act." According to Garrison, God's "Statute Book" contained all of the laws and ordinances needed to govern mankind. The Bible was immutable. Neither the vicissitudes of time, the waves of revolution, nor "the explosions of empires" could change one of its acts. It was also impartial. Having "no respect of persons," it levelled all of the "wain distinctions of the world. The Bible was especially hard on the man who dared disobey its commandments. How terrible were its denunciations against the oppressor! How wonderfully it unmasked hypocrisy, condemned injustice, and punished crime! How marvelous was its power to detect and expose the thief, the drunkard, the voluptuary, and the impostor! On the other hand its requirements were eminently reasonable--love to God and love to man. 10

I, 383; Garrison to J. Telemachus Hilton, Robert Wood, and J. H. How, August 13, 1831, in <u>Liberator</u>, August 27, 1831. See also Garrison to Sarah M. Douglass, March 5, 1832, Garrison to Ebenezer Dole, June 29, 1832, Garrison to William Ellery Channing, January 20, 1834, Garrison to Henry E. Benson, February 26, 1834, Garrison to George W. Benson, June 16, 1834, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. Of the New York mobocrats he wrote: "I pity and weep over those poor misguided, ignorant creatures who have actually committed the violence, and who have been made the tools of intelligent and influential, but base and cowardly men. I pray God to forgive them, as I most cheerfully do, and as I hope to be forgiven. Perilous times have come--but our trust is in the Lord of hosts, and our souls are unmoved--we cannot be driven back." Garrison to Helen E. Benson, July 15, 1834 in Merrill, Letters, I, 376.

¹⁰ Liberator, April 2, 1831.

Since Garrison considered the Bible to be the chief weapon against sin and Negro slavery to be the chief American sin, it was not surprising that he saw no wrong in using the language of the Bible to arraign slaveholding sinners. According to Garrison, God's pronouncements were efficacious only as they were personal. Both the commendations and the rebukes found in the Scriptures were personal. In this respect it was a remarkable volume. Christ, having been forced to deal with sinners, called them by their proper names --"hypocrites," "an adulterous and perverse generation" and "a brood of vipers." "Look at the language of the patriarchs and prophets. of Christ and the apostles!" Garrison wrote, "...we are authorized to imitate the conduct of 'holy men of old,' in rebuking and warning those who are led into error." Both the Scriptures and the history of moral reform testified that sin was to be viewed and spoken of with "strong moral displeasure." Holy principles were just as odious to the evil man when expressed in mild language as they were when presented in a much harsher manner. In December 1834 Garrison noted that "a violation of the law of God presents no occasion for the exercise of moral complacency. God regards it with holy indignation, and so should those who desire to be holy even as he is holy."11

One of the sins which Garrison sought to eradicate during the early 1830's was related both to slavery and to the Bible. In the early volumes of <u>The Liberator</u> he pleaded for the universal diffusion of the Bible as a powerful instrumentality for the

ll Garrison to Gerrit Smith, January 31, 1835, in <u>Liberator</u>, January 31, 1835; <u>Liberator</u>, December 27, 1834. See also speech at Boston, April 2, 1833 in Garrison and Garrison, <u>Life</u>, I, 335-336; Johnson, <u>Garrison</u> and <u>His Times</u>, p. 55.

promotion of the antislavery cause. When notified in 1831 that the New York General Tract Depository had issued 30,000 copies of the Scriptures to be distributed in the Mississippi Valley Area, he was overcome with "lively sensations of joy." Surely the cause of emancipation would receive an immense benefit from this liberal distribut ion of the Word of Life. "THE BIBLE--THE BIBLE!" he wrote, "how sheall we subdue the obdurate heart, and awaken the seared conscience. and successfully impeach the criminal conduct of slaveowners; how shall we operate upon public opinion, and call into vigorous exercise the moral energies of the nation ... without THE BIBLE?" Its SP = xit was so benevolent that it would "dry up rivers of human blood, and turn the sword into a ploughshare, and break every fetter, renovate the face of the world...." Its precepts and doctrines tank men neither to oppress nor defraud, but to "break every yoke and let the oppressed go free." Unfortunately there was one imporsegment of the population which was being denied access to the Holls Scriptures -- the imbruted slaves. According to Garrison, the terrible ain of taking the Bible away from the bondsmen placed an indelible brand of heathenism upon the "peculiar institution." Early in 1834, the editor of The Liberator asserted that if asked Edve a sound reason for his opposition to slavery, he could give ** Do more weighty or more irresistible" than that it robbed the es of the Bible. (Since the bondsmen were rational beings actable to God and "destined to an eternity of bliss or wo," it vitally important that they be permitted to own and to read the cred book which brings life and immortality.") That they were

¹² Johnson, Garrison and His Times, p. 67; Liberator, April 2, April 9, 1831.

denied this right by their cruel masters should, in Garrison's opinion, mightily "stir up the holy indignation of every follower of Christ." 13

The Boston editor was no less devoted to the cause of keeping the Sabbath holy. In the columns of his weekly he lashed out aga inst the operators of theaters and ballrooms who kept their estab 1 ishments open on Sunday, decried the "laxity of morals or religiona " which allowed them to willingly desecrate the Holy Day, and even penned a poem describing the "huge eclipse" which would "dress the world in gloom" if the "moral sun" of the Sabbath were "blotted out - ** His most extensive remarks on the subject of Sabbath observance, however, came in a letter of April 27, 1834 to his bride-tobe. Helen Benson. To Garrison's mind, the first day of the week offered man a "beautiful, though imperfect," type of heavenly rest. It was a "rich and special provision" for those who hungered and thirst ed after righteousness. Certainly the "superior excellence" of this sacred day over every other was obvious to those who had studied the Word of God. That the Sabbath had "imperative and abidi R claims" to universal obedience was as great a truth as that it was sinful to steal, to covet, or to take the name of God in vain. "When was the fourth commandment revoked? Garrison asked. "Dare any to be so presumptuous as to erase it from the ten? Why not rike out the first--the third--the fifth--the seventh? Why not repeal the whole decalogue?" Indeed, had it not always been the sand device of Satan" to vitiate the Sabbath and to destroy its anctity? If the Evil One succeeded in blotting out this day

^{1834;} Speech at Boston, March 10, in <u>Liberator</u>, March 15, 1834.

of "purification, assistance, and rest" he would hold complete dominion over the universe. 14

In his many letters to Helen, Garrison also discussed the importance of prayer. Even though he felt "a vacancy" in his heart because she was not with him on a trip to New York City in 1835, the abolitionist was cheered by the thought that the "omnipresence of our God fills all space, and attends our footsteps whithersoever we so." Men could commune directly with their Maker at all times and in all places. By so doing they could "rejoice in the infinitude of his love, and feast upon the banquet of heavenly munificence." no matter how far they strayed from their homes and families. 15

June. 1831 he noted that the cause of emancipation was proceeding at an unnecessarily slow pace because "so few petitions are put up to the Throne of Grace on the subject." Prayer would forward the work of the antislavery forces "faster than all the pens in the land. "Surely, the abolitionists could do nothing without it.

Later in the year, in discussing the plight of the black man, Garrison asserted that the Negro could find help and security only in God.

If they would "cry mightily to him for succor," He would surely answer their petitions. The Boston editor was no less convinced that

January 31, 1831, April 9, 1831, April 16, 1831,
April 14, 1832, January 31, 1835; Garrison to Helen E. Benson,
27, 1834, in Merrill, Letters, I, 333-335. See also Exodus 20:
In his biography of the Boston editor, Oliver Johnson asserted
"Mr. Garrison held and inculcated in 'The Liberator' at first
sot Orthodox views of the Sabbath. He would no sooner have
to the post-office on that day to mail or receive a letter than
Garrison and His Times, p. 69.

¹⁵ Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, March 16, 1835 in Merrill, ers, I, 465.

he and Helen could find the solution to their problems by daily seeking God in prayer. In the spring of 1834 he wrote, "Dear Helen, in our morning and evening devotions,...let us pray that we may be kept from all sin--from the temptations and snares of an evil world--from idolatry--from slothfulness and folly--and that we may be continually replenished with heavenly wisdom, purity, goodness and truth."

for the bondsman, caused him to support the observance of days of fasting and prayer. In May, 1831 he urged that the coming Fourth of July be set aside as a day of mourning and self-abasement among the colored people. The object of the fast day would be to have the churches register their disgust at the "miserable and heathenish" condition of the slaves, to be seech the Lord to abolish slavery "in a speedy and peaceful manner," and to ask His blessing on all just measures seeking the accomplishment of that great work. He earnestly hoped that black men all over the country would observe the day in this manner, calling upon God to give them relief and to take away their "reproach" forever. "[L]et us pray more, and fast more," he wrote "and the Lord will do great and signal things for us." 17

William Lloyd Garrison, An address delivered before the during the month of June, 1831 (Boston: Stephen Foster, n.d.), p. 9; Liberator, September 17, 1831; Garrison to Helen E. Benson, April 25, in Merrill, Letters, I, 331. An item appearing in the "Moral" breat of The Liberator in August 1831 noted that the "appropriate the Liberator in August 1831 noted that the "appropriate the Liberator in September 1831 noted that the "appropriate the Liberator in August 1831 noted that the "appropriate the Liberator in August 1831 noted that the "appropriate the Liberator in August 1831 noted that the "appropriate the Liberator in August 1831 noted that the "appropriate the Liberator in August 1831 noted that the "appropriate the Liberator in August 20, 1831.

D. 8. Liberator, May 7, 1831; Garrison, Philadelphia, New York,

The editor of The Liberator was also an ardent champion of religious revivals. Just as he believed in the "wonder-working" power of the Scriptures. Garrison looked to the revival as an instrumentality likely to hasten the day of emancipation. Surely the transformation of earthly kingdoms into the "kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ" could never come to pass independently of great rewilvals. The "grasp of oppression" would be weakened and the liberation of the bondsmen hastened only in proportion to the quantity of ""pure religion" prevailing in the land. In Garrison's opinion, the fact that many people regarded revivals as "unnatural" and "injurious" was not sufficient cause to abandon faith in these "out-Pour ings of the Spirit." It argued nothing against the efficacy of revivals that individual excesses were sometimes committed during the meetings. Could it be denied that the struggle between holiness and sin was often "protracted and terrific"? The religious conversions which occurred during times of revival were eminently rational in nature. To Garrison's mind, special grace or a "miraculous interposition of the spirit" was no more requisite for men to lowe and obey God than "special depravity" was to hate and rebel again st Him. Man was a free agent. He possessed "every essential endo ent" to choose between good and evil, obedience and disobedi-Conversions were "scriptural occurrences." Without them, Promises of God would fail, and the earth be flooded with ini-Quity." Indeed, only extensive revivals of "pure religion" could the land from "great plagues and sudden destruction." 18

In the ranks of those opposed to revivals of religion were

¹⁸ Liberator, April 9, 1831; See also Revelation 11:15; ison to The Liberator, June 10, 1831, in Liberator, June 18, 1831.

"cry aloud, and spare not" regarding "irreligion" had never been as great as it was during the early 1830's. He was appalled at the rapid growth of "lacivious, blasphemous, heaven-defying, Godrejecting atheism" in New England. He considered such "skepticism" to be "a war upon the inward and outward man," its votaries going down to the grave with a "pestilential rapidity." This was indeed a time for "plain dealing with sin in every shape." What the nation needed, he asserted, was a return to the "triumphant and memorable" days of martyrdom. A "race of men" had to be created who would be bold for God--"open-mouthed and trumpet-tongued" for his truth even in the face of death. Apparently eager to join the band of martyrs, Garrison wrote: "My prayer to God is, that I may be kept from the fear and the wisdom of man, and be ready to lay down my life victoriously in his service, whenever it shall be necessary." 19

The editor of <u>The Liberator</u> was certainly not a timid person and was ever willing to instruct his readers in matters of morals and religion. In countless articles and speeches he sought to convince others of the correctness of his views. In a poem called "Universal Emancipation," which appeared in the first issue of his Boston weekly, he urged the slaves to:

Bear meekly--as ye've borne--your cruel woes;
Ease follows pain--light, darkness--plenty, dearth:
So time shall give you freedom and repose,
And high exalt your heads above your bitter foes!

Revenge and rapine ne'er did bring forth good.

GOD's time is best!--nor will it long delay:
Even now your barren cause begins to bud,
And glorious shall the fruit be! Watch and pray,...

¹⁹Garrison to George W. Benson, January 12, 1835, in Merrill, ters, I, 434-435; Liberator, May 14, 1831. See also Isaiah 58:1.

Later he cautioned the nation's freedmen to resort to no "unseemly or violent measures." Instead they should seek the "fountains of salvation as opened in the gospel, "-- as well as education, temperance. domestic purity, peace, and moral excellence. By June 1831 he had organized these bits of advice into a cohesive lecture which he delivered before black audiences in Philadelphia, New York, and other cities. On these occasions he put forward his belief that the time was not far distant when all of the nation's Negroes would be Iree to enjoy the same rights as white Americans. In order to hasten the day of deliverance, he urged the black men to respect them selves to support one another, to form societies for moral im-Provement, and importantly, to make the Lord their "refuge and exem-Plar - " Asserting his own belief that "through Christ strengthening you. You may do all things," Garrison told his listeners that Jesus was the only standard around which they could successfully rally. He was the "great Captain of Salvation" in the war against slavery and Proscription. "If ever there were a people who needed the consolations of religion, to sustain them in their grievous afflictions," the solitionist said, "you are that people."20

^{20 &}lt;u>Liberator</u>, January 1, 1831, May 26, 1832; Garrison, Philadelphia, New York, pp. 4-17. Garrison showed an almost fatherly concern for both the physical and the spiritual condition of the Nessons. In 1832 he stated his desire to see black men progressing tue and knowledge. "I have a higher aim than merely to rethem to their proper station in society;" he wrote, "for the them to their proper states and emoluments of this life, are as dust in balance compared with the favor of God, and the obtainment of in Bal happiness." Garrison to The Liberator, September 13, 1832 berator, October 13, 1832. For Garrison's "advice" to the Ne berator, October 17, 1072. For carried children, on the virtue of the Christian party" in of temperance, and on the formation of "a Christian party" in Jack see Liberator, July 16, 1831; Speech at Philadelphia, 15, 1832, in Liberator, June 30, 1832; Garrison to the Colored 15, 1832, in <u>Liberator</u>, June Jo, 2001, <u>Liberator</u>, December 20, 1834 in <u>Liberator</u>, December 20, 1834. For his disclaimer that he had ever tried to bias any of

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Garrison also hoped to convince his readers that the immediate emancipation doctrine was far superior to the schemes of the gradual emancipationists and colonizationists. He found it both sad and disturbing that some men could continue to look upon the bloody system of slavery with "philosophic composure"--that "even professing Christians" could "coldly talk of its gradual abolition."

The Boston editor likened the freeing of the slaves from bondage to the liberation of mankind from sin. In 1831 he noted that the gospel called upon sinners to repent immediately--it did not authorize "the delay of a moment." But, he asked, if all men could not, or rather would not, be instantly repentant, what would be the result?

Because difficulties obstructed the way should gradual repentance be Preached to mankind? To do so would be folly--just as it would be foolish to adhere to the concepts forwarded by the supporters of gradual emancipation. 21

In the same year that he was appointed corresponding secretary of the newly organized New England Anti-Slavery Society,

Garri on published Thoughts on African Colonization, a lengthy indictment of the principles and purposes of the American Colonization ociety. "Think not to succeed in your expulsive crusade;" he told the colonizationists, "you cannot hide your motives from the Great Searcher of hearts.... You may plot by day and by night; you

their minds on any "religious or political points" see Garrison to the Colored Inhabitants of Boston, December 18, 1834, in Liberator, December 20, 1834.

Liberator, August 13, 1831; Garrison to Ebenezer Dole, Review, August 13, 1831; Garrison to Ebenezer Dole, 11, 1831, in Merrill, Letters, I, 122. For a discussion of George Bourne's influence on Garrison's abolitionist doctrines Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 306; David Brion Davis, "The Bence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought," Issippi Valley Historical Review, XLIX (September, 1962), 223-224.

may heap together the treasures of the land, and multiply and enlarge your combinations, to extricate yourselves from peril; but you cannot succeed. Your only alternative is, either to redress the wrongs of the oppressed now, and humble yourselves before God, or prepare for the chastisements of Heaven."

Professing his own lively sense of accountability to God, and devout aspirations for the guidance of the Holy Spirit,"

Garrison appealed to those men who had been "redeemed from the bondage of sin by the precious blood of Christ" to join him in the abolitionist crusade. Certainly there was power enough in the religion of the Savior to melt the most stubborn prejudices, to overthrow the highest walls of partition, to break the strongest caste, and to unite in fellowship even the most hostile combatants. As he wowed the following year, "We shall enlist the PULPIT and the PRESS in the cause of the suffering and the dumb" while aiming at the purification of the nation's churches from all participation in the guilt of slavery. 23

Garrison would not have anyone believe that his opposition to the colonizationists' plans had made him hostile to the ideal of civilizing and Christianizing Africa. "Most intensely" did he desire

William Lloyd Garrison, Thoughts on African Colonization (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968, Reprint of the 1832 edition), p. 104.

Ibid., pp. 3, 8, 143; Liberator, December 14, 1833.

Garrison hoped that his Thoughts would have a "salutary influence" upon the clergy. In the introduction he wrote: "It may grieve them to discover that they have been misled themselves, and that they have unwittingly misled others.... such a confession may indeed require much grace in the heart, but this grace, I am persuaded, they will obtain. As apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ,...they will not shut their eyes, or stop their ears, or refuse to examine, or disregard the truth, in a case involving the temporal and eternal happiness of millions of their fellow creatures." Garrison, Thoughts, p. 38.

to see that "ill-fated" continent transformed into the "abode of civilization," of the arts and sciences, of evangelical piety, of liberty, and of "all that adds to the dignity, the renown, and the temporal and eternal happiness of man." In fact, if the American Church had not so long neglected the Africans' spiritual welfare and had directed its efforts at civilizing and converting them instead of acquiescing in the rape and pillage of the continent by slave trading "pirates," Africa would long ago have been "redeemed, regenerated, and disenthralled." Nevertheless, Garrison found the concept of evangelizing Africa by sending to it "a population degraded by slavery, and, to a lamentable extent destitute of religious and secular knowledge" to be absurd and inept. (The colonizationist propagandists who promoted this scheme asserted that the free blacks were "pests in the community;" that they were an "intemperate, ignorant, lazy, thievish class;" and that, owing to the prejudices of society, no efforts to improve them in this country could be successful. In the next breath they told of the mighty works which the colonized Negroes could achieve -- that they were the missionaries of salvation who were to illumine all of Africa -- that they would create a second American republic. Garrison had no faith in such an "instantaneous metamorphosis." Ignorant and depraved black men who were transported across the ocean would be just as ignorant and depraved upon reaching the African coast. Likewise, those who were "capable of doing well, surrounded by barbarians" would be even more successful if allowed to ply their trades among a civilized and Christian people. It was the Boston editor's "sober conviction" that no enterprise could be more fatally calculated to obstruct the progress of Christianity in a "heathenish country" than the

establishment of colonies of selfish, ignorant, or even intelligent and high-minded men on its shores. In every settlement of this kind, no matter how "choice" the original materials, vice would soon prevail over virtue, intemperance over sobriety, and impiety over godliness. The natives would see just enough of Christianity to hate and shun it. Finding that its fruits were generally bad-that it had no restraining influence upon the majority of its nominal professors—they would spurn with contempt the precepts of the gospel.²⁴

How then could Africa be evangelized? Garrison believed that missionaries of the Cross who were actuated by "holy zeal and genuine love;" who were qualified to instruct, admonish, and proselitize; and who would not, by their examples, "impugn the precepts, or subject to suspicion the inspiration of the Word of Life" should be found to take the gospel to the African people. "A hundred evangelists like these," he wrote, "...would destroy more idols, make more progress in civilizing the natives, suppress more wars, unite in amity more hostile tribes, and convert more souls to Christ, in ten years, than a colony of twenty-thousand ignorant, uncultivated, selfish emigrants in a century." Was not the blessed Savior's command to his disciples "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" rather than "Send out from among yourselves those whom you despise..., those who need to be instructed and converted themselves; those who are the dregs of society, made vicious and helpless by oppression and public opinion..."?25

²⁴ Garrison, Thoughts, pp. 24-25, 27-29, 155-156.

^{25 &}lt;u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 35-36. See also Mark 16:15. Garrison viewed as fallacious the argument which posited that such a project could

In the pages of his Thoughts, Garrison arraigned not only the colonizationists, but also severely criticized the American church and clergy. The pulpit is false to its trust, and a moral paralysis has seized the vitals of the church," he raged \ The sanctity of religion had been thrown over the horrid system of slavery like a mantle. Under its auspices robbery and oppression had been allowed to flourish. As an immediatist, Garrison claimed to have been "almost as cruelly aspersed" by ministers of the gospel and church members as by any other class of men. Unless the pulpit lifted up its voice in "warning" and "supplication" and planned for the redemption of the bondsmen--directly assaulting "the strong holds of despotism," Jehovah would surely pour His indignation upon the land and consume it with "the fire of his wrath." Men of all denominations were duty-bound to bear unqualified testimony against the sin of slavery. Slaveholders could no longer be allowed to share in the Christian communion. In sum, America's churches had to be "purified 'as by fire." 26

Garrison's fulminations against the churchmen were not confined to the pages of his anti-colonization tract. In his Thoughts, the abolitionist had registered a protest against the "obscure, remote

not be initiated because of the fatal effects which the African climate had on whites. If white men could not or would not go to Africa, it was the duty of American Christians to "educate colored young men of genius, enterprise and piety" to do the job of evangelizing the continent. "If our free colored population were brought into our schools, and raised from their present low estate," he wrote, "I am confident that an army of christian volunteers would go out from their ranks, by a divine impulse and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to redeem their African brethren from the bondage of idolatry and the dominion of spiritual death." Garrison, Thoughts, pp. 36-37.

²⁶ Garrison, Thoughts, pp. i, 9, 53-54.

and unseemly pens or boxes" in which the people of color were forced to occupy in the northern churches. During the early 1830's, his concern over the treatment of black religionists was also evidenced in the columns of his weekly. In April, 1831 The Liberator printed a story about the furor caused in Park Street Church because a "respectable colored man" had purchased a pew there for himself and his family. Approximately three weeks after he had first occupied the pew, a deacon, two committee men, and a constable interfered, refusing him permission to take his seat. The black man was eventually driven away by this proscriptive treatment and the pew passed into other, whiter hands. Considering the church sanctuary to be the last place on earth where the "exercise of despotic principles" should be allowed to go unchecked, Garrison fumed at the practices of the professed Christians of Boston. "[T]alk as we may of the distinctions of caste in Burmah," he wrote, "they are not more unjust or exclusive than those which are made in this christian country, and by our christian assemblies." If one were to consider their influence and the force of their example, it would undoubtedly be found that the Negroes' worst enemies were the white religionists. These so-called Christians carried their "wicked and relentless" prejudices into the house of God, "driving from thence all who have sable complexions" unless the Negroes consented to debase themselves by occupying the "menagerie" provided for their use. Garrison considered such conduct to be anti-Christian -- a gross violation of the Savior's golden rule. If the black man's soul was held to be equal in value to the white man's soul, men of both races ought likewise to be able to share the same church facilities in their quest for spiritual improvement. In his opinion, every Negro who continued

to worship in a segregated church was only dishonoring himself. Instead, they should "shun it as they would a cage for wild beasts" until "a better arrangement be made." To speed the end of the proscriptive practices, the editor of The Liberator called upon the churches to put away "this great sin" and no longer let pride and prejudice "mar the beauty of christian worship." 27)

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By the mid-1830's, abolitionist agitation had progressed to the point where the American clergy was forced into taking a stand on the issues which Garrison and his supporters had so dramatically and glaringly illuminated. The fact that many churchmen were opposed to Garrison's immediatism only served to deepen his conviction that they were apologists for the slave system--men who called themselves "Christians" but who nevertheless refused to take an active part in the campaign to liberate the nation's oppressed bondsmen.

Despite the encouraging news that several ministerial gatherings had passed resolutions favorable to the abolition cause, 28 Garrison was both saddened and angered by the actions of other meetings in refusing to join with him in condemning slavery. In September, 1834 the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions declared, on

²⁷ Garrison, Thoughts, p. 127; Liberator, April 23, 1831, May 21, 1831, May 28, 1831, August 13, 1831. See also Liberator, July 30, 1831. For Garrison's opinion of the southern clergy see Liberator, October 1, 1831, December 3, 1831. For a description of his quarrels with Rev. Howard Malcom and Rev. John Breckinridge see Garrison to The Liberator, September 7, 1832, in Liberator, October 6, 1832; Garrison to Samuel J. May, July 28, 1834, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

^{28&}lt;u>Liberator</u>, July 4, 1835, August 22, 1835, November 28, 1835.

the "best evidence," that their slave-holding brethren were sincere followers of Christ. Therefore, the Board did not feel that it would be proper to use language or to adopt measures which might "tend to break the ties that unite them to us in our General Convention,... and to array brother against brother, church against church, and association against association, in a contest about slavery." At a meeting of the Board of Managers of the Baptist General Tract Society the following year, it was unanimously voted that the Board require its agents to pledge that they would in no way intermeddle with the slavery question while in the employ of the Society. 29

Presbyterians too put themselves on record as being opposed to the abolitionist crusade. In January 1836 the Synod of Philadelphia recommended that "all our people...discountenance the revolutionary agitations and unrighteous plans and doctrines of the self styled abolitionists." Advocating colonization as the solution to "the evils of slavery," the Synod declared that the abolitionists were retarding the progress of universal emancipation "more than all other causes combined." These sentiments were echoed by the Synod of Virginia, which asserted that the abolitionist doctrine holding American slavery to be sinful and thus deserving of immediate abolition was "directly and palpably, contrary to the plainest principles of common sense, and common humanity, and to the clearest authority of the word of God."

²⁹Liberator, March 14, 1835, November 28, 1835.

Liberator, November 14, 1835, January 9, 1836. In 1836 the Synod of Virginia described I Timothy 6:1-5 as a passage of Scripture which "not only shews the criminality of abolition doctrines, but also...plainly and fully prescribes our duty in relation to them,..." Liberator, December 3, 1836.

At the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. which met in Cincinnati during the spring of 1836. Garrisonian tenets were again roundly condemned. In a strongly worded resolution, the delegates disclaimed "any right, wish or intention" to interfere "in the civil and political relation between master and slave" as it then existed in the slaveholding states. By a vote of 122-11 they also proclaimed their disapproval "in the most unqualified sense" of the conduct of two General Conference members who were reported to have lectured in favor of "modern abolitionism." Earlier, two bishops of the Church had addressed a pastoral letter to the New Hampshire and New England Conferences urging that abolitionist lecturers be refused the use of Methodist pulpits and houses of worship. Examples of this type of clerical opposition to abolitionism were numerous during the 1830's, causing Garrison to remark that the antislavery cause was "in danger of being injured chiefly by the clergy...."31

The editor of <u>The Liberator</u> was especially angered by the appearance of a series of "clerical appeals," protests, and pastoral letters during 1837. These remonstrances against Garrisonian doctrine and methodology by men of professed allegiance to both the cause of the slave and the cause of Christ elicited from Garrison some of his harshest invective. Calling them extraordinary apologies for "those who either vigorously assail, or give no countenance to the anti-slavery cause," he treated the appeals with contempt. They displayed nothing but "the weakness of folly, and the fierceness of 'clerical' malignity." They were "imbecile and verbose."

^{31 &}lt;u>Liberator</u>, October 31, 1835, June 11, 1836, October 20, 1837.

They were "nothing better than drivel." 32

Garrison believed that the various appeals evidenced the continued existence of a "clerical conspiracy" which sought to wrest the reigns of New England abolitionism from his hands and place them with the clergy. Should this happen, he asserted, the integrity of the antislavery movement would be constantly endangered. During 1834 and 1835 a group of ministers had attempted to organize a new moderate abolition society in order to combat his influence. That the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race collapsed within a few months of its formation did not mean that clerical opposition to Garrison's course was likewise destroyed. In the fall of 1837 the Boston abolitionist warned that "a plot is going on for a distinct anti-slavery organization on sectarian grounds." The anti-Garrison portion of the clergy were busily engaged in holding caucuses, corresponding with each other. and "laying plots" to "carry their point" against the Garrisonians. By the end of the following year he could write that the plot was "extensively laid." The plan of the clerical abolitionist and their supporters was "to rally at our [Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society] annual meeting, elect a different board of managers, start a new anti-slavery paper, to be the organ of the Society--&c. &c."33

Jackson Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children, II (New York: Century Co., 1885), 133-143, 154-158; Johnson, Garrison and His Times, p. 274-277.

³³The name of the New England Anti-Slavery Society had been changed in 1836. <u>Liberator</u>, October 20, 1837, January 11, 1839; Garrison to Lewis Tappan, September 13, 1837 in Ruchames, <u>Letters</u>,

Despite a mighty battle of wills and words, Garrison managed to survive the assaults that his opponents launched at the 1839 gathering. The old Board of Managers was re-elected and the proposition to establish another antislavery newspaper in Massachusetts was indefinitely postponed. Nevertheless, the Garrisonian ranks did not emerge unscathed. At least two dozen dissidents chose to separate themselves from the Society following the meetings--a foreshadowing of the schism which was to rend the American Anti-Slavery Society with such destructive force in 1840. With mixed emotions, the editor of The Liberator reported the outcome of the confrontation. He told his readers that, while he was gratified that the enemy faction had been routed, he was nevertheless filled with "pain and sorrow" whenever he recalled the "turbulent scenes" of the annual meeting. Garrison believed that the "spirit of insubordination" which had been exhibited by the professed friends of abolition could only injure the "holy cause." Such behavior provided "the enemies of human rights" with a good excuse to point the "finger of reproach" at the Massachusetts abolitionists and to "exult in view of their dissentions."34

Convinced that nearly all of the clergy were against him, the editor of The Liberator continued to lash out against the

II, 299; Garrison to George W. Benson, October 20, 1837, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 312-313; Garrison to Mary Benson, December 23, 1838, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 407; Garrison and Garrison, Life, I, 468-475; Nye, Humanitarian Reformers, pp. 83-84. In September 1836 Garrison wrote: "I am conscious that a mighty sectarian conspiracy is forming to crush me, and it will probably succeed, to some extent. Well--from the heart I can say, 'The Lord is my portion--I will not fear what men can do unto me.'" Garrison to Samuel J. May, September 23, 1836, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 178.

³⁴Liberator, February 1, 1839; Merrill, <u>Wind and Tide</u>, pp. 148-150; Thomas, <u>Liberator</u>, pp. 266-280.

churchmen, calling them "blind leaders of the blind," "revilers and false witnesses," and "a corrupt priesthood." It was just this type of language that had contributed so greatly to the alienation of the clergy from the Garrisonian ranks in the first place. Between 1835 and 1840. Garrison bombarded the American religious establishment with every epithet that was not too vile to include in a speech or a newspaper article. "What an oath-taking, war-making, man-enslaving religion is that which is preached, professed, and practised in this country!" he declared. "It is like 'clouds without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame.'" In his condemnation of the American profession of religion, Garrison spared no denomination. The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was a "cage of unclean birds, and synagogue of Satan." The members of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions were treacherous and cowardly apologists for southern "men-stealers." Unitarian and Episcopal, Universalist and Roman Catholic, Baptist and Methodist were alike charged with the shedding of innocent blood. All were accused of recognizing as members "those who grind the faces of the poor, and usurp over the helpless the prerogatives of the Almighty!" Southern clergymen were said to be "openly abandoning their God, and bowing down to Satan." In their wickedness they were even brazen enough to maintain that the slave system was not evil in itself. was authorized by God. and therefore, ought not to be abandoned. The spirit of the Northern churchmen was found to be "scarcely more humane." 35

^{35&}lt;u>Liberator</u>, March 14, 1835, October 10, 1835, July 23, 1836, December 11, 1840; Garrison to James Mott, March 4, 1839 in Ruchames,

That Garrison considered the American profession of faith to be a markedly unholy imposture was also exhibited in the stinging rebukes which he meted out to the religious press. Like many of the nation's Christians, many of the nation's religious papers were "a disgrace to Christianity." They were filled with "apologies for sin, and sinners of the worst class." With "scarcely an exception," they countenanced the oppressor while denouncing those who were "warning him of his danger and urging him to repent." "Melancholy, disgust, indignation and amazement" welled up within Garrison whenever he perused their "vitiated columns." He considered it to be a "public calamity" that papers such as the Vermont Chronicle, the Boston Recorder, the Christian Mirror, and the New Hampshire Observer were controlled by editors who deemed it proper to band together in opposition to "every moral and religious reform" which was "at present struggling against the wind and tide of popular clamor." However "orthodox" they might try to appear, these men were totally lacking in Christian liberality, courage, benevolence, and moral

Letters. II. 440; Garrison to Oliver Johnson, August 14, 1837, in Liberator, August 25, 1837; Garrison to George W. Benson, September 12, 1835, in Merrill, Letters, I, 527; Garrison to Samuel J. May, January 17, 1836, in Liberator, January 23, 1836. See also Jude verses 12-13; Revelation 2:9, 3:9, 18:2. Garrison denied that, in rebuking the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions, he was trying to destroy its usefulness or to injure the Baptist denomination. He also noted: "We have been, from early childhood, taught to regard that denomination as most truly apostolical in its doctrines; and consequently, all the prejudices and predilections of our education have naturally clustered around it. In our opposition to that which is evil. we shall make no exception in favor of any sect or party, for we do not care by what names men call themselves, and give very little heed to their professions. 'By their fruits ye shall know them, ' is the infallible test, established by Christ himself." In April, 1840 he wrote: "There is not a sect. which. as a sect, has taken even nominally the right ground with regard to our cause, except, perhaps, the Freewill Baptists." Liberator, March 28, 1835, April 3, 1840.

discernment. It could truly be said that they possessed a "cautious and time-serving spirit." 36

Garrison claimed that the hostility of these editors toward him was rooted not only in their animosity toward the cause of abolition, but was also due to the fact that he would not "cordially embrace all their religious dogmas." There was much truth in his analysis. The indifference and hostility with which a large segment of the American religious establishment met his pleas for immediate and unconditional emancipation not only caused him to become alienated from the clergy, but also served to convince him that he needed to reconsider many of the religious views which he had held since the days of his youth. When combined with his immediatist doctrines, the new religious views which emerged from this reappraisal served to widen even further the breach between himself and the more orthodox evangelicals.

Between 1835 and 1840 Garrison greatly modified his views on several of the more formal aspects of religious practice. In November, 1835 he voiced his opposition to the "custom of appointing one day in the year to be specially thankful for the good gifts of God." Believing that men should be grateful to their Maker at all times and not just when the fall harvest was gathered, he wrote: "There is great danger that if we are thankful only when we are full or prosperous, ours is merely the gratitude of selfishness." Besides helping to instill the notion that it was immaterial whether

³⁶Garrison to Mary Benson, December 23, 1838, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 408; Liberator, September 26, 1835, September 10, 1836.

³⁷ Liberator, September 10, 1836.

one was thankful or not during the remainder of the year, Thanksgiving, since it was proclaimed by a civil officer, was a dangerous
example of Church-State union. Garrison found it to be "quite an
absurdity" that men should "mourn or rejoice--fast or gluttonise"
in response to a proclamation made by a governmental authority. By
agreeing to fast once a year and to be thankful once a year, provided that "a Proclamation comes forth from head quarters--not
otherwise," the people of Massachusetts were following in the footsteps of the ancient Jews. As for himself, he asserted that he was
growing more and more hostile toward "outward forms and ceremonies
and observances, as a religious duty."

Another custom which he now found to be "obviously abhorrent to the spirit of the gospel" was the practice of putting church pews up for sale at auction. By doing so the Church was saying to the rich man, "Sit thou here, in a good place--take thy choice of the best pew thou canst select, as thou art able to pay for it" while telling the poor man, "Stand thou there by the door, or take refuge in yonder obscure corner--for thou hast no money, and thy raiment is vile." The Boston editor considered this practice to be an "odious monopoly" which evidenced the "abominable pride" of some professed Christians. 39

In like manner Garrison protested against the "monopoly" of suitable and proper places of worship claimed by the clergy. He objected to the term "house of God" when applied to any building

³⁸ Garrison to Mary Benson, November 27, 1835, in Merrill, Letters, I, 563; Garrison to George W. Benson, November 27, 1835, in Merrill, Letters, I, 561.

³⁹ Liberator, February 25, 1837.

made by human hands because it was not correct in fact, because it was the cause of "much superstition," and because it was not "authorized in the gospel." The believer was not required to journey to a meeting house in order to render "acceptable worship to the Most High." No mere mortal could command "those who are the sons of God" to "Go to this mountain in Samaria" or "Go to Jerusalem" to worship. They were the Lord's freemen and, as such, should be the first to realize that Christian worship was nothing more than Christian obedience—the "simple, unbroken, perpetual obedience of the heart, and entire consecration of body and soul, mind and strength, reputation and property" to the service of God. Most assuredly, Garrison asserted, such heart-felt obedience was not a thing of "form, or locality, or time, or circumstance." 40

By the mid-1830's Garrison had also begun to question the sanctity of the Sabbath. Although a strict Sabbatarian in early life, he had long considered it to be proper, and in accordance with the example of Christ, to plead the cause of the enslaved on the Sabbath day. In 1831 he boldly declared that he was prepared to champion antislavery principles "on all days, on all convenient occasions, in all suitable places, before any sect or party,..."

Ibid.; Garrison to Samuel J. May, June 22, 1839, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 495; Garrison to Francis Jackson, June 18, 1838, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 369; Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, June 14, 1840, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 643. In May 1838 Garrison wrote his wife that, in Christ Jesus, "all stated observances are so many self-imposed and unnecessary yokes; and that prayer and worship are all embodied in that pure, meek, childlike state of heart, which affectionately and reverently breathes but one petition—'Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' Religion, dear Helen, is nothing but love—perfect love toward God and toward man—without formality, without hypocrisy, without partiality—depending upon no outward form to preserve its vitality, or prove its existence." Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, May 12, 1838, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 359.

For the abolitionist there was "no day too holy, no place improper, no body of men too inconsiderable to address." Nevertheless, as late as July 2, 1836 Garrison was more than willing to decry the arrival of a military company in Providence on Sunday as "a specimen of the growing wickedness of the times." To a man of Sabbatarian upbringing, the strutting of troops through the streets on the Sabbath seemed "a most aggravated profanation of the day." 41

Garrison first gave his readers cause to doubt his orthodoxy on the Sabbath question in The Liberator of July 23, 1836.

In a lengthy article criticizing a speech that Lyman Beecher had recently made in Pittsburgh, he objected to the "extravagant and preposterous language" used by the clergyman in referring to the Sabbath as "the great sun of the moral world...the cord by which heaven holds up nations from the yawning gulf of corruption and ruin." Such language, said Garrison, was not authorized by the gospel. If every thing that was valuable or sacred depended upon the outward observance of one day in seven, was it not strange, he asked, that neither Christ nor any of the apostles ever hinted at such a fact? Was it not more proper to consider the fourth commandment as "only one of ten" instead of as "the great sun of the moral world"?

⁴¹ Garrison, Philadelphia, New York, p. 3; Johnson, Garrison and His Times, p. 363; Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, July 2, 1836 in Ruchames, Letters, II, 136-137. In a letter which he wrote to his future wife on Sunday, April 27, 1834, Garrison noted: "You, my sweet Helen, are too familiar with the liberality of my mind to suppose that I am contending for a bigotted observance of this holy day.... No one is less tenacious of devotional forms than myself, or more desirous that every man should worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. Indeed, there is so of the form of godliness, and so little of its power, in our land, that I am compelled to take refuge in silent meditation and secret prayer, more frequently than in outward exhibitions of worship." Garrison to Helen E. Benson, April 27, 1834, in Merrill, Letters, I, 334.

Basing his argument on the teachings of the New Testament, Garrison held that, while under the first covenant there was a Sabbath, a "worldly sanctuary," a set of divine ordinances, an ark of the covenant, and a chosen priesthood that were "indispensable and obligatory" to proper worship, the "purely spiritual reign of Christ" had long ago been "ushered in, to the abolishment of every type and shadow." The priesthood, as such, was now extinct, the ark had vanished, and the sanctuary had been demolished—the "handwriting of ordinances" had been "nailed to the cross." Thus, he asserted, men should not attempt to coerce an observance of the Sabbath by legislation, but should consecrate all of their time, thoughts, actions, and powers to the service of God,

Garrison was "more and more convinced" that every attempt to determine precisely what was or what was not a violation of the Sabbath would prove nugatory both on the basis of its utter impracticality and on its unauthorized interference in the lives of men. It was his belief that "where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty"--the liberty to pray in public or private, to worship wherever one pleased, to break the fetters of mere outward observances, and "to set apart any portion of time for religious purposes." To Garrison's mind it was obvious that such a liberty was diametrically opposed to all that was "sectarian, or formal, or pharisaical." If men would "put on Christ" they would be as free as their Master-and he was Lord even of the Sabbath day. 42

Liberator, July 23, 1836; See also Mark 2:27-28 and II Corinthians 3:17. Garrison noted that the "chief design" of his July 23 article was "to show the inconsistency of Dr. Beecher." The minister was "loud, earnest, eloquent" in behalf of the Sabbath, yet he gave his "protecting influence" to a system of slavery which, "at a single blow, annihilates not only the fourth commandment, but THE

aware of the fact that his remarks on the sanctity of the Sabbath were causing "some fluttering in certain quarters." Within a month of the appearance of the Beecher article, Garrison noted that his comments had already subjected him to a great deal of censure by both the religious press and by private individuals. He was especially grieved by a letter which he received from a Massachusetts minister who wrote, "I have thought of you as another Wilberforce—but would Wilberforce have spoken thus of the day on which the Son of God rose from the dead?" In defense of his position, the abolitionist noted that John Calvin, Thomas Belsham, George Fox, Martin Luther, and "many other distinguished commentators and pious men" had also maintained that under the gospel dispensation there was no such thing as a "holy day," and that all of man's time ought to be sanctified by works of righteousness. 43

In an August 27 editorial, Garrison sought to calm the tempest that his new views on the Sabbath had caused. He was not opposed to the religious observance of the first day of the week-"if it be voluntary," but he was of the decided opinion that any attempt to enforce its observance as a peculiarly "holy day" by "pains and penalties," whether civil or ecclesiastical, should be

WHOLE DECALOGUE!" Liberator, July 23, 1836. See also Liberator, August 6, 1836, August 27, 1836; Garrison to William S. Porter, July 30, 1836 in New England Spectator, August 17, 1836; Garrison to Samuel J. May, September 8, 1838, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

⁴³ Garrison to Henry E. Benson, August 11, 1836 in Ruchames, Letters, II, 156; Garrison to Henry E. Benson, August 18, 1836, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to Henry E. Benson, August 21, 1836, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 166-167; Garrison to Effingham L. Capron, August 24, 1836, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

resisted by "all the Lord's freemen" as an act of tyranny. The editor assured his readers that the appearance of the July 23 article did not mean that he was going to allow himself or his paper to be diverted from the antislavery cause. He had merely tried to warn America's religionists about being overly dogmatic on the subject of an exact and formal observance of the Sabbath. Since the question of the divinity of the Sabbath was "not strictly sectarian, but general," it was obvious that his remarks were not to be construed as an attack upon the "peculiar tenets or ecclesiastical arrangements of any sect."

Any hopes which Garrison may have had of quashing the protest over his anti-Sabbatarian views were dashed when the Sabbath issue became entangled in the clerical appeals controversy. In their "Protest of Clerical Abolitionists, No. 2," which first appeared in the New England Spectator of August 2, 1837, Charles Fitch and Joseph Towne noted that they had "entertained suspicions of the Liberator" ever since its editor commenced his "attack upon the Sabbath." When they had first discovered that the formerly upright Garrison was determined to forward sentiments which were "calculated to remove from the minds of men that pressure of obligation which heaven has laid upon them, to devote a seventh portion of time to the public worship of God," they were "deeply pained." They were especially concerned because his sentiments were "disguised under the cloak of philanthropy." Pernicious principles, "coming from such a source, and mingled with so much that is true," were "un-Speakably more dangerous" than the attacks of an open and avowed

Liberator, August 27, 1836. See also speech at Boston, January 27, 1837, in Liberator, February 11, 1837.

enemy. It was now evident to those who knew his "peculiar theological notions" that, in Garrison's vocabulary, "abolition" meant the abolition of the Christian ordinances, the Christian ministry, and the visible church. 45

In a letter which Garrison printed in the columns of his weekly in early September, the sentiments of the Clerical Protest were seconded by James Woodbury, an Acton, Massachusetts clergyman. Responding to the charges levelled against him by Fitch, Towne, and Woodbury, Garrison declared that on the Sabbath question he was as orthodox as John Calvin. As to the Christian ordinances, he asserted his belief in "eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Incarnate Word, and being baptized into the death of the Son of God." In addition, he considered the Christian ministry to be a "royal priesthood" of the character described in I Peter 2:9 and held to a "visible church," but one that was visible only to those who were "gifted with spiritual vision." Such was the true nature of the "jacobinical heresies" with which the three ministers had sought to brand him in hopes of kindling a "sectarian flame in the bosoms of abolitionists" which would consume the "ties of a common brotherhood" which bound them in allegiance to the cause of the slave. 46

Garrison was again forced to take a defensive stance when William S. Porter, editor of the <u>New England Spectator</u>, charged that many of the black people of Boston were following his example and neglecting "the Sabbath and the house of God." Denying Porter's

Liberator, September 8, 1837.

⁴⁶ J. T. Woodbury to Charles Fitch and Joseph H. Towne, August 17, 1837, in <u>Liberator</u>, September 1, 1837; <u>Liberator</u>, September 1, 1837, September 8, 1837.

claims and declaring that his "new-born zeal" for the Sabbath was merely "personal hostility." Garrison compared the journalist to those scribes and Pharisees who "watched him [Christ]. whether he would heal on the sabbath-day, that they might find an accusation against him." In Garrison's estimation. Porter's defense of the Sabbath placed him in the camp of the legalists who were endeavoring to obtain righteousness by the law. "What is your 'eternal life'?" he asked, "The ten commandments!" The editor of the Spectator seemed to be ignorant of the fact that mankind had been delivered from the law--that men were now supposed to "serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." His critical article only proved him to be a "deceitful and bigoted man" who delighted to "take refuge in formal hypocrisy." To Porter's charge that he neglected "the house of God" on the Sabbath, Garrison replied that it was one of his "legal impostures" to represent a building made of bricks and mortar as God's "house." Since there was no such "holy building" on earth, it was impossible for anyone to "neglect that which does not exist." To the charge that he "did his own pleasure" on the Sabbath, Garrison wrote, "This is a libel upon that Spirit which has translated me from darkness into marvellous light My meat and drink is to do the will of my heavenly Father. It is not my object, on any day, to 'do my own pleasure,' in a worldly sense.... The things of this world--its pursuits, its honors, its emulations, its fortunes, its reputations -- I tread under my feet." 47

Liberator, October 27, 1837; Garrison to William S. Porter, October 20, 1837, in Liberator, October 27, 1837. See also Luke 6:7 and Romans 7:6. In his October 20 reply to the editor of the Spectator, Garrison wrote: "Remember, this language is not uttered for effect, or boastingly. Few men in the world have less to do with profession than myself; nay, my crime is, that I have not made what

Still another "mighty stir" was created in October 1840 when The Liberator printed the call for the Chardon Street Convention. This gathering was held in Boston in mid-November to "examine the validity of the views which generally prevail in this country as to the divine appointment of the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath, and to inquire into the origin, nature and authority of the institutions of the Ministry and the Church, as now existing."48 Although Garrison's name was not appended to the call, he was generally given credit for sponsoring the "infidel convention." Once again his opponents rushed to the attack. In a letter to his brother-in-law, George Benson, Garrison noted that not only was "the priesthood" upset, but that even some of their "professed antislavery friends" were also filled with dismay by the call. "Cowards!" he raged, "not to know that truth is mightier than error, and that it is darkness, and not light, that is afraid of investigation." As for himself, the abolitionist asserted that none of this opposition disturbed him. "I can 'smile at Satan's rage, and face a frowning world, "" he wrote, "for my trust is in the Lord, and Christ is my Redeemer."49

At the convention itself, Garrison found himself surrounded

is called 'a public profession of religion.' But of what value are professions where fruits are wanting? or what need of professions where fruits abound?"

⁴⁸ The Sabbath question was actually the only issue considered by the convention. Ralph Waldo Emerson later described those in attendance as "madmen, madwomen, men with beards, Dunkers, Muggletonians, Come-outers, Groaners, Agrarians, Seventh-day-Baptists, Quakers, Abolitionists, Calvinists, Unitarians and Philosophers." Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Chardon Street Convention," in Lectures and Biographical Sketches (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1886), p. 352.

⁴⁹ Garrison and Garrison, Life, II, 422-424; Liberator, October 16, 1840; Garrison to George W. Benson, November 1, 1840, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 722.

by men much more radical than himself. Although he strongly opposed a proposition calling for the recognition of the first day of the week as a divinely established Christian Sabbath, he also championed the authority of the Scriptures against those who would deny that they were the only proper "foundation" upon which to base a discussion of the Sabbath. When a storm of protest greeted Joshua Himes' suggestion that the convention accept only the Old and New Testaments as proof for all arguments, Garrison came to his aid by requesting that all those who rejected divine authority be barred from participating. As he later wrote, "At the opening of the Convention, and on various occasions during the discussion, I expressly declared that I stood upon the Bible, and the Bible alone, in regard to my views of 'the Sabbath, the church, and the ministry'....

My arguments were all drawn from the Bible, and from no other source."50

Despite the fact that the three days of meetings ended without any definite vote or action on the Sabbath question, Garrison was nevertheless punished for his attendance. In early December he wrote that the convention had made "no small stir" in the community and was bringing "fresh vials of wrath upon my devoted head as a heretic, an infidel, etc." One month later he complained to George Benson that The Liberator had lost upwards of 700 subscribers during

⁵⁰Garrison and Garrison, Life, II, 424-426; Thomas, Liberator, pp. 301-304; Liberator, January 29, 1841; Lindsay Swift, William Lloyd Garrison (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Company, 1911), p. 204. In 1835 Garrison asserted that "it is because human enactments are consulted and obeyed, rather than the infallible code of laws given by the Almighty, so many hurtful customs and practices abound...to learn my duty, I will not consult any other statute-book than THE BIBLE; and whatsoever requirement of man I believe is opposed to the spirit of the gospel, I will at all hazards disobey." Liberator, July 4, 1835.

the past year. "The Sabbath Convention has been more than they could tolerate;" he wrote, "and to save the formal observance of the first day of the week, they are willing that slavery should be perpetuated."⁵¹

In addition to the opposition of the churchmen there were two other significant factors which contributed to the changes effected in Garrison's religious beliefs between 1835 and 1840. The first involved the contact which he had with members and doctrines of the Society of Friends. In answering Rev. Nathaniel Colver's charge that he had "headed an infidel Convention" at the Chardon Street Chapel, the abolitionist noted that he was as strongly opposed to infidelity as he was to priestcraft and slavery. He claimed that his religious sentiments were as "rigid and uncompromising as those promulgated by Christ himself"--"excepting as they relate to certain outward forms and observances, and respecting these I entertain the views of 'Friends.'" In the antislavery

⁵¹ Garrison to Elizabeth Pease, December 1, 1840, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 731; Garrison to George W. Benson, January 7, 1841, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. See also Garrison to John A. Collins, December 1, 1840, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. In response to Louis Filler's assertion to the contrary, Aileen Kraditor has written that reformers such as Arthur Tappan, who held to rigid sabbatarian principles and exhibited an anti-Catholic bias. probably outraged fewer potential abolitionists than did Garrison with his antisabbatarianism and defense of women's rights. She noted: "Anti-Catholicism and sabbatarianism were quite respectable with the evangelical Protestants among whom the abolitionists exerted their main efforts at conversion." Aileen S. Kraditor, Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850 (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 75. See also Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), p. 130.

⁵²Liberator, January 29, 1841. Feeling that the observance of special times and ceremonies was unnecessary and stressing the need for a daily rebirth of Christ in the heart, the early Friends proclaimed every day as the Lord's day and every week as Holy Week. Believing in a spiritual baptism and communion, the Quakers considered

crusade Garrison had become acquainted with many Quakers -- Benjamin Lundy, Arnold Buffum, Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Elizabeth Pease among them. Since these members of the Society of Friends differed from one another in their interpretations of Quaker beliefs, it was not surprising to find them, as well as many other Friends, taking various positions on the slavery issue. The editor of The Liberator. not being one to allow differences of opinion to exist in the area of antislavery doctrine, was often moved to criticize the Quakers for their "lukewarmness" toward Garrisonian immediatism. He contrasted their lack of enthusiasm for the abolitionist creed with that of their English brethren who had met "the opposing hosts of oppression" with great courage and zeal. It was not enough that the Friends were not slaveholders or that some of them occasionally bore "the testimony of a few words" against slavery. His desire was to have "not one, or ten, or a hundred, but all be quickened" in the "benevolent work" of abolishing the American system of bondage. 53

Two Friends who apparently met Garrison's standards of benevolence were James and Lucretia Mott, early opponents of slavery and, after 1827, members of the Hicksite branch of the Society. 54

the Christian Sacraments to be mere rituals without any real significance. Formal creeds were shunned. They did not believe that religious services had to be held in certain consecrated buildings. Neither did they believe that the Scriptures could be considered the principle ground of truth or that an ordained ministry was a necessary feature of Christian worship. The Friends held that God was known directly. Since He was present in every human heart, all men had within themselves the true source of their religious inspiration.

⁵³Garrison to Samuel J. May, March 14, 1837, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 233; Liberator, May 1, 1840; Garrison to Mary Benson, November 27, 1835 in Merrill, Letters, I, 564. See also Johnson, Garrison and His Times, p. 251.

⁵⁴ After 1815, Elias Hicks became recognized as the champion of certain liberal views which the more conservative Friends believed

During a trip to Philadelphia in 1835, Garrison greatly enjoyed and appreciated the hospitality offered him by the quaker couple. In their home the abolitionist found "much of the disinterestedness, purity and peace of heaven." He described Lucretia as "a bold and fearless thinker, in the highest degree conscientious, of most amiable manners, and truly instructive in her conversation." Her husband was no less worthy of praise--being "distinguished for his goodness, benignity and philanthropy." As a guest in their home he did not find it "very difficult" to comply with the Lord's "admirable injunction" to "love thy neighbor as thyself." In 1849, as he looked back upon his early meetings with the Motts, Garrison recalled that, even though he was "strongly sectarian" in his religious beliefs at the time--" and hence uncharitable in judgment touching theological differences of opinion," they nevertheless manifested a "most kind, tolerant, catholic spirit," toward him and gave him their "cordial approbation and cheering countenance" as an advocate of the suffering slave. "If my mind has since become liberalized in any degree, (and I think it has burst every sectarian trammel,)" he wrote, "--if theological dogmas which I once regarded as essential to Christianity, I now repudiate as absurd and pernicious, -- I am

to be radical and dangerous. To Hicks, outward authorities, external performances, and historical revelations were relatively unimportant. He held that the ministry, the Bible, and even the historic Christ were unnecessary for experiencing the Inner Light. These views, along with his charges that the Quaker elders were seeking to fasten a yoke of enforced orthodoxy upon the Society and to introduce an evangelical movement patterned after the revivalistic methods of the Methodists, resulted in an 1827 schism. Not all of the Hicksites shared his anti-Trinitarianism, but all agreed that the Inner Light, spoken of in John 1:9, was supreme and that Quakers should have the right to entertain divergent views on theological matters. See Bliss Forbush, Elias Hicks: Quaker Liberal (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956); Doherty, Hicksite Separation.

largely indebted to them for the change."55

Lest it be thought that the respect which Garrison had for several of the Friends' doctrines was solely the result of his admiration for certain Quaker personalities, it must be noted that, on the whole, the beliefs themselves and not the men and women who held them were what he valued most highly. He realized that a number of the principles which he had come to cherish were similar to those upon which the Friends operated. In a letter which he wrote to his wife's sister, Mary, in 1835, Garrison described the Quakers as a religious body whose "great leading, fundamental principles are more in harmony with mine than those of any other." By 1841 he could complain that he was being "persecuted...for the crime of cherishing their peculiar sentiments, substantially in regard to the sabbath, the church & the ministry." The realization that he was supported in his beliefs by the members of the oft-persecuted, traditionally antislavery sect served to strengthen Garrison's confidence in the correctness of his views. 56

⁵⁵Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, March 19, 1835, in Merrill, Letters, I, 467-468; Liberator, November 9, 1849. See also Matthew 19: 19, 22:39, and Mark 12:31.

Letters, I, 563-564; Garrison to Elizabeth Pease, June 1, 1841, Houghton Library, Harvard University. In 1838, Garrison wrote that his views of the Sabbath were in accord with those held by John Calvin, Thomas Belsham, Joseph Priestley, William Penn, George Fox, and Robert Barclay, "and which chiefly distinguish the Society of Friends from other religious sects." He then noted: "As a christian, I hold to the sanctification of seven days in a week, instead of one day in seven, as under the Jewish institution. I discard all human creeds, and all ecclesiastical combinations, and all observances of times and seasons, and all rites, ceremonies, forms and ordinances, as constituting no part of christianity, and as being contrary to that liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free. I deny that there is, now, any worldly sanctuary or ordinances of divine service, or any priestly office, except that which is exclusively occupied by him

The abolitionist and the Friends shared a special kinship in their opposition to war. Influenced greatly by the Yankee pacifist and founder of the American Peace Society, William Ladd, Garrison declared his pacifism early in life. The subject of war and the exertions of Ladd in behalf of peace were frequently alluded to in his early newspapers. In the fall of 1829, after being forced to pay a fine for failing to appear at the May militia muster he wrote that, although he was "not professedly a Quaker," he "heartily, entirely and practically" embraced the doctrine of non-resistance. Being "conscientiously opposed" to all "military exhibitions," the young editor declared that he would never obey any order to bear arms, but instead would "cheerfully suffer imprisonment and persecution" for his refusal to enroll in the "sanguinary school" which trained men to become "skilful murderers." By 1835 he could write that, although it was a "difficult lesson to learn," he was more and more convinced that it was the duty of the followers of Christ to "suffer themselves to be defrauded, calumniated and barbarously treated, without resorting either to their own physical energies, or to the force of human law, for restitution or punishment."57

Three years later Garrison played a major role in the formation of the New England Non-Resistance Society. In the Declaration of Sentiments which he penned for the September, 1838 Peace Convention,

^{&#}x27;who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.'" Garrison to Francis Jackson, June 18, 1838, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 368-369.

⁵⁷Thomas, <u>Liberator</u>, pp. 49-51; Garrison and Garrison, <u>Life</u>, I, 113, 125; Garrison to Jacob Horton, June 27, 1829, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; <u>Genius of Universal Emancipation</u>, September 16, 1829; Garrison to Mary Benson, November 27, 1835, in Merrill, <u>Letters</u>, I, 563.

he showed the extent to which he was willing to transcend simple pacifism. The Declaration denied allegiance to any human government, recognized no ruler but God and Christ, and recommended the abolition of all armies, navies, arsenals and military fortifications. Since the laws enacted by human governments were enforced "virtually at the point of the bayonet," the members of the Non-Resistance Society vowed not to hold any office which imposed upon its occupant the obligation to "compel men to do right, on pain of imprisonment or death." Thus, they voluntarily excluded themselves from all legislative and judicial bodies and repudiated all "human politics, worldly honors, and stations of authority." Those who signed Garrison's document pledged themselves to abide by the belief that the "penal code" of the old covenant, "AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH," had been abrogated by Christ and that, under the new covenant, the forgiveness, rather than the punishment of enemies, had been enjoined upon His disciples "in all cases whatsoever."58

In the Declaration, Garrison asserted that the members of the Society advocated "no jacobinical doctrines." Many of those who read the document were not easily convinced that this was

Liberator, September 28, 1838. See also Exodus 21:24,
Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21, and Matthew 5:38-39. Just prior
to the Peace Convention, Garrison wrote: "The desire of putting my
enemies into a prison, or inflicting any kind of chastisement upon
them, except of a moral kind, is utterly eradicated from my breast.
I can conceive of no provocations greater than those which my Lord
and Master suffered unresistingly. In dying upon the cross, that
his enemies might live--in asking for their forgiveness in the extremity of his agonies--he has shown me how to meet all my foes,
ay, and to conquer them, or, at least, to triumph over them."
Garrison to Samuel J. May, September 8, 1838, in Ruchames, Letters,
II, 387. See also Liberator, December 12, 1835; Garrison to
Henry E. Benson, December 15, 1835, Garrison Papers, Boston Public
Library; Liberator, December 7, 1838.

entirely true. Non-resistance, when added to his other "heresies," was simply too much for some of the abolitionist's sympathizers to bear. Amos Phelps, for one, resigned his post as General Agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in protest against Garrison's course of action. As might be expected, such opposition scarcely phased the crusading editor. In a June 1839 letter to Samuel J. May he wrote, "Notwithstanding the clamor that is raised about the non-resistance principles and doctrines, I am more and more satisfied that they constitute the very kingdom of heaven which the Prince of Peace came to establish; and also the real atonement which Jesus died to make, that the world might be reconciled unto God." 59

The third important factor which contributed to the modification of Garrison's religious beliefs between 1835 and 1840 was related to the exposure which he had to the nineteenth-century doctrine of perfectionism. One could not read his 1838 Declaration of Sentiments without realizing that he had come under the influence of John Humphrey Noyes' perfectionist ideas. The abolitionist

Reformers, P. 115; Garrison to Samuel J. May, June 22, 1839, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 495; Liberator, September 28, 1838. See also Kraditor, Means and Ends, p. 51. For other examples of the confidence which he had in the principles of the Non-Resistance Society see Garrison to Mary Benson, December 23, 1838; Garrison to Samuel J. May, January 4, 1839, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. For other examples of his views on non-resistance, war, and government prior to 1841 see Garrison to James Mott, March 4, 1839, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 440-441; Speech at Boston, March 4, 1839, in Liberator, March 8, 1839; Garrison to George W. Benson, September 29, 1839, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Liberator, October 11, 1839; Garrison to Charles Stearns, February 10, 1840, in Liberator, February 14, 1840; Garrison to Edmund Quincy, June 13, 1840, Garrison Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

Noyes was a graduate of Dartmouth College and had studied for the ministry at Andover and Yale. While at the latter institution, he became convinced that it was possible to attain perfect holiness in this life. He also developed a unique view of Christ's

first met the editor of The Perfectionist when Noyes visited the Anti-Slavery Office in Boston during the spring of 1837. After learning the identity of his visitor, Garrison spoke with interest of Noyes' monthly--which he had apparently been reading for several months, if not from its inception in 1834. He also told Noyes that his mind had been "heaving on the subject of Holiness and the Kingdom of Heaven" and said that he planned to devote more of his energies to it "as soon as he could get anti-slavery off his hands."

The Vermont editor then spoke to Garrison on the subject of human government--finding him "ripe for the loyalty of heaven." 61

A few days after their meeting, Noyes wrote his new friend a letter describing his determined opposition to all human governments and his supreme allegiance to the principles of perfect holiness. After declaring that he had subscribed his name to "an instrument similar to the Declaration of '76, renouncing all allegiance to the government of the United States, and asserting the title of Jesus Christ to the throne of the world," he asked if it

second coming--fixing it not in the future, but in 70 A.D. In early 1834 Noyes announced that he had attained a state of sinless perfection. As a result of the general opposition to his views he was deprived of his license to preach and was forced to withdraw from college. It was not long before he became convinced that monogamic marriage was incompatible with perfectionism and that human institutions were obstacles to human progress. See George Wallingford Noyes, ed., Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes (New York: Macmillan Company, 1923). Aileen Kraditor has written that Garrison was a nonresistant "because he was a perfectionist, believing that men were capable of obeying divine commands to be free of all sin and that when the time came when they were willing to follow Christ's example, social relations would be based on love, not on force." Kraditor, Means and Ends, pp. 103-104. For a study on the perfectionism of the early quakers see R. Newton Flew, The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology: An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Present Life (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), pp. 281-292.

⁶¹ Garrison and Garrison, Life, II, 114, 144-145.

was not "high time" for the abolitionists to abandon this same reprobate and oppressive government. Surely, he noted, many of them had heard the "great voice out of heaven" which commanded, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins and of her plagues." Noyes than reminded Garrison of their conversation:
"You said your mind was heaving on certain momentous subjects, and you only waited to set Anti-slavery in the sunshine before you turned your mind to those subjects. Allow me to suggest that you will set Anti-slavery in the sunshine only by making it tributary to Holiness." According to Noyes, the abolition cause would most assuredly be thrown "into the shade" if the Boston editor allowed it to "occupy the ground" which "ought to be occupied by UNIVERSAL EMANCIPATION FROM SIN."

The effect which Noyes' words had upon Garrison was evidenced in a letter which the abolitionist wrote to Henry C. Wright in mid-April. Asserting that human governments would remain in existence as long as men were "resolved not to bear the cross of Christ, and to be crucified unto the world," he noted that, in the "kingdom of God's dear Son," holiness and love were the "only magistracy." In Garrison's opinion, there was nothing more offensive to the religionists of the day than such "practical holiness." They despised the doctrine which taught that total abstinence from sin was "not only commanded but necessarily attainable" and stigmatized as "a delusion of the devil" the idea of being entirely free from sin. Their worldly wisdom, however, was of little importance when

^{62 &}lt;u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 145-148; John Humphrey Noyes to William Lloyd Garrison, March 22, 1837, in <u>Liberator</u>, October 13, 1837. See also Revelation 18:4.

compared with the teachings of God. Did it not say in Romans that "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death"? Had the Bible ceased to teach that "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature"? Was it not written that "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified"? 63

It was not long before Garrison began to defend Noyes' perfectionist ideas in the columns of The Liberator. In a June, 1837 article he held that human governments were the result of man's disobedience to "the requirements of heaven." They were preferable to a state of anarchy only in the same sense that a hail storm was to be preferred over an earthquake or an outbreak of smallpox over a cholera epidemic. If men would "render unto God the things that are God's" they would not need a "caesar" to rule over them. (The "kingdoms of this world" would then become "the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ" and all "principalities and powers" would of necessity terminate. To Garrison's mind, Noyes' "no government" theory only meant the "perfect reign of Christ throughout the earth." Accordingly, he was in favor of "subverting the rotten, unequal, anti-christian government of man, and establishing, as a substitute, that which is divine." His deepest hopes were expressed in a sonnet which he penned to usher in the year 1841. It read, in part:

⁶³Garrison to Henry C. Wright, April 16, 1837, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 258-259. See also Romans 8:1-2, II Corinthians, 5:17, and Hebrews 10:14.

Now let there be on earth an end of sin,
And all contention cease throughout the world;
The glorious reign of holiness begin,
And Satan's empire to the dust be hurled!

Garrison's conversion to perfectionism gave his opponents yet another reason for denouncing him as an infidel. As the furor over his many "heresies" grew in intensity, the abolitionist became increasingly defensive of his beliefs. Labeling his enemies as "truly pharisaical enemies of abolition." the Boston editor asserted that a true servant of Christ must expect to share in his Master's sufferings. If the priest and the Levite charged the Lord with having a devil, why should the modern day disciple marvel at being likewise defamed? As Christ had been persecuted, so must those who rallied under His banner expect persecution. "I am accused of being a Sabbath-breaker," he wrote, "--so was Jesus. Of being inimical to government -- so was Jesus. Of being a disturber of the peace of society -- so was Jesus. Of being hostile to the religion of the land--so was Jesus." Garrison claimed that such charges did not trouble him in the least. He was not disturbed to read that his opponents called him "a disturber of the peace." "an infidel." and "a pestilent fellow." It was seldom that a reformer, "however humble...his sphere of action," escaped being "arraigned by the tongue of malice" for some "special transgression." His adversaries knew, as well as he did, that "the truth is not in them"--that they were bearing false witness. 65

⁶⁴ Liberator, June 23, 1837, October 13, 1837, December 7, 1838, January 1, 1841. See also speech at Providence, July 4, 1837, in Liberator, July 28, 1837; Matthew 22:21 and Revelation 11:15.

⁶⁵ Garrison to Erasmus D. Hudson, September 8, 1838, in Liberator, October 26, 1838; Garrison to Francis Jackson, June 18, 1838, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 369-370; Garrison to Phebe Jackson, September 19, 1840, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 706; Garrison to

Declaring that since he had not been dismayed by the cries of "madman! fanatic! incendiary!" which greeted him at the outset of his antislavery career, he would not now allow himself to be disturbed by the cry of "infidel," the editor of The Liberator gave his readers a comprehensive description of the moral and religious views which he had come to hold by 1841. In the December 11, 1840 issue of his paper, Garrison wrote that his alleged heresies consisted of these things: a refusal to agree with the majority in regard to certain outward forms and observances; a disinclination to become a member of any religious sect or to adopt a "human creed" as his standard of conduct; a belief in the somewhat less than Christ-like character of the American clergy; a conviction that men could not be slaveholders and still possess the spirit of Christ; a refusal to support a pro-slavery priesthood or to recognize a pro-slavery church as a religious body; an assurance that it was not right for Christians to "imprison, hang or butcher" their enemies; a contempt for the assertion that human governments, upheld by military power, and administered by "wicked rulers" were divine; a disavowal of the necessity of sinning against God or "being always more or less in bondage to the devil"; a preference for "holiness of heart" over "holiness of time"--in the "true tabernacle which the Lord pitched" over a worldly sanctuary and the ordinances of divine service; a conception of spiritual worship and communion without the "intervention of any types or figures;" and finally, a refusal to make

Francis Jackson, June 28, 1836, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 374. See also Liberator, January 3, 1835, November 27, 1837; Garrison to Samuel Osgood, August 2, 1839, in Liberator, August 2, 1839; Garrison to Edmund Quincy, June 19, 1838, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; I John 2:4.

religion "a thing of circumstance, time or place"--to cause it to become something distinct from the every day pursuits and avocations of life. This, said Garrison, was the "head and front" of his "infidelity."

⁶⁶ Liberator, December 11, 1840. A statement of Garrison's beliefs, in poetical form, can be found in The Liberator, of August 25, 1837.

CHAPTER V

RELIGION OF A FREE LAND

Slavery gives character to the American people. It dictates their laws, gives tone to their literature, and shapes their religion.

--Frederick Douglass May 23, 1846

Following his escape from bondage in September 1838,

Frederick Douglass made his way to New York City where he was sheltered by David Ruggles, secretary of the New York Vigilance Committee and editor of an antislavery quarterly called The Mirror of

Liberty. While staying with Ruggles, the fugitive slave was joined by his fiancée, Anna Murray, a young black woman whom Douglass had met while living in Baltimore. Anna had encouraged him to flee to the North and had given him money to finance his escape. After they were married by Rev. James W. C. Pennington, himself an ex-slave from Maryland, the newlyweds traveled to New Bedford, Massachusetts where they hoped to build a new and better life. 1

Encouraged by the prospects before him and by the memories of the satisfying Christian fellowship which he had enjoyed in

Douglass, Life, pp. 202-206; Quarles, Frederick Douglass, pp. 8-10. Anna Murray Douglass, free-born daughter of a Denton, Maryland slave couple, had first met Frederick when she was a house-keeper for a wealthy family in Baltimore. She, too, was a member of the Methodist Church. The only source of information on Mrs. Douglass' early life is Rosetta Douglass Sprague, Anna Murray Douglass: My Mother as I Recall Her (pamphlet, Washington, D.C., 1900).

Baltimore, Douglass sought to join a local Methodist congregation. In pursuit of this end, he attended a Sunday morning worship service at the Elm Street Methodist Church in New Bedford. Upon entering the sanctuary and proceeding a short way up the aisle, an usher touched Douglass on the shoulder saying, "The colored people sit up there." The portion of the gallery to which he was directed contained seats that were different from those occupied by the white members of the congregation. The partitions between the black pews were so high that only a very tall person could see the pulpit when seated. Douglass was disturbed by this proscription and did not listen to the worship service in a "very devotional frame of mind." Nevertheless, he chose to regard this shabby treatment as an accomodation to the prejudices of those in attendance who "had not yet been won to Christ and his brotherhood," and he tolerated it "lest sinners should be driven away from the saving power of the gospel." · Once converted, he thought, they would treat him as a man and a brother.9

The ex-slave held higher expectations for the converted portion of the church body. Surely, he said to himself, these Christian people have none of this feeling against color. They, at least, have renounced this prejudice. When none but the saints are assembled, they will certainly recognize the colored people as children of the same Father and heirs of the same salvation, on equal terms with themselves. He was soon to learn that these charitable assumptions were false.

Helen Pitts Douglass, ed., <u>In Memoriam</u>: <u>Frederick Douglass</u> (Freeport, New York: Books For Libraries Press, 1971, Reprint of the 1897 edition), p. 242; Douglass, <u>Bondage</u>, pp. 350-351.

It being the quarterly meeting, Douglass had an opportunity to see the "religious part of the congregation by themselves." At the close of the "very solemn and searching" sermon, the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was observed. After the unconverted portion of the assembly was dismissed, the half dozen or so Negro members of the church descended from the gallery and seated themselves against the wall most distant from the altar. The minister, Reverend Bonney, sang "Salvation 'tis a Joyful Sound" and then began to administer the sacrament to the white members. When all of the whites had received the bread and wine. Rev. Bonney turned to the colored members and, extending both hands in an inviting and pleading manner, exclaimed, "And now let our dear colored brethren and sisters come forward; come forward, brethren and sisters, come forward, and partake of the sacred emblems, for God is no respecter of persons." Douglass did not go forward. He went out, never to visit the Elm Street church again. Disillusioned and saddened by this experience, the former slave found it impossible to respect the religious profession of those "believers" who were held captive by the forces of anti-Negro prejudice.) He could not therefore feel that in joining such a church, he would be joining a truly Christian organization.3

In subsequent weeks, Douglass attended other churches in New Bedford with the same result. When one of them was holding a revival, he attempted to attend one of the meetings, only to be stopped by one of the deacons, and told, in a pious tone, "We don't allow niggers in here"! Douglass had not yet become fully acquainted

Douglass, Bondage, pp. 351-353; Douglass, In Memoriam, p. 242.

with the Garrisonian view of the church. He could easily see, from his own experience, how the slaveholding church of the South, with its Coveys, Weedens, Aulds, and Hopkins could put on a facade of holiness while being corrupt and sinful within, but he could not as yet understand why the churches of the North refused to treat him as a brother in Christ. After numerous rebuffs from white ministers and deacons, Douglass joined a small sect of his own people, led by Rev. Thomas James, himself an escaped slave. Here he enjoyed "many seasons of peace and joy," eventually becoming a class leader and lay preacher in the little schoolhouse on Second Street which served as a church home.

While engaged in these activities, Douglass was also becoming involved in the antislavery movement. As a slave, he had often overheard Hugh Auld and other white men discussing "abolitionists." He did not know exactly what the term implied, but quickly discerned that those referred to as such were "most cordially hated and soundly abused" by the slaveholders. If a slave had made good his escape from bondage, it was usually said that he had been persuaded and

Douglass, Bondage, pp. 351, 353; Holland, Colored Orator, p. 41; Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, January 1, 1846, in Liberator, January 30, 1846.

Douglass, Bondage, p. 353; Holland, Colored Orator, p. 42. In his autobiography, Rev. James wrote that when he was preaching in New Bedford in 1841, he heard Douglass speak and licensed him to preach. Benjamin Guarles and Philip Foner doubt whether this actually happened since there is no mention of Douglass in the official list of ministers and preachers of the African Methodist Church in 1842. See Wonderful Eventful Life of Thomas James, By Himself (Rochester: Post Express Printing Co., 1886), p. 6; Guarles, Frederick Douglass, p. 11; Foner, Frederick Douglass, p. 381; African Methodist Episcopal Church Magazine, I (December, 1842), 89; Washington Evening Star, February 21, 1895; Amy Hanmer-Croughton, "Anti-Slavery Days in Rochester," in Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series, Vol. XIV (Rochester: Rochester Historical Society, 1936), p. 114.

assisted by the abolitionists. If a slave struck his overseer or committed any crime or violent act out of the ordinary, it was said to be the fruit of the abolition movement. Young Douglass was determined to find out who these abolitionists were and to discover why they engendered so much hatred among the slaveholders. Surely, whatever else they might be, they could not be unfriendly to the chattel. "An old volume" of Walker's dictionary afforded little help, but the pages of a Baltimore newspaper provided him with much "incendiary information." In the columns of the American, Douglass read that a vast number of petitions and memorials had been presented to Congress, praying for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and for the abolition of the interstate slave trade. With this bit of news in hand, the vexing problem of the abolitionists' identity and mission was solved. Thereafter. whenever the young slave heard the words "abolition" or "abolition movement" mentioned, he felt the matter to be one of personal concern.

Haunted by the lingering memory of the Nat Turner insurrection, the residents of Baltimore were, during the same period, further plagued with multitudinous anxieties and fears created by the threat of a deadly cholera epidemic. As Douglass later noted, "the thought was present, that God was angry with the white people because of their slaveholding wickedness, and, therefore, his judgments were abroad in the land." The young Christian juxtaposed this line of reasoning with his thoughts on abolition and came to the conclusion that there was much to be hoped for from the antislavery men since

Douglass, Bondage, pp. 163-165; Frederick Douglass, "Reminiscences," Cosmopolitan, VII (August, 1889), 377.

their movement was "supported by the Almighty, and armed with

Douglass continued to learn about the abolitionists after his escape to the North. He "had already the spirit of the movement, and only needed to understand its principles and measures."

This understanding was gained from reading The Liberator and associating with those who "believed in that paper." Within five months of his arrival in New Bedford, Douglass was a subscriber to Garrison's weekly. Through it, he obtained "a clear apprehension" of the principles of the antislavery movement. He not only liked, but "loved" the paper and its editor. Garrison seemed to be an all-sufficient match for the opponents of emancipation, a man of power and principle, his words "full of holy fire, and straight to the point."

The Liberator took its place in Douglass' heart "second only to the Bible," while its editor became his greatest hero.

Caught up in the spirit of Garrisonianism, Douglass began to attend the meetings of local black abolitionists. At one such gathering, he spoke in favor of resolutions condemning slavery, commending Garrison as "deserving of our confidence and support," and denouncing colonization. Every two weeks he attended a social meeting at the home of a local Quaker to discuss antislavery principles and events. Soon Douglass began to assume a position of leadership within the New Bedford abolition movement.

⁷Douglass, Bondage, pp. 165-166.

^{8 &}lt;u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 354-356; Douglass, <u>Life</u>, p. 213.

^{9&}lt;u>Liberator</u>, March 29, 1839; <u>Liberator</u>, July 9, 1841; H. S. to Lydia Maria Child, August 14, 1841, in <u>National Anti-Slavery Standard</u>, August 26, 1841; Foner, <u>Frederick Douglass</u>, pp. 25-26.

Douglass first heard William Lloyd Garrison speak at a meeting of the Bristol Anti-Slavery Society. No "face and form" had ever impressed him with "such sentiments and such hopes" as did those of the Boston editor. There seemed to be no contradiction between the speech and the man, only absolute sympathy and oneness. His words were "mighty in truth" and "mighty in their simple earnestness." Garrison's power did not appear to emanate from any type of "dazzling rhetoric," but from his character, his convictions, and his high moral purpose. Despite the fact that, on this occasion, Garrison announced nearly all of his "heretical" views, Douglass could not help feeling that here was the man, the Moses raised up by God to deliver the black man from bondage. In him, he saw "the resurrection and the life of the dead and buried hopes of my enslaved people." 10

Douglass' abolition activities and his participation in the Methodist meetings at the Second Street schoolhouse soon brought him to the attention of the Garrisonians. On August 12, 1841, at a convention in Nantucket, Douglass was invited to say a few words to the assembled friends of abolition. His recounting of the cruelties endured while a slave in Maryland brought an immediate response from John A. Collins. The general agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society urged Douglass to become a paid lecturer for the society. After some hesitation, Douglass accepted Collins' offer. 11 Had this

Douglass, "Reminiscences," pp. 378-379; Douglass, Life, pp. 213-214; Holland, Colored Orator, p. 43.

William Lloyd Garrison [Jr], "Frederick Douglass as Orator and Reformer," Our Day, XIV (August, 1894), 182; Douglass, Bondage, pp. 357-359; National Anti-Slavery Standard, August 26, 1841. There is some confusion as to who first induced Douglass to become an antislavery lecturer. Rev. Thomas James claimed that it

event not occurred, it is entirely possible that Douglass would have become a minister. On the other hand, he had seen much in both the northern and southern branches of the church to dissuade him from following such a path. He was soon to see still more.

New Bedford had become engaged in a "season of revivals."

Many of the inhabitants repented of their sins and were converted.

But, as Douglass saw it, the evangelical practices of the local

Christians left much to be desired. Judged by their deeds, it seemed as if they likened the kingdom of heaven to a fishing net from which all those fish having "rather black scales" had to be sorted out and packed by themselves. Among those who experienced religion at this

was his action in calling upon the ex-slave to speak from the pulpit of his church which resulted in Douglass' being hired in 1841. There is probably an element of truth in this claim since the man who invited Frederick to speak at Nantucket, William C. Coffin, had heard him speak at one of James's meetings. Garrison's sons believed that their father, through Collins, was the prime mover in the affair. Charles Chesnutt agreed with this viewpoint, but noted that the idea had doubtless occurred to more than one of the abolitionist leaders who heard the Nantucket speech. Indeed, Edmund Quincy asserted that he was the first person to approach Douglass on the subject. James Buffum claimed joint credit with Garrison for Douglass' employment. John Collins has also been touted as the initiator of the idea. However, in 1845, Garrison wrote that Collins and others only "seconded" his own efforts to bring Douglass into the fold. Three years later, Douglass himself wrote that Garrison had "put it into my head that I might make myself serviceable to the cause of the slave by devoting a portion of my time to telling my own sorrows, and those of other slaves which had come under my observation." See Hanmer-Croughton, "Anti-Slavery Days," p. 115; Garrison and Garrison, Life, III, 20; Chesnutt, Frederick Douglass, p. 33; Quarles, Frederick Douglass, p. 14; Foner, Frederick Douglass, p. 381; Edmund Quincy to Richard D. Webb, December 13, 1845, Anti-Slavery Letters to William Lloyd Garrison and Others, Boston Public Library; James N. Buffum, Commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society (Philadelphia: T. S. Dando & Co., 1884), p. 42; Benjamin Quarles, Black Abolitionists (New York Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 63; Douglass, Narrative, p. vii; Douglass to Thomas Auld, September 3, 1848, in Anti-Slavery Bugle, September 29, 1848.

¹²Quarles, Frederick Douglass, p. 14.

time was a young black girl. She was baptised in the same water as the white children, but when she passed the communion cup to one of her fellow converts, a look of disgust crossed the face of the white Christian. Refusing to partake of "the precious blood which had been shed for all" because it had been touched by the lips of a Negro, the white girl fled the church. "Such was the religion she had experienced," commented Douglass. 13

As such incidents drove him further and further from a veneration for and a respect of the Church, the abolition movement loomed ever larger in his thoughts. Eventually, he began to speak of the antislavery cause in a manner, and with a vocabulary, usually reserved for spiritual things. His new lecturing career was "the commencement of a higher state of existence" than any to which he had previously aspired. He claimed that the excellent example offered him by the "pure, enlightened and benevolent" society to which he now belonged had exerted a beneficial influence on his mind and had moved him to rid himself of violent thoughts and much of his early dislike of white people. Since abolitionism, "the light of God's truth," had broken in upon his "dark mind,"/he had become "a friend of that religion which teaches us to pray for our enemies -- which, instead of shooting balls into their hearts, loves This was not, to Douglass' mind, the type of religion practiced by the white Christians of New Bedford.

Black Methodism also began to lose its attraction. Douglass

¹³ Speech at Plymouth County Anti-Slavery Society, December, 1841, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, December 23, 1841.

Douglass to Thomas Auld, September 3, 1848, in Anti-Slavery Bugle, September 29, 1848; Speech at New York City, October 22, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 28, 1847.

came to the conclusion that Rev. James's little church "consented to the same spirit which held my brethren in chains." The pastor had been persuaded by the other New Bedford clergymen to join them in refusing to give out notices of antislavery meetings. This stand was unacceptable to the ardent new abolitionist and caused him to leave James's circle of believers. He did, however, continue to serve, on occasion, as a lay preacher at the Second Street school-house. 15

As the abolition platform started to eclipse the pulpit in Douglass' esteem, Garrison began to usurp the position of religious advisor in his heart. He was proud to follow along in the "thin but brave" ranks of that "great and good man," William Lloyd Garrison. Douglass thought that the Boston editor had done what all the great reformers and pioneers in the cause of freedom or religion had ever been called upon to do. He had made himself unpopular in the fight for the maintenance of great principles. He had given of his personal reputation, his individual property, and his "wide and gianthearted" intellect so that others could reap a rich reward from the labors that he had bestowed and the "seed which he had sown."

Surely, to stand up for such a man when attacked and maligned was the true position. Believing as he did, Douglass came to the

¹⁵ Douglass, Bondage, p. 354; Holland, Colored Orator, p. 42. In 1895, Douglass questioned the wisdom of leaving the Elm Street congregation for the smaller group led by Rev. Thomas James. He wrote: "It would have, perhaps, been better to have endured and patiently awaited the silent operations of more enlightened views, especially since there was not the high intelligence in the little Second street Methodist pulpit, which I found in that of the Elm street church." Douglass to Leonard B. Ellis, January 5, 1895, in New Bedford Evening Journal, February 21, 1895.

conclusion that there was "no man whose judgement I would follow sooner than his."

Garrison reciprocated in these sentiments of praise. Encouraged by the ex-slave's devotion to the cause, as seen through the reports of correspondents and by personal observation, the chief abolitionist of Massachusetts saw in Douglass that "union of head and heart, which is indispensable to an enlightenment of the heads and a winning of the hearts of others." He did not find Douglass' personal power to lie chiefly in the fact that he had been a slave, brutally treated "even by those professing to have the same mind in them that was in Christ Jesus," but in the strength of his intellect, in the greatness of his spirit, and in the force of his eloquence. 17

During his first few months as an abolitionist lecturer,
Douglass traveled with John A. Collins. At country-wide meetings
they would be joined by Garrison, Parker Pillsbury, Stephen S.
Foster, Abby Kelley, and other leaders of the movement. Douglass'
speeches were usually narrations of his own experiences as a slave.
One of the most effective portions of his platform repertoire was a
satiric version of a slave-holding minister's sermon. In a canting
tone of voice, he would re-enact the scene at the slaveholding
altar. "Oh! if you wish to be happy in time, happy in eternity,
you must be obedient to your masters; their interest is yours,"

¹⁶ Douglass to Maria (Weston) Chapman, March 29, 1846, in Philip S. Foner, ed., The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass, I (New York: International Lublishers, 1950), 143; Speech at London, England, March 30, 1847, in Foner, Life and Writings, I, 217; Douglass to a friend, July 31, 1846, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁷ John A. Collins to William Lloyd Garrison, January 18, 1842, in <u>Liberator</u>, January 21, 1842; Douglass, <u>Narrative</u>, pp. viii, x; <u>Liberator</u>, March 5, 1847.

Douglass' "minister" would tell the assembled slaves. "How beautiful are the arrangements of Providence! Look at your hard, horny hands—see how nicely they are adapted to the labor you have to perform! Look at our delicate fingers, so exactly fitted for our station, and see how manifest it is that God deigned us to be his thinkers, and you the workers—oh! the wisdom of God." The sermon was usually followed by a parody on a familiar hymn about being saved from a burning hell and dwelling with Immanuel "in heavenly union." It began:

Come, saints and sinners, hear me tell, How pious priests whip Jack and Nell, And women buy, and children sell, And preach all sinners down to hell, And sing of heavenly union. 18

The bitterness which permeated Douglass' satire on the religion of the South was soon to become even more intense. On both sides of the Atlantic, during the years 1841-1848, the ex-slave denounced the slaveholding religion. He told his audiences that southern Christianity had been prostituted to such an extent that

¹⁸ Foner, Frederick Douglass, pp. 47, 50-51; Douglass, Bondage, p. 361; Douglass, Narrative, p. 124; Holland, Colored Orator, pp. 66-69; National Anti-Slavery Standard, December 23, 1841. In 1895, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote that people never became tired of hearing Douglass' sermon. Often after he had spoken for an hour. shouts would go up from the audience, asking for his famous parody. She remembered that several literary critics had pronounced it the best piece of satire in the English language. On her last visit to Douglass' Anacostia home, she asked the elderly abolitionist if he had ever allowed the sermon to be printed. He said no. She then asked if he could reproduce it. Once again, Douglass answered in the negative. He could not, he said, bring back the old feeling if he tried and he would not if he could. "The blessings of liberty I have so long enjoyed, and the many tender friendships I have with the Saxon race on both sides of the ocean, have taught me such sweet lessons of forgiveness that the painful memories of my early days are almost obliterated, and I would not recall them." Elizabeth Cady Stanton to an unidentified correspondent, February 21, 1895, in Douglass, In Memoriam, p. 44.

it now supported robbery and openly defended slavery by a perverted use of the scriptures. Slaveholding, slave buying, and slave trading was being carried on by members of all the leading denominations. Men, women, and children were sold to build churches, to purchase Bibles, and to support missionaries. Southern Christians allowed the bondsman's God-given intellect to stagnate and waste away. Indeed, the same people who professed "the largest liberty and devotion to the religion of Jesus Christ" were the very ones who were denying the slaves the right to read the sacred scriptures. 19

In support of his damning charges, Douglass offered the "general fact" that slavery had existed "under the droppings of the sanctuary of the south" for the last two hundred years without coming into conflict with the church. Instead of preaching the Gospel against this "tyranny, rebuke, and wrong," southern ministers had sought to throw into the background whatever could be found in the Bible opposing the infamous institution, while bringing forward "that which they could torture into its support." Such men now stood brazenly exposed as "the foremost, the strongest" defenders of that institution. 20

Answering claims that the slaves had the gospel preached to them and were being taught to read the Bible by their masters,

Douglass cited an example of a Sabbath school that had been established

¹⁹ Speech at Canandaigua, New York, August 1, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, August 19, 1847; Speech at London, England, March 30, 1847, in Foner, Life and Writings, I, 215; Speech at Moorfields, England, May 22, 1846, in Foner, Life and Writings, I, 155; Douglass to Horace Greeley, April 15, 1846, in Liberator, June 26, 1846.

Speech at Moorfields, England, May 22, 1846, in Foner, Life and Writings, I, 161; Speech at Rochester, December 12, 1847, in North Star, January 7, 1848.

in Richmond, Virginia. Here, it was supposed, the bondsmen were being educated. Upon investigation, however, it was discovered that the school taught nothing but "what would tend to make the slave a better servant." The knowledge gained at such a school would, in Douglass' opinion, "more than chains, or whips, or thumb-screws" give perpetuity to the slave system. 21

He did believe, however, that the system could be destroyed by moral means. Douglass urged that men of all persuasions and denominations resolve, in their conventions, synods and conferences, to have no Christian fellowship with slaveholders. He wanted the slaveholding Christians of the South to be surrounded "as by a wall of anti-slavery fire." The censure of the religious bodies should "blaze down" upon them "in every direction" until, stunned and over-whelmed with shame and confusion, they were forced to free their slaves and restore to them their long lost rights.²²

The slaveholding southern Christians were not the only ones to feel the heat of Douglass' invective. The ex-slave had been exposed to too much Garrisonian rhetoric and had experienced too much proscription in the Church to exclude northern religionists from his charges. According to Douglass, the institution of slavery had tainted the character of the American people. It dictated their laws, influenced their literature, and shaped their morality and religion. Northern churches, ministers, and professors of religion were held to be in good fellowship with and, in many instances, to

Speech at Boston, January 28, 1842, in <u>Liberator</u>, February 4, 1842; Speech at Glasgow, Scotland, April 21, 1846, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 29, 1846.

²² Speech at London, England, May, 1846, in <u>Liberator</u>, June 26. 1846.

be defenders of "the great abomination." Northern colleges were charged with teaching the southern slaveholding ministers to pervert the scriptures. 23

Douglass, like his mentor Garrison, often compared American Christians to the ancient scribes and Pharisees. "Woe unto you,... hypocrites!" he would thunder, "for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." He held this dark and terrible picture to be true of the majority of the nation's professed Christians. Such men attended, "with Pharisaical strictness," to the outward forms of religion, while neglecting the weightier matters of "the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." They were always eager to sacrifice, but seldom deigned to show mercy. They claimed to profess a love for the "God whom they have not seen" while hating "their brother whom they have seen." They prayed for the heathen on the other side of the world, but despised and neglected the heathen at their own doors. 24

Douglass was not content merely to condemn the American profession of religion in general terms. He noted that his fellow abolitionists had resolved to attack slavery whenever and wherever it manifested itself. Having followed it from the state to the street, from the mob to the church, and from the church to the

Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, May 23, 1846, in Liberator, June 26, 1846; Speech at Rochester, December 12, 1847, in North Star, January 7, 1848; Speech at Boston, January 28, 1842, in Liberator, February 4, 1842; Speech at London, England, March 30, 1847, in Foner, Life and Writings, I, 216.

Douglass, Narrative, pp. 122-123. The verse that Douglass used to compare American Christians to whited sepulchres is Matthew 23:27.

pulpit, they were now hunting the "hideous fiend" in that quarter.

Hence, he aimed some of his most potent darts at the American ministry. These clerics held "the keys of the dungeon" in which the bondsmen were confined. In their hands rested the power to mold public opinion and to change it "from the spirit of hatred to that of love to mankind." That they were unwilling to do this was evident, Douglass said, from the results of their teaching. If the American church was "the chief refuge of slavery," surely the slave institution found no champions so bold, brave, and uncompromising as the American clergy. They were, according to Douglass, more skillful, adroit, and persevering, and would descend to even greater meanness than any other class of opponents faced by the abolitionists. 25

Douglass had no qualms about attacking certain policies of those Christians allied with the American Bible Society. In a short article in the 1848 Liberty Bell, he put forward his argument for not taking the Bible to the American bondsmen. His position did not rest on any basis hostile to the scriptures, but on a feeling that, since the Bible was "peculiarly the companion of liberty," it would be a mockery to give it to the one portion of the American population that was wholly deprived of such liberty. Certainly the idea of providing the slave with Bibles sounded like a good idea, but in actuality, such a large scale, organized operation would only serve to absorb energies and funds "in giving to him the Bible that ought to be used in giving him to himself." To demand less than the physical liberation of the fettered bondsman would merely soothe the

²⁵ Speech at London, England, March 30, 1847, in Foner, Life and Writings, I, 214, 216; Speech at New York City, October 22, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 28, 1847.

conscience of the slaveholder and deceive the slave. Indeed, the Bible was only useful to those who could read its contents. "Away with all trifling with the man in fetters!" Douglass wrote, "...give ice to a freezing man, and tell him of its good properties in hot weather, -- throw a drowning man a dollar, as a mark of your good will, --but do not mock the bondman in his misery, by giving him a Bible when he cannot read it." 26

In these early years of his lecturing career, Douglass had little trouble finding examples of the type of thought and behavior that he so heartily condemned. As was becoming more and more common, he found church doors barred against abolitionist lecturers. Experiencing this difficulty a number of times on an 1847 antislavery tour, Douglass commented that the inhospitable ministers must think their buildings "too holy" to host those who were endeavoring to plead "the cause of our own common humanity." With more than a touch of sarcasm, he noted that when rescuing America's slaves became as popular as killing men in Mexico, the abolitionists would not only have the churches open to their use, but also, perhaps, "be voted into religious societies as honorary members." To Douglass, the closed doors of the churches only made good the proposition that "humanity is received more cordially in the street than in the church."²⁷

Frederick Douglass, "Bibles for the Slaves," in The Liberty Bell (Boston: National Anti-Slavery Bazaar, 1848), pp. 253-255.

²⁷Douglass to Sydney Howard Gay, August 20, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, September 2, 1847. In 1847, Samuel J. May commented on Douglass' antislavery speeches at Syracuse: "Some there were who winced not a little at his ridicule of the current religion of our country. But most of his audience felt that what he said was too true. It will, of course, be a very unpopular measure, but I believe it as necessary now as it was in the days of our

Along with the Pharisaical hypocrisy and meanness of the American Church and clergy, Douglass condemned the prejudice that he found among Christians. This feeling of white Americans toward men of a darker skin color always rankled Douglass, but he became especially indignant when bigotry was discovered among those professing to be of a pure spiritual nature. He once noted that slavery and the social climate of the country had so instilled color consciousness in the minds of the white population that there were some Christians who would even find it disagreeable if colored people were to greet them at the gates of heaven. The people of the North claimed to like the black man as well as any other, he said, but only "in their proper place." White northerners treated the Negro more like a dog than a fellow man. They refused to admit that he had a head to think, a heart to feel, and "a soul to aspire." They degraded the black population and then asked why the Negro was degraded. They closed their colleges and seminaries against him and then asked why he was not better educated. 28

Douglass' condemnation of the baneful effects of color prejudice was only increased by his 1845-1847 lecturing tour through
England, Ireland, and Scotland. Time and again, in his letters,
he marveled at the equalitarian treatment that he received from
those less contaminated with the onus of color consciousness. "How
different here, from my treatment at home!" he wrote Garrison from
Dublin. "In this country, I am welcomed to the temperance platform,

Saviour, to unmask hypocrites, especially those who stand in holy places." Samuel J. May to Sydney Howard Gay, October 5, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 14, 1847.

Speech at Plymouth County Anti-Slavery Society, December, 1841, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, December 23, 1841.

side by side with white speakers, and am received as kindly and warmly as though my skin were white." He rode on stage coaches, omnibuses, and steamboats without being directed to the second class seats. He visited museums, art galleries and botanical gardens without being proscribed because of his color. Instead of being accorded the status of "a thing," he found himself treated as a man--"a child of the common Father of us all." The cordiality with which members of the clergy greeted him, embraced him, and lent him their aid, contrasted so strongly with his experience in the United States that he looked "with wonder and amazement on the transition." When he attended their worship services, no deacon met him at the door with "upturned nose and scornful lip" to tell him, "We don't allow niggers in here."²⁹

The black abolitionist was treated with less courtesy by those sections of the Scottish press which supported the Free Church and its retention of the "slave-money." This was indeed a predictable reaction since the Garrisonian abolitionists had been harshly critical of the Free Church of Scotland for refusing to return contributions made by American slaveholders to its building and ministerial projects. Douglass treated this church body and

²⁹ Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, September 29, 1845, in Liberator, October 24, 1845; Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, September 16, 1845, in Liberator, October 10, 1845; Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, May 23, 1846, in Liberator, June 26, 1846; Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, January 1, 1846, in Liberator, January 30, 1846.

Nevertheless, even in <u>The Witness</u>, the official Free Church paper, his color was respected. Douglass was attacked on grounds of color by only one paper, the <u>Scottish Guardian</u>, which consistently referred to him as "the Black." George Shepperson, "Frederick Douglass and Scotland," <u>Journal of Negro History</u>, XXXVIII (July, 1953), 318.

its leaders in the same manner that he treated those churches in the United States which continued to "hold fellowship with slave-holders." In the agitation to have the Free Church "send back the money," he saw "the same old question of Christian union with slave-holders--old with us, but new with most people here." The Free Church, in vindicating their participation in such a union, acted upon "the damning heresy" that a man may be a Christian, "whatever may be his practice," as long as his religious creed was acceptable. Douglass believed that this tacit approval of the infamous southern institution only served to put the slaveholder's conscience at ease and to prolong the antislavery conflict. 31

The Free Church was not the only supposed Christian and benevolent organization to be censured by Douglass during these years. He termed the tactful, but evasive, 1846 report of the International Evangelical Alliance relative to slaveholding members "one of the greatest sins of omission ever committed by British Christians." Here was a prime example of English religionists allowing themselves to be "sadly hoodwinked," "misled," and "cajoled." Having it in their power to give slavery "a blow which would have sent it reeling to its grave, as if smitten by a voice or an arm from Heaven, they had permitted themselves to be misled by "the jack o'lanterns from America"—the United States delegates to the Alliance. These Americans, Douglass said, were skilled in the art of falsehood and did not hesitate to "use" religion to aid them in

Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, April 16, 1846, in Liberator, May 15, 1846; Speech at Arbroath, Scotland, February 10, 1846, in Holland, Colored Orator, p. 123; Speech at London, England, May, 1846, in Liberator, June 26, 1846; Speech at Glasgow, Scotland, April 21, 1846, in Liberator, May 29, 1846.

their fraud. They succeeded in misleading the English delegates because they not only had the persuasive skills of an American politician, but they also combined these "seductive qualities" with a "loud profession" of piety. 32

The compassion and feeling so evident in Douglass' writings and speeches about the American slave was not merely a color conscious type of sentiment. He was leaning toward those aspects of religious belief which stressed the Christian's responsibility to help alleviate the physical, as well as the spiritual, problems plaguing mankind. In August, 1846, he wrote that he found poverty, crime, and suffering in London, but found no slavery. In this he deemed England to have "a decided advantage" over America. Yet, he vowed that he was by no means unmindful of the needy. "You may rely upon me," he wrote, "as one who will never desert the cause of the poor, no matter whether black or white." From Scotland, he wrote Garrison that, though he was more closely connected and identified with one class of the world's oppressed people, he could not allow himself to be insensible to the wrongs and sufferings of any part of the family of man. "I am not only an American slave," he noted. "but a man, and as such, am bound to use my powers for the welfare of the whole human brotherhood."33

Thus, it is not surprising that just as he condemned the religion of the American South for allowing the slaves to exist in

³² Speech at London, England, March 30, 1847, in Foner, Life and Writings, I, 218-220; Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, January 2, 1847, in Liberator, January 29, 1847.

³³ Douglass to Lynn Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle, August 18, 1846, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 15, 1846; Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, February 26, 1846, in Liberator, March 27, 1846.

degradation and misery, he rebuked the religious profession of those on the other side of the Atlantic who allowed their fellow man to live in squalor. After viewing the living conditions in the Dublin slums. Douglass wrote. "God help the poor! An infidel might ask ... where is your religion that takes care for the poor--for the widow and fatherless -- where are its votaries -- what are they doing?" His answer to this question also served as a vivid example of the distinction that he made between the genuine Christian and the mere professor of religion. The "votaries" were wasting their energies in useless debate on "hollow creeds" and points of doctrine, which, when settled. "neither make one bair white nor black." In conversations with such people, some of whom were "such rigid adherents to their faith that they would scarce be seen in company with those who differed from them in any point of their creed." he became disgusted with hearing them quote the text "the poor shall not cease out of the land" in palliation of their neglect. 34

In the appendix to his <u>Narrative</u>, Douglass differentiated between a widespread, but false Christianity and the genuine Christianity of Christ. To accept the latter as pure and holy, he found it necessary to reject the former as corrupt and wicked. To love the "pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ," he felt that he had to hate the "slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical" religion of America. To associate such a corrupt system of belief with Christ was "the climax"

Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, February 26, 1846, in <u>Liberator</u>, March 27, 1846. The text is a portion of Deuteronomy 15:11, which reads in full: "For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land."

of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels." Only a perverted Christianity would allow a man who wielded a blood-clotted cowskin during the week to fill the pulpit on Sunday, claiming to be a minister of the "meek and lowly" Jesus. Only an inconsistent religion would allow those who preached Bible-reading as a religious duty to deny the slaves the opportunity of learning to read the sacred scriptures. 35

Douglass made a similar distinction between the two types of Christianity in an 1846 address at Finsbury Chapel, Moorfields, England. On this occasion he spoke of his love for that religion which was pure, peaceable, gentle, "easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." He loved the religion which made it the duty of its disciples to help those in need, to "visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction," and which was based upon the principle of "love to God and love to man." It was because he believed in this type of Christianity that he loathed the "mind-darkening and "soul-destroying" religion of the South. 36

During these years, Douglass was especially careful to make certain that his northern audiences did not misconstrue the harsh words with which he bombarded the American religious establishment.

"Do not misunderstand my railing," he told his listeners, "--do not class me with those who despise religion--do not identify me with the infidel. I love the religion of Christianity--which cometh from above." Douglass stressed the point that the religion of the

³⁵ Douglass, Narrative, pp. 120-121.

³⁶ Speech at Moorfields, England, May 22, 1846, in Foner, Life and Writings, I, 162.

slaveholders was a mockery of Christ's true religion. Such men, he believed, actually hated those teachings of Christ which applied the principle of the love of God to man--to the slave as well as to the master. To be in harmony with God was to be in open discord with these "professed Christians" since they were actually only advocates of that "long-faced Phariseeism" which "goes up to Jerusalem and worship[s], and leaves the bruised and wounded to die." 37

Douglass' profession of allegiance to a higher form of religious faith than that which then prevailed in America was not the only evidence of his deep desire to avoid being thought of as an "infidel." Despite his criticism of the clergy, he sometimes found it advisable to stop short of a wholesale condemnation of this influential body of men. He noted that however low and corrupt a nation's ministry might be, the "fountain of the purity, as well as of the corruption, of the community may be found in the pulpit." He maintained that, despite their many shortcomings, the ministers of religion, as a whole, were "always higher -- of necessity higher -than the community about them." The clerics could not conceivably continue to enunciate the "great abstract principles of right" without exerting, to some extent, a healthy influence upon their own conduct, even though their own conduct often violated those principles. Indeed, when Richard D. Webb objected to the inclusion of letters of endorsement from clergymen in the English version of his autobiography, Douglass told him: "If clergymen read my Narrative

³⁷ Speech at Boston, January 28, 1842, in <u>Liberator</u>, February 4, 1842; Speech at Glasgow, Scotland, April 21, 1846, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 29, 1846; Douglass to Thomas Van Rensselaer, May 18, 1847, in <u>Liberator</u>, June 4, 1847; Speech at New York City, October 22, 1847, in <u>National Anti-Slavery Standard</u>, October 28, 1847.

and approve of it, my prejudice against their office would be but a poor reason, for rejecting the benefit of such approval.... To leave them out because they are ministers would be to show oneself as much and more sectarian than themselves.... The spirit of bigotry and sectarianism may exist, and be as deeply rooted in those who condemn sects, as [in] those who adhere to them." Such remarks were not merely verbal ploys or concessions to the ministers, but evidenced Douglass' feeling that, with the aid of those clerics who were not yet totally alienated from the Garrisonian movement, the moral sentiment of the land could be brought into a closer alignment with the religion of Christ. As he noted in 1847, it was still "the religious people who are to be relied on in this Anti-Slavery movement."

The Douglass of the mid-1840's also held several other attitudes toward religion which tended to disprove any contention that he had completely abandoned religious orthodoxy for "Garrisonian infidelity." Prayer continued to play an important part in his life. He often prayed that Americans would repent of their sins toward the black man before an angry God sought retributive punishment for their infamous deeds. On other occasions he entreated the Supreme Being to raise up and send forth more workers to unmask the proslavery church and to rebuke the man-stealing ministry--to rock the land with agitation, and "give America no peace till she repent, and be thoroughly purged of this monstrous iniquity." For the noble band of antislavery workers, he gave thanks to God with "a heart

³⁸ Speech at London, England, March 30, 1847, in Foner, Life and Writings, I, 226; Foner, Frederick Douglass, p. 66; Speech at New York City, October 22, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 28, 1847.

overborne with gratitude."39

Douglass also continued to venerate the Holy Bible. He believed that it was filled with wisdom and goodness. "Faith, hope, and charity" sparkled from every page. Even though the abolitionists' opponents had attempted to "press the Bible into the service of slavery," he believed that such efforts were futile because the scriptures contained "all that is right" and were opposed to all that was wrong. It treated all men alike, knew no one by the color of his skin, and said to all who were willing to hear, "Whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, do you so unto them."

The view of the Godhead held by Douglass during these years was also quite orthodox and normally would have aroused little complaint among even the most pious Christians. God was above all a judge who was ever ready to "confound the wisdom of the crafty, and bring to naught the counsels of the ungodly." To Douglass' mind, the crafty and ungodly were to be found in the ranks of the slave-holders and their clerical allies. This viewpoint was what caused the great stirring among their numbers and was the root cause of the slanderous charges hurled at the abolitionists. Douglass was ever ready to remind his opponents that the Great Judge would eventually punish them for their lack of adherence to His holy decrees. In 1847, Douglass asked the elderly Henry Clay if he thought that

Jouglass to William Lloyd Garrison, January 1, 1846, in Liberator, January 30, 1846; Douglass to Samuel Hanson Cox, October 30, 1846, in Liberator, November 27, 1846; Speech at New York City, May 11, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, May 20, 1847.

Speech at Belfast, Ireland, January 6, 1846, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress. The verse that Douglass quoted is commonly referred to as the "Golden Rule." See Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31, and Ephesians 4:32.

God would hold him guiltless on the "great day of account" if he were to die with the blood of his slaves clinging to his garments. The abolitionist noted that Clay had previously made a profession of religion, had been baptised, and was a church member in good standing, but asserted that the Kentuckian would stand rejected at the bar of God unless he ceased to do evil, and learned to do good. "You must 'break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free,'" he warned, "or take your place in the ranks of 'evil doers,' and expect to 'reap the reward of corruption."

Since his concept of the genuine Christian faith was formed under the dual influence of his experiences as a black Christian and as a black Garrisonian abolitionist, it is not surprising that Douglass found the most satisfactory example of this type of religious practice in the antislavery movement rather than in the Church. In his mind, the abolitionist crusade was closely allied with the religion of Christ and dramatically opposed to the slaveholding religion of the day. It removed fetters instead of clamping them tighter, broke the strangling yokes of bondage, and lifted up the

⁴¹ Speech at New York City, October 22, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 28, 1847; Frederick Douglass, "Folly of Our Opponents," in The Liberty Bell (Boston: Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Fair, 1845), p. 168; Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, November 8, 1842, in Liberator, November 18, 1842; Douglass to Henry Clay, in North Star, December 3, 1847. Douglass also believed that the Supreme Being entered into the lives of mortals to alter their fortunes. In discussing his removal from the Lloyd plantation in his Narrative, Douglass wrote, "Going to live at Baltimore laid the foundation, and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity. I have ever regarded it as the first plain manifestation of that kind providence which has ever since attended me, and marked my life with so many favors.... I may be deemed superstitious, and even egotistical, in regarding this event as a special interposition of divine Providence in my favor. But I should be false to the earliest sentiments of my soul, if I suppressed the opinion." Douglass, Narrative, pp. 46-47.

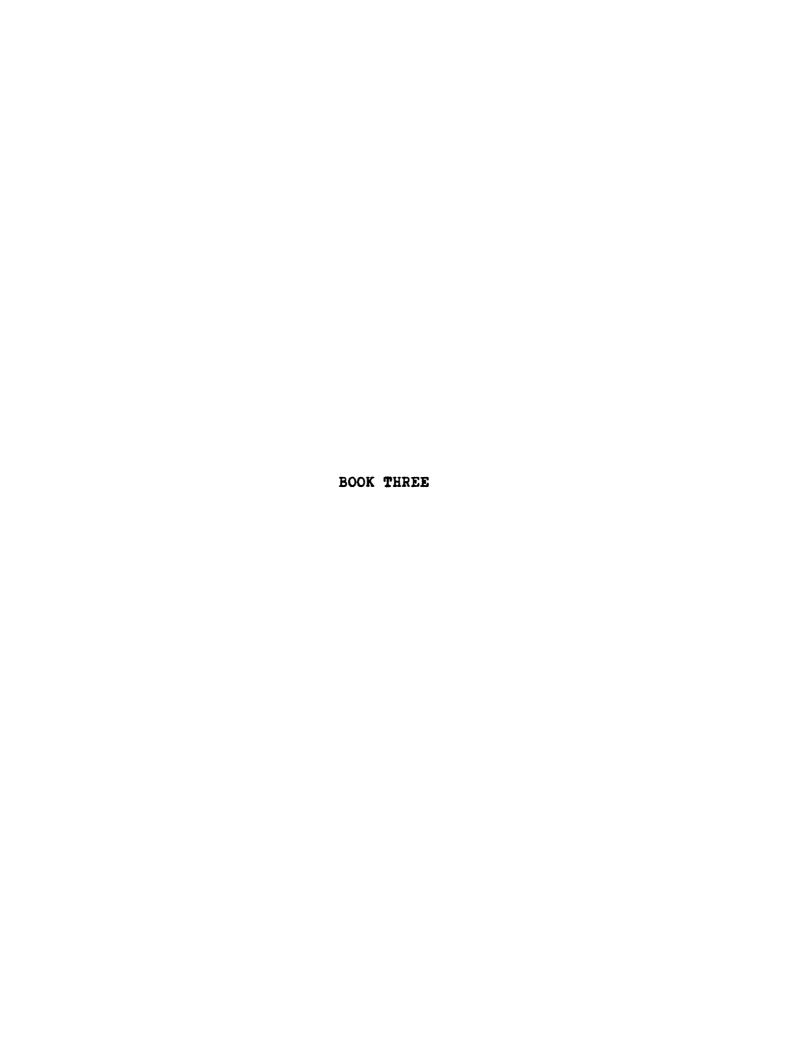
was founded upon all of the genuine Christian tenets that he so dearly loved. The abolitionists reached down to the lowest link in humanity's chain, to the most degraded segment of the population and told them to stand up and be men. Unlike the popular religionists of the land, the members of the abolition movement loved both God and their fellow man. This was antislavery. This was true Christianity. 42

Douglass vigorously defended the abolitionists from the charges of infidelity. He felt obligated to do so as a member of the lecture tour and because he believed the abolition movement to be the primary refuge for the "true" Christianity. Douglass held that there were no more pious and faithful Christians in the United States than were to be found among the abolitionists. He believed that when the history of the emancipation movement had been fairly written, it would be found that they were the only men who had firmly grounded themselves on the "immutable, eternal, and allcomprehensive principle of the sacred New Testament -- 'All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.'" It was because William Lloyd Garrison had "fearlessly unmasked hypocrisy" and openly opposed the cant of the clerics that he was execrated by the American ministry. The clamor was raised, not against the slaveholders, but against virtuous abolitionists who were engaged in a campaign to rid the land of a terrible sin against God. The slaveholding religionists of the South, along with their northern sympathizers, had branded the antislavery men

⁴² Speech at New York City, October 22, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 28, 1847.

as infidels because they alone had tellingly rebuked the nation's religious leaders for stressing Christian creeds while disregarding Christian duties. Indeed, at the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1843, Douglass asserted that the antislavery movement was the only earthly hope of the American slave. "There is no hope for the slave in Church or State," he said. "But this Society is above either Church or State. It is moving both daily, more and more." 43

⁴³ Speech at London, England, March 30, 1847, in Foner, Life and Writings, I, 214, 216-218; Speech at Bristol, England, April 1, 1847, in Liberator, May 14, 1847; Speech at Moorfields, England, May 22, 1846, in Foner, Life and Writings, I, 161-162; Holland, Colored Orator, p. 79.



CHAPTER VI

FREEDOM OF INQUIRY

To discard a portion of scripture is not necessarily to reject the truth, but may be the highest evidence one can give of his love of truth.

--William Lloyd Garrison November 21, 1845

forms and ceremonies and observances" did not cause him to forsake the God of his youth. Between 1835 and 1840, his writings and speeches were filled with heart-felt references to that "merciful," "blessed," "omnipotent" Being. In addition to declaring his own steadfast faith in the promises of God, Garrison urged that others engaged in the antislavery crusade continue to "lean on the arm of Omnipotence" even though "the earth be removed, and...the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." "Our happiness must centre in God," he wrote, "--so that whether he gives or takes away, we may at all times be able to say, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

Garrison to George W. Benson, October 26, 1835, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to Amos A. Phelps, December 16, 1835, in Merrill, Letters, I, 579; Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, December 28, 1835, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to George W. Benson, October 21, 1835, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to James G. Birney, April 6, 1836, Simon Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Garrison to George W. Benson, February 17, 1837, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 212. See also Psalms 46:1-3; Liberator, November 7, 1835; Garrison to Harriet Foster, January 14, 1839, in Liberator, April 26, 1839; Liberator, July 19, 1839; Garrison to Joshua T. Everett, April 14, 1840, in Liberator, May 1, 1840; Garrison to Henry E. Benson, September 3,

Feeling that his own feet were firmly "planted upon the eternal Rock," Garrison had no qualms about rebuking those who appeared to be more worldly and less virtuous than himself. As he traveled across the Atlantic to attend the World's Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840, Garrison was especially critical of his fellow passengers, calling them "a prayerless, godless, drinking, card-playing, low-minded set." Being "awfully estranged from God, and from the spirit of his dear Son," Garrison's shipboard associates were "disposed to make light of every thing serious and sacred." Although he had several "serious conversations" with these men, "and not altogether in vain," he could not help feeling that any attempt to reason with them was "like casting pearls to swine." In a May 28 letter, he told Helen that if such men were to be his companions throughout eternity he would indeed be miserable--especially if it was found that there was "any affinity between my spirit and theirs."

^{1835;} Garrison to George W. Benson, October 21, 1835; Garrison to Thomas Shipley, December 17, 1835; Garrison to Effingham L. Capron, August 24, 1836; Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, May 5, 1839; Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, May 20, 1840; Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, May 21, 1840; Garrison to John A. Collins, October 16, 1840, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. Upon the birth of his son, George, in February, 1836, Garrison wrote the following sonnet:

Remember, when thou com'st to riper years,

That unto GOD, from earliest in fancy,

Thy grateful father dedicated thee,

And sought HIS guidance through this vale of tears.

Fear GOD--then disregard all other fears;

Be, in HIS truth, erect, majestic, free;

Abhor OPPRESSION--cling to LIBERTY

Nor recreant prove though horrid death appears.

Later, in a letter to George Benson, he wrote: "It is his moral image about which I feel the most solicitude. May he early learn to put on Christ, that he may be made perfect in righteousness, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing!" <u>Liberator</u>, February 20, 1836; Garrison to George W. Benson, March 15, 1836, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 64.

²Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, July 23, 1840, in Ruchames,

The abolitionist also sought to have his brother, James, join him in finding that "perfect rest" which only a genuine Christian walk could bring. Long estranged from the things of God and deeply ensnared in the sins of the world, James Garrison seemed a fit subject for his younger brother's pious admonitions. "O, how I long to see you...reconciled to God in your spirit!" the Boston editor wrote in 1840, "I want to sing praises with you through all eternity, in company with dear mother, and our departed sisters, and with an innumerable host of the wise and good in all ages, now redeemed from sin and the power of the devil." When Garrison considered how mercifully, "almost miraculously," God had preserved James's life throughout the years, he could not help but feel that the Divine Being would yet pluck him "as a brand from the burning," and make him an "heir of glory." Perhaps remembering the entreaties of his mother, he told James how to become a "new man" in Christ. "If we have sinned, and are willing to confess and forsake our sins," he wrote, "he is ready to forgive us. Let his goodness lead us to repentance. His name is Love, and his forbearance, long-suffering and mercy are infinite. Let us not distrust him...it is but to follow Christ, to imitate his example, to receive him in faith, and pardon will be vouchsafed to us, and heaven will be our portion."

Letters, II, 670; Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, May 28, 1840, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 629-630. See also Garrison to unidentified correspondent, June 14, 1840, in <u>Liberator</u>, July 31, 1840.

Garrison to James Garrison, June 4, 1840, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 636. In a May 1840 letter to Helen, Garrison told of his concern for his older brother: "My poor dear brother James! I am sorry to hear that his health does not seem to improve, and that he has another ulcer internally; but let us hope that the warm weather, with proper care and treatment, will yet restore him. I love him with all a brother's affection—of that, he cannot doubt. Earnest is my prayer to God, that he may be led to review his past life,

In his personal war against vice and corruption, Garrison found no group of men more desperately in need of regeneration than the southern slaveholders. He had long been convinced that, even though the "mantle of Christianity" had been thrown over it, slavery was the "worst form of atheism" which had ever cursed the world. Despite their "pious professions" to the contrary, slaveholders could justly be called "atheists of the most desperate spirit" -- men who disregarded and trampled upon God's divine teachings in order to fulfill their own craven lusts. They felt no shame in defiling the marriage institution and compelling men and women to "herd together like cattle." They evidenced no guilt in withholding the Bible from the millions of chattels who were living in a state of "forced heathenism." Their conception of religion apparently included "hunting slaves with bloodhounds--shooting them down with rifles--speculating in human flesh and blood"--while at the same time talking about enjoying "the glorious light and liberty of the children of God."

and to perceive how widely he has departed from the path of rectitude, to the ruin of his immortal soul. O that he may be led to speedy and hearty repentance, that he may rejoice in God, and be made an heir of glory, through Jesus Christ our Saviour!" Walter M. Merrill has noted, in relation to this piece of correspondence, that, although the abolitionist loved his brother and tried to do everything possible to help him, he nevertheless failed to understand James and his problems. Garrison looked upon his brother's drinking habit as a sin which, like any other, could be forgiven and even eliminated if he sincerely repented and reconciled himself to Christ. Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, May 19, 1840, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 617; Merrill, Behold Me Once More, p. 105.

Liberator, February 26, 1847; Speech at New York City, May 12, 1846, in Liberator, May 22, 1846; Garrison to Sumner Lincoln, November 8, 1841, in Liberator, November 26, 1841. In 1843 Garrison wrote: "Among the almost numberless vices and crimes generated by the prolific slave system, profanity and lewdness are prominent. The whole southern country is filled with cursing, to an awful extent, and there are comparatively few on its soil, who do not indulge in this disgusting habit." Liberator, May 26, 1843.

According to Garrison, the mode appointed by God to conquer atheistic error and destroy the works of Satan was moral suasion, or "the foolishness of preaching." By making full use of this divinely ordained "tool," the Boston editor hoped to destroy the "satanic empire" of the slaveholders. No other method was acceptable. To attempt to destroy slavery through political processes was worse than imbecility--it was treason to the holy cause of abolition. Believing that it was as impossible for men to be moral reformers and political partisans at the same time as it was "for fire and gunpowder to harmonize together," Garrison held that the so-called "political abolitionists" found great pleasure in deriding moral suasion, treating it as "imbecility itself." Such men looked to the ballot box to effect the regeneration of "a wicked and depraved people" and considered a "political harangue" to be "worth a score of religious addresses." Believing that the Garrisonian abolitionists had appropriated the only divinely approved method of attacking the slave system, Garrison asserted that "the politics of this world are foolishness with God."5

During the 1840's, the editor of <u>The Liberator</u> weighed his religious profession against that of the American Church and clergy. Once again he was able to conclude that his own standards were much higher than the norm. "I have found the American church to be the very bulwark of the slave system,..." he wrote, "--and therefore not the church of Christ." The church of the Savior would not have allowed itself to become spattered with the blood of the slave. Its

⁵Garrison to Richard P. Hunt, May 1, 1840, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 594-595; Liberator, November 19, 1841, March 11, 1842, November 11, 1842, July 4, 1845; Garrison to unidentified correspondent, May 11, 1847, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 14, 1847.

ministers would not have been found among those seeking to crush "the sacred cause of emancipation." Its members would not have willingly and eagerly justified the "adultery, barbarity, manstealing and murder" that was so prevalent at the South. Christ's church would have been "the main support of liberty, and the shield of the oppressed." It would have remembered "them that are in bonds, as bound with them." Garrison would accept no Christianity as genuine which had been "mingled with the institutions of slavery." He desired, and claimed to profess, a Christianity "such as Jesus taught, such as Jesus practically exemplified"--a religion which knew "no color or clime" and made "all mankind our countrymen." As he told an audience in 1847, "...if you bring me a Christ who shakes hands with the slaveholder, I will not have him to reign over me. Jesus does not make common cause with the oppressor, and therefore I love him. Those who would do so, insult Him, and are amongst those who would crucify Him in preference to Barabbas."

Feeling as he did about the American profession of religion, it was not surprising to find Garrison lending his voice to the cry raised by Stephen S. Foster and Parker Pillsbury to "come-out" from corrupt proslavery churches. While he disapproved of their practice

Liberator, January 19, 1844, July 4, 1845, October 2, 1846, January 15, 1847; Speech at Dedham, Massachusetts, August 1, 1845, in Liberator, August 15, 1845. See also Hebrews 13:3. For examples of Garrison's strictures on the Free Church of Scotland and the Evangelical Alliance, two groups which had also deemed it proper to "mingle" with the institution of slavery see Liberator, July 17, 1846, October 2, 1846, November 27, 1846, July 30, 1847; Garrison to Edmund Quincy, September 18, 1846, Garrison Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College; Garrison to Elizabeth Pease, October 25, 1846, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. For his scathing criticism of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions see Liberator, July 25, 1845. For his sonnet on "The True Church" see Liberator, November 26, 1841.

of entering worship services on Sunday mornings and loudly calling upon the congregations to leave, the Boston editor nevertheless admired the spirit of these radical Christian anarchists. Their entreaties to come out from iniquity complemented his own perfectionist beliefs. Surely the man who had achieved perfection in this world risked losing it if he continued to hold communion with the unsanctified. The genuine Christian had no choice but to denounce evildoers and to remove himself from their religious fellowship. In Garrison's estimation, "come-outer" was "a most honorable appellation." Since it was a term which admirably described the true disciples of Christ, no "seeker after truth" should feel ashamed of bearing it. Such determined men had come out from a "kingdom of darkness, violence and blood"--from a "soul destroying priesthood"--from an "apostate church" and a "spurious religion"--indeed from "all the works of the devil."

Declaring that proslavery churches "ought to be abandoned by abolitionists as those who would flee out of Babylon," Garrison preached the tenets of come-outerism from the lecture platform. In a December, 1843 address, he charged the American church and clergy both with justifying slavery and with sanctioning war. Some ministers claimed that slavery existed by divine appointment while others

⁷Kraditor, Means and Ends, p. 105; Thomas, Liberator, pp. 318-319; Liberator, July 8, 1842, December 22, 1843. In an 1845 letter, Samuel May, Jr. wrote that "Mr. Garrison has never denied that there has been, is, and should be a Church; yet has he been represented as aiming to overthrow the Church, Ministry, Gospel, and all. He has plainly & vehemently (how hard is it to smother indignation in such a case) denied that that was a Church of Christ which excused slaveholding & slave trading, with all their horrible accompaniments..., which apologised for these, nay which claimed for them the sanction of the Old Testament, and the permission at least of the New!" Samuel May, Jr. to J. B. Estlin, December 29, 1845, May Papers, Boston Public Library. See also Liberator, July 30, 1841.

championed standing armies and were as much in favor of "exterminating enemies" as was the soldier. After making further allegations, he declared that if either of his major charges were true it would be "sufficient reason" for Christians to come out from among such men and be filled with the spirit of Christ. In early 1844 he told another audience that "the true church and the kingdom" were to be found within and not outside of man. This genuine Christian church was not "a creature of human device." To become a member it was not necessary to endorse a particular creed or to perform certain rites and ceremonies. All that was required was "regeneration and a living faith." This being the case, the "odious and detestable" assertions of those clergymen who claimed that it was the Christian's solemn duty to become a church member had to be "trampled in the dust." The "great truth" had to be proclaimed that "every soul, in Christ Jesus, is independent of every outward association." Not only was the American Church a false church, but it was also "a cage of unclean birds -- the very bulwark of slavery, and the stout defender of war." Surely, said Garrison, all true Christians could see the necessity of "coming out" from such a body before they became partakers of its sins and co-recipients of its justly-deserved "plagues."

Garrison was afforded another opportunity to discuss the

Speech at Boston, January 23, 1840, in <u>Liberator</u>,
February 28, 1840; Speech at Lynn, Massachusetts, December 17, 1843,
in <u>Liberator</u>, January 12, 1844; <u>Liberator</u>, February 16, 1844. See
also Revelation 18:4. In 1845 Garrison wrote: "We deny that what
is called the Apostolic church was intended, or enjoined, as a model
organization, to be perpetuated, or is of any binding force whatever. It was a temporary institution, adapted to a special emergency, and expired long ago by its own limitation. Every church now
claiming the authority or sanction of the primitive church, is
thereby convicted of gross imposture." <u>Liberator</u>, January 17, 1845.
See also <u>Liberator</u>, February 16, 1844.

"true Church" at the convention which was held in Chardon Street Chapel in late October, 1841. The resolutions which he submitted for discussion held that this Church was independent of all manmade organizations, creeds, and compacts. It was "not in the province of any man, or any body of men," to admit to or exclude from the "true Church" any one who was "created in the divine image." Moreover, it was "nowhere enjoined as a religious duty" by Christ or His apostles that men should connect themselves with "any association, by whatever name known." All men, said the abolitionist, were "left to act singly, or in conjunction with others, according to their own free choice." As was the case with the Sabbath Convention, no attempt was made to bring the resolutions to a vote. Likewise, the Church Convention was similar to its predecessor in that it remained open to "every variety of religious opinion." The editor of The Liberator defended this practice even though it gave his enemies another opportunity to besmerch his character. Who was the greatest sinner, he asked, the supposed infidel or the man who would "forcibly put a gag into the mouth of an infidel"? Was it not to be expected that some "very crude, or very heretical, or very absurd notions" would be uttered whenever men were allowed to speak freely? Would this freedom of thought and speech prove injurious to "Truth and Right?" Nonsense, he said. The good which the Chardon Street Conventions had done for "the cause of Christianity and of freedom" could not easily be exaggerated. The terror with which they had been viewed by "those twin-monsters of the pit, priestcraft and sectarianism" was "full demonstration of their utility."9

⁹Garrison and Garrison, <u>Life</u>, III, 7-8; <u>Liberator</u>, October 29, 1841. A second convention had been held in March, 1841 to discuss the origin and the authority of the ministry. Garrison did not address the convention.

During the 1840's Garrison not only became critical of the religious press for ridiculing the conventions and for allowing "only one side to be heard," but he also extended his belief in the correctness of free inquiry to theological matters. According to the Boston abolitionist, there was "no safer, higher, or better" way to discover Truth than to leave the mind "perfectly untrammelled"--to contend for unlimited investigation, to vindicate the supremacy of reason, and to repudiate all arbitrary authority. The fact that men were "more or less ignorant" demonstrated both the need for freedom of conscience and the absurdity of "affixing pains and penalties to heretical opinions." "Who," he asked, "shall dogmatically assume to decide what is heresy, or inflict vengeance upon the heretic?" 10

In an 1846 editorial, Garrison declared that he was "against that religion which discountenances free inquiry, and in favor of that infidelity which is for it." He asked his readers whether it was worthy of man, as a rational being, to be "stultified by ghostly authority"--to be "intimidated from hearing, searching, trying all things." Was it impossible for men to be mistaken? Had they never detected themselves in error or changed an opinion? Could they grow no more? As for himself, he would hold to the belief that whatever could not bear the test of "the closest scrutiny" had no claim to human respect or confidence. If he could teach his children no other precept--if he could leave them no other example, it would be "a fearless, impartial, thorough investigation of every subject to which their attention may be called, and a hearty adoption of the principles which to them may seem true...." The abolitionist vowed that he would

^{10 &}lt;u>Liberator</u>, January 30, 1846, April 16, 1847.

not arbitrarily determine for them what was the "orthodox" or the "heretical" views on any subject. "I have no wish, no authority, no right to do so," he wrote. As an example, he expressed his desire that they examine "whatever may be advanced in derogation of the divine inspiration and authenticity of the Bible, as freely as they do whatever they may find in support of the same," that they read both the generally accepted and the opposing views relative to the doctrines, precepts, and miracles of Christ, and that they "see what proofs are adduced for a belief in the non-existence of a God, as unreservedly as they do the evidence in favor of his existence." Garrison would urge them to pursue such a course because he believed free inquiry to be essential to "the life of truth." Right would prevail over wrong, he wrote--"and all the sooner in a fair conflict."

Garrison's opinions on the credulity of "priest-ridden"

Christians and on freedom of inquiry were set forth in the columns of his weekly on a number of occasions during the 1840's. In taking a largely favorable view of those two "arch enemies of orthodoxy,"

Theodore Parker and Thomas Paine, the editor of <u>The Liberator</u> gave his readers cause to fear that he was becoming wholly estranged from evangelical Christianity. In 1841, after hearing Parker's famous sermon, "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity," Garrison remarked to his friend, Johnson, "Infidelity, Oliver, infidelity!"

By 1845, however, he was accustomed to the controversial clergyman's

Liberator, January 30, 1846. Garrison noted that the apostle Paul was a "free inquirer," having exhorted the Thessalonians to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." See also I Thessalonians 5:21; Garrison to Elizabeth Pease, June 20, 1849, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., January 7, 1858, Garrison Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

"heresies" and had himself begun to minimize the importance of the supernatural elements of the Christian faith in comparison with the moral ones. In an article which appeared in April of that year, Garrison stated that the "uproar" raised by the clergy against Farker proceeded from "a state of mind in reality no more concerned for the true character of God and for genuine piety, than was that of their Jewish predecessors, the Scribes and Pharisees." The ministers of Boston were shocked and appalled not at the "entire overthrow of the gospel" and the "planting of heathenism in its place," as in the case of Southern slavery -- not at the rejection of Christ's kingdom of peace, as in the case of war--not at the "popular denial of human brotherhood"--but at the "candid confession of a disbelief in the miraculous, by one confessedly pure and excellent in his walk and conversation ... "Surely, he wrote, the obligations and duties of man to his fellow man and to God were not affected by the question of "whether miracles were wrought in Judea or not." 12

Later in the year, the Boston editor reviewed a new edition of Thomas Faine's theological works. Admitting that he had been brought up to believe that the author of The Age of Reason was a "monster of iniquity" whose "opinions and doctrines" were too pernicious to be examined, Garrison told his readers that he had never before "perused a single page or paragraph" of Paine's writings. Since he now considered himself to be "delivered from the thraldom of tradition and authority," the abolitionist felt that he could give the deistic republican's religious sentiments a "candid and

¹² Swift, Garrison, p. 299. See also Garrison to editor Zion's Herald, August 27, 1842, in Liberator, September 9, 1842; Liberator, January 22, 1847.

careful perusal." Garrison found Paine to be a remarkably intellectual man, a close reasoner, and a powerful writer. It was certain that he was an honest man, at least in the sense that he was not a hypocrite. Endowed with "an uncommon share of mental and moral intrepidy," Paine was one of the very few men throughout history "who have dared to think for themselves, to utter their own convictions, ... and to enter into a fearless investigation of forbidden subjects, without regard to consequences." He knew that in expressing his unorthodox views on religion, he was inviting "obloquy and a fiery persecution." He realized that "a ravening priesthood" would combine to hunt him down as one who ought to be destroyed "in the name of the Lord" and for the safety of the Church. Yet he did not cower, but chose to be "covered with infamy" rather than suppress what he considered to be essential to "the freedom and welfare of the people." For this, said Garrison, Paine deserved the thanks of "every lover of progress."13

The editor of The Liberator found it admirable that Paine "went for the utmost freedom of the mind"--that he made his appeals to the reason of men and not to their "fears or selfishness." Certainly it was a "lamentable truth" that most men were not governed by reason in their consideration of religious matters. "Wholly influenced" by imitation, education, and custom, and taught by their "crafty leaders" to be afraid of reason, they came to hold certain beliefs, not as a result of their own independent investigation, but because it was the fashion to do so in the community or nation in which they happened to live. In view of this situation, Garrison

¹³ Liberator, November 21, 1845.

did not find it surprising that mankind was "groaning under the dominion of religious and political tyranny" or that the earth was "covered with mental darkness, and crowded with all forms of superstition."

In 1847, Garrison further attacked "Christian superstition" by criticizing what he called "mystical religion." If the "pure and undefiled religion" of Christ was what the apostle claimed it to be in the Book of James, he wrote, then there could be nothing "intricate or mysterious" in it except "that which commends itself to all rational beings." If religion was not "a sensible thing" then it had to be "a very foolish thing." If it was supernatural, it could not be natural and therefore, "though it may possibly answer for another world," it was clearly "of no advantage to the present." Garrison noted that, while he would not quarrel with any man "whose taste is strongly for the marvellous," he would nevertheless continue to believe that, "in proportion as that passion shall take possession of him," such an individual would undoubtedly find himself "less and less inclined to labor in a practical, common sense manner, for the extirpation of wrong from the earth." To an ardent reformer like Garrison, there was simply too much that was "tangible and plain" in the world to "feel any inducement to plunge headlong into the regions of mystery."16

During the spring of 1847, Garrison once again lashed out against "Christian temple worship." As he had noted in his earlier

¹⁴ Ibid.

James 1:27 reads "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

¹⁶ Liberator, April 9, 1847.

strictures on the subject, a "holy building" was as great an absurdity as a "holy steam-boat, or a sanctified grist-mill." On this occasion, however, his emphasis was clearly on the superstition inherent in consecrating a man-made building, by "rites and ceremonies," to "what is called public worship." Being diametrically opposed to "the genius of Christianity," such an act was merely an imitation of Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Paganism. Religious incantations could not sanctify bricks, stones, mortar, or any other material substance. However sincere, every attempt at such a sanctification was, in "the eye of reason," equally "ludicrous and impossible" -- a "sure proof of religious infatuation." The idea that there was a "house of God" was an absurd one, yet it continued to hold millions of believers in "the bondage of superstition." Surely it could not be "right or useful" to make mankind believe that a particular structure suddenly became holy as a consequence of the religious ceremonies which were performed at the laying of its cornerstone. "Away with all such mummeries and incantations!" wrote Garrison, "As Protestants, as Christians, be it ours to show a superstitious and priest-ridden world a better way--a more rational faith--a nobler consecration of the religious element."17

In the same article, he criticized the credulity with which

¹⁷ Liberator, May 7, 1847. In his sonnet entitled "Worship," Garrison noted:

No worldly sanctuary now may claim
Man's reverence, as a consecrated pile;
Mosque, synagogue, cathedral, are the same,
Differing in nought but architectural style:-Avaunt, then, Superstition! in GOD's name,
Nor longer thy blind devotees beguile!

most professors of religion treated public worship -- that "distinct, special religious act or performance...to be done, statedly, under clerical guidance." Garrison denied its utility, discarded it as a religious obligation, and protested against it on "the ground of reason and humanity." According to the abolitionist, public worship "inevitably, necessarily, uniformly" led its votaries into spiritual bondage. It was "a mere religious performance" which proved nothing as to moral character or Christian benevolence. It neither fed the hungry, clothed the naked, gave relief to the prisoner, broke the chain of the slave, nor subverted popular iniquity. Truly, it could be said that public worship was "ostensibly, all for God, who lacks nothing; but nothing for man, universally who needs almost every thing." To give such worship a "special sanctity" was definitely wrong. In Garrison's opinion, it was imperative that religious meetings be conducted in a rational manner and be "divested of all sorcery." They should always be "purely voluntary" and not "effected through a fear of the displeasure of God, or the flames of hell."18

By the mid-1840's, Garrison's reexamination of the beliefs of his youth, spurred on by his devotion to free inquiry, had led him to modify his views on the supernatural sanction of the Bible. In the course of the debate over slavery, both the pro and the antislavery forces had sought to justify their positions by reference to Scripture. This being the case, it was almost inevitable that some of those in the antislavery camp would be led to repudiate the texts used by the proslavery polemicists as being contrary to the true meaning and intent of God's Word. It was but a short step from

^{18&}lt;sub>Liberator</sub>, May 7, 1847.

this view to the belief that not all of the Bible was divinely inspired. This was the direction in which Garrison's mind was moving. 19

In January, 1841 the abolitionist had defended himself against charges of infidelity by noting that "in a true estimate of the divine authority of the scriptures, no one can go beyond me. They are my text-book, and worth all other books in the universe."

In early November he penned a sonnet which graphically exhibited his orthodoxy on the question of divine revelation:

O Book of Books! though skepticism flout

Thy sacred origin, thy worth decry;
Though transcendental folly give the lie
To what thou teachest; though the critic doubt
This fact, that miracle, and raise a shout
Of triumph o'er each incongruity,
He in thy pages may perchance espy;
As in his strength th' effulgent sun shines out,
Hiding innumerous stars, so dost thou shine
With heavenly light, all human works excelling:
Thy oracles are holy and divine,
Of free salvation, through a SAVIOUR, telling:
All truth, all excellence, dost thou enshrine—20
The mists of sin and ignorance dispelling.

Nevertheless, by November 1843, Edmund Quincy could write that Garrison's opinions had been "greatly modified of late with regard to the Bible." It seemed that he was now "pretty well satisfied" that God had not "grown wiser by experience"--that the Supreme

¹⁹ See Kraditor, Means and Ends, pp. 91-92; Johnson, Garrison and His Times, p. 364; Lydia Maria Child, "William Lloyd Garrison," Atlantic Monthly, XLIV (August, 1879), 236; John Jay Chapman, William Lloyd Garrison (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1921), p. 166. In 1838 Garrison declared that "he who pertinaciously clings to a particular passage of scripture to uphold a favorite theory, and is always dwelling upon it, and refuses to compare scripture with scripture...does virtually acknowledge that the mass of evidence is against him.... In this manner do the advocates of slavery run to the passage, 'And they shall be your bondmen and bond-maids for ever,' to justify that atrocious system." Liberator, December 7, 1838. See also Leviticus 25:46.

²⁰ Liberator, January 29, 1841, November 5, 1841.

Being had not commanded people to "cut their brothers' throats a thousand years before he commanded them to love one another." Quincy feared that this change in Garrison's religious beliefs would complicate the work of the abolitionists. "It was so convenient," he wrote, "to be able to reply to those who were calling him infidel, that he believed as much as anybody, and swallowed the whole Bible in a lump, from Genesis to Revelation, both included." Having long judged the sins of the world by Truth and Right as revealed in the Scriptures, Garrison was beginning to judge the Scriptures by Truth and Right as revealed by his own reason. 21

In his article on Thomas Paine, the editor of <u>The Liberator</u> gave his readers a clear picture of his new views. He lamented the fact that, of the millions who professed to believe in the Bible as the inspired Word of God, there were few who had "the wish or the courage" to know upon what basis they had formed their opinions. Speaking to those who had been taught to believe that their salvation would be "put in peril" if they ever came to doubt the plenary inspiration of the Bible, Garrison wrote that there could be nothing "more consonant to reason" than the proposition that "the more valuable a thing is, the more it will bear to be examined." If the Bible, "from Genesis to Revelations," was divinely inspired, its "warmest

Edmund Quincy to R. D. Webb, November 27, 1843, in Garrison and Garrison, Life, III, 95; Kraditor, Means and Ends, p. 92. Garrison's sons wrote that it "would not be easy" to name the exact date upon which their father relinquished his belief in the "supernatural sanction of the Bible." According to them, this "radical change" made "no difference in his regard for the Scriptures, or in his use of them, as a moral engine, and he never failed to urge the reading of them upon his children." Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children, IV (New York: Century Co., 1889), 336.

partisans" had nothing to fear. It was to be examined with the same freedom as any other book and then "taken precisely for what it is worth." To insist that every thing contained in the Scriptures was inspired of God required "the suspension of the reasoning faculties." To say that all Biblical assertions had to be believed simply because they were found in that volume was "equally absurd and pernicious." It was the "province of reason" to "search the scriptures" and distinguish the true from the false -- to determine "what is probable. and what incredible -- what is historically true, and what fabulous... --what is the letter that killeth, and what the spirit that maketh alive." According to Garrison, "no man living" could tell when the various books of the Bible were written or by whom they were authored. This was "purely a matter of conjecture" and, since conjecture was not certainty, it ceased to be authoritative. Nor was it of "vast consequence," in the "eye of reason," whether Paul was the real author of Hebrews or whether Moses actually wrote the Pentateuch. "What is writ, is writ, and it must stand or fall by the test of just criticism..."22

likely to give birth to another. The clergy had long taught their congregations that "every chapter and verse" in the Bible was divinely inspired; that the Scriptures were to be their master, not their servant; that whatever the Bible taught or allowed "must be from God, and therefore right." Blindly adhering to these precepts, men had searched the Bible and found, on the strength of a single text or a number of texts, that it was lawful to make war, to sustain

²² Liberator, November 21, 1845.

"governments of brute force," and to enslave human beings. "What can be more monstrous than this?" asked the abolitionist. On the other hand, Thomas Paine and his followers had discarded the Bible as a pious imposture. Not being satisfied to refute the "foolish dogma of priestcraft" as to the plenary inspiration of the volume, they "manifested toward it exceeding bitterness and contempt of spirit" -- closing their eyes to its real character and to "the estimate in which it should be justly held." Finding historical inaccuracies and "things incredible" in the Bible, they condemned the entire work as fiction. Usually having "very little acquaintance" with the book, the followers of Faine seldom referred to those portions of Scripture which "inculcate the most stringent morality, the noblest sentiments, the most expansive benevolence, the purest life." They took no pleasure in "selecting the wheat from the chaff." To avoid Scylla they "perished on Charybdis." As for himself, Garrison believed that to discard a portion of Scripture was "not necessarily to reject the truth, but may be the highest evidence that one can give of his love of truth."23

During the 1840's Garrison also continued to criticize the more orthodox Christians for believing in the efficaciousness of "forms and ceremonies." He told the readers of his weekly that he knew of no "sacred rite" to be performed under the new covenant dispensation. Those who continued to "derive religious sustenance" from "rituals, temple worship, a priesthood, and holy days" were said to be ensuared in "spiritual leading-strings." Garrison believed it imperative for all men to learn and understand that Christianity had

²³ Ibid.

no other forms or ceremonies, times or seasons, than those of "love and good-will to all the human race"--that the only true and acceptable worship was practiced by those who worshipped God "in spirit and in truth." He held that if these views were accepted by American Christians, the power of "religious sorcerers" and the tyranny of "religious despots" would come to a "perpetual end." 24

tent. The observance of the first day of the week as "holy time" was said to be the "stronghold of Priestcraft." It was the day which brought the American people directly under the "priests" control and kept their "reasoning faculties...in abeyance, to be moulded and guided to the promotion of the craft." Certainly the Pope of Rome did not possess a more sanctimonious air or a more "cat-like tread" than Rev. Justin Edwards, principal agent of that "clique" known as the American and Foreign Sabbath Union. Most assuredly, all reasonable men could see that priestcraft, in league with "political despotism," laid heavy burdens upon men's shoulders and then, in order to justify its rapacity and hide its guilt, "imprudently descants

^{24 &}lt;u>Liberator</u>, September 9, 1842, May 5, 1843. In 1843 Garrison spoke out against the custom of opening reform meetings with a formal prayer. After an abolition gathering at Northampton, Massachusetts he wrote: "As usual, at the opening of the meeting, an opportunity was given for vocal prayer; but no one was moved to improve it.... The omission of a religious formality, which has so long enslaved the human mind, and which is the product of any thing but the true spirit of prayer, is another hopeful sign, though it will cause formalists and pharisees to groan in spirit, and to lift up their hands in holy horror. It also shows how purely mechanical and ceremonial this mode of extorting vocal prayer has been, and is, as generally adopted; for when reliance on the priest ceases, and no one is urged to go through with the performance, the result is usually silence, though many devout souls are present." Garrison to The Liberator, August 2, 1843, in Liberator, August 18, 1843. For his strictures on fast days see Liberator, May 28, 1841, March 28, 1845. For his criticism of quaker formalism see Liberator, September 9, 1842.

on the merciful arrangement of Providence, by which these bowed down laborers are enabled to obtain rest for their bodies one day in seven!"25

Angered by the pronouncements of a pro-Sabbath convention held in Rochester during the summer of (1842, Garrison offered a thousand dollar reward to anyone who could prove that either Christ or any of his disciples had ever alluded to "the sin of Sabbathbreaking," that the apostles had ever enjoined. "in the name of the Lord," the religious observance of any day of the week as the "holy Sabbath," that Christ had ever commanded his disciples to observe the first day of the week either as the Sabbath or in commemoration of His resurrection and ascension, or that the first day of the week was "declared by Jehovah, to be substituted for the seventh day as a Sabbath." Since he was confident that the observance of Sunday as a holy day was a "trick of priestcraft," without any foundation in Scripture, and hostile to "the spirit and design of Christianity," Garrison felt that there was little risk in offering the rewards. He knew that it was "not in the power of any human being to bring forward any such proof."26

Liberator, September 30, 1842, June 25, 1847. See also Liberator, July 12, 1844, February 28, 1845, November 27, 1846, February 26, 1847. In an 1835 letter to Samuel J. May, Garrison noted his aversion to travelling on Sunday. By 1844, however, he could write: "Believing that there is no sabbatical observance under the Christian dispensation--or, if there be, that the seventh, and not the first day of the week, is the sabbath, according to the Decalogue--I felt as free, of course, to pursue my journey on Sunday, as on any other day of the week." Garrison to Samuel J. May, December 26, 1835, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Liberator, August 23, 1844.

Liberator, August 19, 1842. For Garrison's reaction to an attempt to claim the reward see <u>Liberator</u>, September 30, 1842. The <u>Liberator</u> of November 12, 1841 contained a Garrisonian sonnet which expressed his hope that men would obey God's will by observing all days as "holy time."

Despite a break in friendly relations with John Humphrey Noyes over how abolitionism and abolitionists should operate within the pantheon of Christian reform, the editor of The Liberator continued to adhere to perfectionist tenets. According to Garrison, it was "essential to salvation" for men to receive and accept the doctrine which taught that they could obtain "immediate, unconditional, everlasting emancipation from the bondage of Satan, "_through Jesus Christ. It was because so few endeavored to rebut the "Calvinistic dogma" which held that men could not be perfect in this life that the "nominal Christianity" of the United States was so spurious. Of the millions who professed to have "passed from death unto life" scarcely a fraction could be regarded as having a just claim to the name "Christian." While claiming to be free, they acknowledged that they were in bondage. Declaring that no one could live without sin, they made provision for sin in the flesh. "If Christ cannot cleanse me from all sin here." wrote the abolitionist, "he cannot do it any where. If he cannot save me in this world, then it is because the devil is mightier than he."27

Garrison was strengthened in his beliefs by the fact that orthodox churchmen "all over the country" were adopting strong

²⁷ Garrison to Elizabeth Fease, June 1, 1841, Houghton Library, Harvard University; Garrison to Elizabeth Fease, July 2, 1842, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. See also Kraditor, Means and Ends, p. 103; Merrill, Wind and Tide, pp. 182-183; Liberator, November 19, 1841, August 19, 1842. In 1843 Edmund Quincy described Garrison's perfectionism, noting that the perfectionists were "a sect whose general doctrines he receives though he does not belong to it or any." One of Noyes's doctrines which the abolitionist refused to accept was the Vermont radical's concept of marriage. Lindsay Swift has written that in setting himself in opposition to Noyes's "elastic conception of the sexual relation" Garrison showed that he was "not of the right temper for a disciple." Edmund Quincy to R. D. Webb, June 27, 1843, Massachusetts Historical Society; Swift, Garrison, pp. 171-172. See also Liberator, November 26, 1841.

resolutions and taking "decisive action" against perfectionism. He was not surprised by their actions because he knew that there was no doctrine which the "priesthood" hated more bitterly--none which they were more anxious to keep their "dupes and captives" from believing--than the "rational, scriptural, glorious, and only truly reformatory doctrine of salvation from sin in this life." Garrison considered these proceedings to be "admonitory 'signs of the times'" which pointed to the fact that "a frightful state of corruption and impiety" existed within the nation's churches. To argue against the doctrine of holiness was to open the "floodgates of unrighteousness," to lower the standard of Christianity, and to "unblushingly" become the devil's advocate. Those who denied the ability of men to live without sin were themselves the "servants of sin."

Ever eager to denounce what he considered to be half-heartedness, Garrison did not hesitate to reprove those whose brand of perfectionism was somewhat less exacting than his own. During the 1840's, he criticized Charles Grandison Finney and Asa Mahan for not going "far enough" in their religious profession. They had written and published "many valuable articles respecting the New Covenant" in the Oberlin Evangelist, but they still seemed to be "in legal darkness" on many points. Considering how far they had advanced in "the theory of spiritual life," he found it surprising to find them so "trammelled" by "times and seasons, holy days, and fastings and penances, and worldly sanctuaries, and ordinances of divine service, and forms and ceremonies which gender to bondage." 29

^{28 &}lt;u>Liberator</u>, October 15, 1841, May 5, 1843.

²⁹ Liberator, October 15, 1841. Aileen Kraditor has written that Garrison's slogan of the duty to struggle to free oneself of

According to Garrison, the two clergymen did not lack "light" as much as they did moral courage and firmness. Sometimes they were as "bold as a lion," shocking and startling the ungodly and the hypocritical by their Christian radicalism. On other occasions they quickly lowered their strident tone and hoisted the flag of conservatism in order to save themselves from being put "beyond the pale of sectarian fellowship." In Garrison's opinion, they either had to "advance or retreat"--to carry on "an exterminating war" against the whole system of legality or "surrender at discretion." Finding their views on the necessity of making a "public profession of religion," on non-resistance, on government, and on the Sabbath to be out of tune with his own, the Boston editor characterized "Oberlin theology" as being neither Judaism nor Christianity, but "a mixture of both." 30

One doctrine of the early 1840's which Garrison thought to be wholly "pernicious and untenable" rather than a "mixture" of right and wrong was Millerism—the belief in the imminence of a premillennial advent. Along with Noyes, the abolitionist held that Christ had returned to earth around the year 60 A.D. His coming marked the end of the apostolic church and ministry while the new dispensation set men wholly free to follow the Savior in righteousness and truth. According to Garrison, a correct view of the second advent

all sin, "Be ye perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect," did not imply confusion between what was in principle obligatory and what was immediately realizable. On the contrary, he insisted that "to refrain from propagating the full truth or from struggling to do what he believed was the Christian's duty, because perfection was not realizable, would be to refrain from taking the first step toward its realization." Kraditor, Means and Ends, p. 29.

^{30 &}lt;u>Liberator</u>, September 17, 1841, August 26, 1842. See also Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, August 28, 1847, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; <u>Liberator</u>, November 10, 1848.

was essential to a clear perception and a just appreciation of the rights, privileges, and requirements of the new covenant dispensation. Such a view exalted Christ as a "Prince and a Saviour" in the most impressive and glorious manner while it gave a "death-blow to priestcraft, and all its train of pious impostures." It was the "consummation of all shadows, types, figures, ceremonies, and observances," whether under the "patriarchal, levitical, prophetical, or apostolical administration." Basing his views on Christ's words in Luke 21:32, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled," Garrison declared that, just as the French Revolution was the "legitimate product" of the "false religion" of France, the "Miller mania" was to be traced to the "false teachings of a dumb and blind priesthood ... " Could it be denied that generation upon generation of Christians had been taught to believe that the heavens and the earth were to be destroyed by fire and that Christ was to come in "a literal outward presence" to "sweep away the wicked with the besom of destruction"? Why then, he asked, should anyone be surprised to find that the theory which held that these events would come to pass during the year 1843 was being "so readily and extensively embraced"? As long as the "spiritual teachers" of Christendom continued to "inculcate the dogma" that the second advent was a future, and not a past event, there would be ample opportunity given for the formulation of "any conceivable number of impostures on this subject."31

Liberator, February 10, 1843, February 17, 1843; Thomas, Liberator, pp. 316-317. See also speech at Lynn, Massachusetts, December 17, 1843 in Liberator, January 12, 1844; Liberator, February 16, 1844, January 17, 1845. In a letter which he wrote to his wife from New Ipswich, New Hampshire early in 1844, Garrison noted: "There are a number here, who embrace the views of Mr. Miller,

and continue steadfast in his doctrine.... Such persons must have veneration and marvellousness to a great degree, and while they are under such excitement, reason and argument are of very little avail in convincing them of their delusion." Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, January 12, 1844, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

CHAPTER VII

CONFRONTATION

He who has God and conscience on his side, has a majority against the universe.

--Frederick Douglass August 11, 1852

Influenced greatly by Garrison, Frederick Douglass began his abolitionist career as an enthusiastic critic of organized religion, political parties, and the American Union with slaveholders. Although he quickly broadened his platform repertoire beyond that of a mere recitation of his slave experiences, Douglass' speeches were not noticeably original. He was seemingly content to say what the other abolitionists had said many times before. Nevertheless, as he developed poise and self-confidence on the lecture circuit, Douglass became aware of the somewhat paternalistic attitude which occasionally surfaced among the white abolitionists. During the late 1840's and early 1850's, he came into contact with the less benevolent, more authoritarian side of the Garrisonian movement. 1

Farl E. Thorpe, "Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington," Negro History Bulletin, XX (November, 1956), 39; Foner, Frederick Douglass, pp. 48-49. See also Douglass, Bondage, p. xxii. In 1860, Elizabeth Cady Stanton recalled how Garrison had influenced her life. "My own experience is, no doubt, that of many others," she noted. "In the darkness and gloom of a false theology, I was slowly sawing off the chains of my spiritual bondage, when, for the first time, I met Garrison in London. A few bold strokes from the hammer of his truth, I was free! Only those who have lived all their lives under the dark clouds of vague, undefined fears can appreciate the joy of a doubting soul suddenly born into the kingdom

As early as 1841, Stephen S. Foster had warned Douglass that audiences would cease to believe that he was ever a slave if he sounded "too learned." Garrison, too, urged him to "tell his story" and let the other lecturers speak on the more complex issues. Despite such injunctions from his white friends, Douglass refused to be stereotyped and stunted. As he wrote in his autobiography, "I was now reading and thinking. New views...were presented to my mind. It did not entirely satisfy me to narrate wrongs; I felt like denouncing them." Thus it was, that the stage was set for the 1847 confrontation between the ex-slave who had developed "a mind of his own" and the Garrisonian abolitionists, some of whom felt that the Negro was not yet ready to chart his own course in the antislavery world. 2

The first sign of an open breach between Douglass and Garrison occurred after the harried pace of their 1847 western tour had proven to be too strenuous for the elder abolitionist. Garrison became ill in Cleveland and urged Douglass to carry on with the lecture tour while he recuperated. Not considering his friend's illness to be of a serious nature, Douglass traveled to Buffalo for the next scheduled engagement. Later that week, however, he received word that the Boston abolitionist's condition was critical. This unexpected news made Douglass wish that he had not left Garrison's bedside. His

of reason and free thought.... To Garrison we owe, more than to any other one man of our day, all that we have of religious freedom." Speech at New York City, May 8, 1860, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 18, 1860. See also Swift, Garrison, pp. 374-377.

²Foner, Frederick Douglass, p. 59; Douglass, Bondage, pp. xxii, 361-362, 398-399. See also Quarles, Black Abolitionists, pp. 47-54.

Benjamin Quarles, "The Breach Between Douglass and Garrison,"

Journal of Negro History, XXIII (April, 1938), 146; Douglass to

Sydney Howard Gay, September 26, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery

concern over his companion's health was explained to Garrison by Samuel J. May. In an October 8 letter, May wrote, "Frederick Douglass was very much troubled that he did not get any tidings from you when he reached Syracuse on the 24th of September. He left you reluctantly, yet thinking that you would follow on in a day or two;...he was almost sure he should meet you at my house. His countenance fell, and his heart failed him, when he found me likewise in sad suspense about you." This message seems to have made little impression upon Garrison because, in a letter to Helen a few days later, he expressed surprise that his co-worker had "not written a single line to me, or to any one, in this place, inquiring after my health, since he left me on a bed of illness."

Douglass' apparent lack of solicitude was not the sole reason for Garrison's annoyance. He was greatly aggravated by Douglass' decision to go forward with his plans to publish an independent antislavery weekly. This project had originated when a number of British friends established a testimonial fund for the ex-slave. On Douglass' suggestion, this money was to be applied to the cost of establishing

Standard, October 7, 1847. During the summer of 1847, the two abolitionists had nothing but praise for each other. Garrison looked forward to visiting the western regions with his "eloquent friend," Douglass, while the ex-slave noted that his companion's "conversational powers" were seemingly inexhaustible. Garrison was "as fresh at midnight as at midday.... When he opens his mouth, and pours forth his truthful voice, the dark and foul spirit of slander falls before him, like Dagon before the ark." Garrison to John B. Vashon, July 27, 1847, in Journal of Negro History, XII (January, 1927), 40; Douglass to Sydney Howard Gay, August 20, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, September 2, 1847. See also Liberator, March 26, 1847.

Samuel J. May to William Lloyd Garrison, October 8, 1847, Anti-Slavery Letters to William Lloyd Garrison and Others, Boston Public Library, Garrison to Helen Garrison, October 20, 1847, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

a "well-conducted," Negro-run newspaper which would disprove the black man's supposed inferiority and demonstrate "his capacity for a more exalted civilization than slavery and prejudice had assigned him." Expecting to find his Boston associates favorably disposed to the new enterprise, he instead encountered opposition. Garrison believed that if Douglass remained true to his abolition principles he would be able to find few subscribers for his new paper. "It would not be in the power of Gabriel himself," he wrote, "to obtain much patronage or applause as an editor, if he were faithful to his trust, and utterly indifferent to the length of his subscription list." For Douglass to devote his precious time to cultivating such a limited audience would be wasteful since the large crowds which attended the various antislavery lectures were "every where eager to hear his eloquent and triumphant appeals." Despite the fact that his own career followed this very pattern, Garrison asserted that it would be "quite impracticable to combine the editor with the lecturer, without either causing the paper to be more or less neglected, or the sphere of lecturing to be seriously circumscribed."5

Initially, Douglass followed his mentor's advice. He temporarily abandoned his plan to publish a weekly paper, basing his decision on the fact that several Negro-owned journals had come into existence during the past year. Noting that "these will be sufficient to accomplish the good which I sought," he acquiesced in the wishes of the Garrisonians. The editor of The Liberator was pleased with this decision and joined his black friend in publicly denying that

Douglass, Life, pp. 257-259; Liberator, July 23, 1847. See also Liberator, July 16, 1847.

the Boston abolitionists had pressured Douglass into abandoning the project.

Nevertheless, the independent strain that was growing ever more prominent in Douglass' character became visible to all in late 1847 when he issued a prospectus for an antislavery paper to be called The North Star. In a letter to J. D. Carr, Douglass wrote, "I had not decided against the publication of a paper one month before I became satisfied that I had made a mistake, and each subsequent month's experience has confirmed me in the conviction." The new desire to publish a weekly did not result from any "ungrateful want of appreciation" for the zeal, integrity, or ability shown by the Garrisonian editors, but emanated from a "sincere and settled conviction" that such a journal, if conducted with moderate skill and ability, "would do a most important and indispensable work, which it would be wholly impossible for our white friends to do for us." Douglass considered it to be neither a reflection on the fidelity, nor a disparagement of the ability of his white fellow-laborers to assert that "the man who has suffered the wrong is the man to demand redress, -- that the man STRUCK is the man to CRY OUT--and that he who has endured the cruel pangs of Slavery is the man to advocate liberty."7

Garrison's initial reaction to the revival of his co-worker's publishing scheme was scarcely charitable. He said that Douglass'

Booker T. Washington, <u>Frederick Douglass</u> (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Company, 1906), p. 121; Douglass to editor of the Boston Daily <u>Whig</u>, June 27, 1847, in <u>Liberator</u>, July 9, 1847; Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, July 18, 1847, in <u>Liberator</u>, July 23,1847; <u>Liberator</u>, June 25, 1847.

⁷Douglass to J. D. Carr, November 1, 1847, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, January 27, 1848; North Star, December 3, 1847. See also North Star, December 22, 1848.

action was "impulsive" and "inconsiderate." Douglass "never opened to me his lips on the subject, nor asked my advice in any particular whatever! Such conduct grieves me to the heart." Nevertheless, Garrison's anger cooled rapidly. Soon he was complimenting Douglass on the high quality of The North Star and criticizing the free Negroes for not more enthusiastically supporting the new, Rochester-based paper. Overall, relations between the two abolitionists remained fairly cordial during Douglass' first three years in Rochester. They continued to meet at the annual conventions of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Their platform references to each other were courteous, if sparing. Nevertheless, the old amity was absent.

A return to their pre-1847 relationship was made almost impossible by Douglass' 1851 announcement of a fundamental change in his political tenets. At the eighteenth annual meeting of the society, a resolution was introduced which denied the Garrisonian abolitionists' endorsement to any paper which did not assume the United States Constitution to be a proslavery document. Douglass thereupon announced that his North Star was no longer eligible for their approval. After considerable thought and a "careful study" of the writings of Lysander Spooner, of Gerrit Smith, and of William Goodell, he had come to the conclusion that the Constitution, construed in the light

⁸Garrison to Helen Garrison, October 20, 1847, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. In March, 1848, Samuel May, Jr., noted that Douglass considered this imputation to be false--"that, on the contrary, he did speak to Mr. G. about it just before he was taken ill at Cleveland. Mr. Garrison, however, has no recollection whatever of it." Samuel May, Jr., to Mary Carpenter, March 4, 1848, Anti-Slavery Letters to William Lloyd Garrison and Others, Boston Public Library.

^{9&}lt;u>Liberator</u>, January 28, 1848, January 5, 1849; Quarles, "Breach," p. 149; Foner, <u>Frederick Douglass</u>, pp. 136-137. See also North Star, January 14, 1848.

of well established rules of legal interpretation, "might be made consistent in its details with the noble purpose avowed in its preamble." As a corollary, it became his duty to use political as well as moral means for the overthrow of the slave system. 10

Carrisonian tenets. "There is roguery somewhere!" he exclaimed, and angrily asked that The North Star be removed from the "approved" list of the society. Later, the Massachusetts abolitionist claimed that he merely meant that, since the slaveholders of the South, as well as all of the nation's political parties, were professing the same ardent attachment to the Union and the Constitution, there must be roguery somewhere--"there must be deception either on one side or the other in the use of terms, for they did not and could not all mean the same thing by those terms, but something diametrically opposite."

If Douglass could "satisfy his understanding and his conscience" by assuming that, under the Constitution, chattel labor had always been illegal, he had "no reproach to fling" and could "only marvel."

Despite this explanation, Douglass never forgot Garrison's harsh accusation. Indeed, he expected to receive even more abuse from the Garrisonians. He knew the temper of his old companions too well to hope that he would escape punishment. The leaders of the

¹⁰ Quarles, "Breach," pp. 149-150; Foner, Frederick Douglass, pp. 136-142; Liberator, May 23, 1851; Douglass, Life, pp. 261-262. In 1889, Douglass wrote, "I was a non-voter in 1848, though deeply interested in the free soil movement inaugurated at the Buffalo convention in that year. Before 1852 I became a sound convert to the doctrine of the unconstitutionality of slavery, and to the duty of voting against slavery." Douglass to Frederic May Holland, August 3, 1889, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

¹¹ Foner, Frederick Douglass, p. 142; Liberator, May 23, 1851, July 4, 1851; F. M. Holland, "Frederick Douglass," Open Court, IX (March 7, 1895), 4415.

American Anti-Slavery Society were strong men, noble champions in the cause of human freedom, but unfortunately they were not "the most charitable in construing the motives of those who see matters in a different light from themselves."

The expected verbal assault did not come immediately. During the remainder of 1851 and the first few months of 1852 the conflict between Douglass and the Garrisonians lay dormant. The editor of The North Star continued to publish the speeches of leading Garrisonian abolitionists and even praised the Society for doing "a great and good work." The editor of The Liberator graciously noted that, however widely he dissented from Douglass' present interpretation of the Constitution, he continued to hold "the same desire for the success of his paper, the same personal attachment, and the same confidence in his wish and determination to do all that in him lies for the speedy abolition of slavery, that we have felt from the beginning." But all this was only the proverbial calm before the storm. 1852 the feud flared up again at the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society. So intense was the hostility between the two camps that Douglass could complain of being assailed "with more bitterness" by the Garrisonian school of abolitionists than "from any other quarter." He wrote that he was often tempted to strike back, but was striving to "maintain silence under whatever Mr. Garrison may say." The ex-slave claimed that, despite Garrison's efforts to "undermine and destroy" his paper, he still stood in relation to his mentor like "a child to a parent," but "not so in relation to any

Quarles, "Breach," p. 150; Douglass to Gerrit Smith,
May 21, 1851, in Philip S. Foner, ed., The Life and Writings of
Frederick Douglass, II (New York: International Publishers, 1950),
156; Liberator, May 23, 1851.

other man of the party." It is not surprising, therefore, that

Douglass was less reticent in attacking Garrison's associates than

he was in taking on Garrison himself. 13

By the fall of 1853, the conflict reached a stage of vituperation unparalleled in the history of the antislavery movement. At this point, Douglass, in reporting the 1853 convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society, threw out the remark that Parker Pillsbury, Henry C. Wright, and Stephen Foster had been "induced to absent themselves" from the meetings because their presence might have given "new force to the charge of infidelity which is brought against the Society." This remark went unanswered until, at the August 2, 1853 celebration of West India Emancipation at Framingham, Massachusetts, Wendell Phillips publicly criticized Douglass for daring to attend the ceremonies after making such a statement. He demanded that the black abolitionist justify his slur "upon the integrity of the American Anti-Slavery Society." Frederick replied to the demand rather halfheartedly, reserving his best defense for publication in his own weekly. In the columns of Frederick Douglass! Paper, the weekly born of the 1851 union between The North Star and Gerrit Smith's Liberty Party Paper, he wrote that there was a time when he would have denied the charge that he had made against the three Garrisonians. That he did not do so was "owing to an altered state of the case." The abolitionists in question simply "do not stand where they once did." If the charge of infidelity had been solely the invention of the proslavery church, he would have given

Paper, February 5, 1852, February 26, 1852; Douglass to Charles Sumner, September 2, 1852, in Foner, Life and writings, II, 210-211.

it no credence since such a charge would probably have been the direct result of the abolitionists' faithfulness to the antislavery cause. Unfortunately, evidence existed which showed that Pillsbury, Wright, and Foster not only did not believe in the inspiration of the Holy Bible, but also gloried in this disbelief. They laughed at the absurdity of recognizing any book as being of divine authority. Douglass felt that it would have been "either the utmost folly, or the grossest dishonesty" to have pursued the course recommended by Phillips and to have defended the three from the charge of infidelity. He could not retract or deny the charge because he felt that he could not do so truthfully. Thus, along with his close friendship with the Garrisonians and his belief in several of their major doctrines, Douglass now abandoned his unquestioning faith in the supreme spiritual purity of the Garrisonian movement. No longer could he say with the same conviction that the "hated and despised" abolitionists were the only men and women in the land who did not "hold the truth of God in unrighteousness."14

¹⁴ Foner, Frederick Douglass, pp. 143-144; National Anti-Slavery Standard, September 3, 1853, September 24, 1853; Frederick Douglass' Paper, August 12, 1853, August 19, 1853; North Star, January 28, 1848.

of the Constitution. Any difficulty that he experienced could be attributed to the fact that he had become "alienated in spirit" from his old friends and no longer treated them with fairness or courtesy. "He is an altered man in his temper and spirit;" Garrison wrote, "the success of his paper he makes paramount to principle; and the curse of worldly ambition is evidently the secret of his alienation." It was not long before extracts from Douglass' articles were being published in The Liberator's "Refuge of Oppression" column, a section of the paper usually reserved for material from anti-abolitionist journals. By the end of the year, Garrison could write that his former co-worker stood "self-unmasked," his features flushed with passion, his air scornful and defiant, his language "bitter as wormwood," his pen dipped in poison; "as thoroughly changed in his spirit as was ever 'arch-angel ruined,' and as artful and unscrupulous a schismatic as has yet appeared in the abolition ranks." Beneath "the blackness of his skin" Douglass was attempting to hide "the blackness of his treachery."15

Tertiary issues and personal recriminations aside, the basic fact remains that, however much the Garrisonians protested that their hostility did not originate in Douglass' conversion to new antislavery principles, their words and actions during this period revealed how bitterly they resented his independent thinking. The ex-slave's proof of the contribution that the Negro could make as a major figure in the abolition movement was a major cause of the Garrisonian unrest and, to a large extent, explained why the Garrisonians were a good

¹⁵ National Anti-Slavery Standard, September 3, 1853; Liberator, September 23, 1853, November 18, 1853, December 16, 1853; Foner, Frederick Douglass, pp. 144-147.

deal kinder to others who left their ranks than they were to Douglass. 16

In spite of the various tumultuous events which occurred throughout this period, Douglass retained many of the same attitudes toward the American Church and the "true" Christianity that he had held during the early 1840's. Although he had severed most of his ties with the Methodist Church, the ex-slave still considered himself to be a believer in that higher form of religion given to man by a just and merciful Creator. To be sure, Douglass' God was still a figure of eternal justice. Presiding over the highest court in the universe, God adjudged America's slaveholders to be guilty of grievous wrongs. He told them that they could have "no peace" until they truly repented of their sins. As Creator and Lawgiver, God had, in times past, "stood and measured the earth," establishing the laws of man and nature, and instituting the penalties for their violation. "The earth is the Lord's, and righteousness should cover it," wrote Douglass, "and he who concedes any part of it to the introduction of slavery, is an enemy to God, an invader of his dominion, and a rebel against his government."17

This all-wise, "everywhere present" Eternal Being was also a God of love and mercy. Surely He would not permit twelve million

¹⁶ Foner, Frederick Douglass, pp. 150-151. See also Richard T. Greener, "Reminiscences of Frederick Douglass," Champion Magazine, I (February, 1917), 294.

Writings, II, 251; Speech at Rochester, December 8, 1850, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 148; Frederick Douglass' Paper, June 2, 1854; Speech at Pittsburgh, August 11, 1852, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 206; North Star, January 28, 1848, November 17, 1848, February 8, 1850. Louis Filler has written that the Garrisonian attack on Douglass was unjustified because the black abolitionist's conversion to the use of the ballot box and his new respect for the Constitution "did not change his views or actions" in other areas. "He had not shifted his orbit; he had enlarged it." Filler, Crusade, p. 206.

of his creatures to continue forever in a state of degradation and misery. "All things are possible with God," Douglass asserted. "Let not the colored man despair.... Greater is He that is for us, than they that are against us." The abolition of slavery would require time, energy, perseverance, and patience on the part of the anticlavery forces. It would also necessitate "a martyr-like spirit of self-sacrifice, and a firm reliance on Him who has declared Himself to be 'the God of the oppressed.'" Indeed, the "all-pervading love of God" had the power to "reach, melt and fuse the souls of men into a sense of common kinship, brotherhood and destiny." 18

Douglass also continued to feel a deep love for those aspects of religious feeling which urged man to minister to the physical, as well as the spiritual, needs of his fellow man. In April, 1849 he visited an orphan's asylum in New York City. Here he found religion in its appropriate sphere, "taking care of the fatherless, and lightening the burdens of the lonely widow." He felt like lifting his voice in the hymn "Praise God," as he beheld the scores of small children who had been rescued from damp and gloomy cellars, deserted and desolate garrets, "from the abodes of vice and crime," and placed in such a "delightful abode of virtue and intelligence."

¹⁸ Frederick Douglass' Paper, June 2, 1854; Speech at Chicago, November, 1854, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 332; Speech at Rochester, December 8, 1850, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 140; North Star, February 2, 1849; Speech at Rochester, December 1, 1850, in North Star, December 5, 1850; Speech at New York City, May 11, 1853, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress; Speech before the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1848, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

North Star, May 4, 1849. In an 1848 letter to Thomas Auld, Douglass expressed his happiness in the fact that his children were not doomed to a life in slavery. They were "not to work up into rice, sugar and tobacco, but to watch over, regard, and protect, and to rear them up in the nurture and admonition of the gospel--to train them up in the paths of wisdom and virtue." Indeed, Douglass' children

Still another carry-over from the earlier period was

Douglass' refusal to concede that the American clergy would never become more of a help than a hindrance to the antislavery crusade. It

was the "faithless and recreant priesthood" that he wished to hold

up to censure, not the "true servants of an impartial God." he vowed

that he would never be "driven off the platform" of the Christian religion in fighting slavery and hoped that the nation's ministers would

become ever more willing to join him on that platform. He appealed

to the clergy to "buckle on the armor of their master, and heartily

strive with their immense power, to arrest the nation in its downward

progress, and save it from the deep damnation to which it is sinking."

20

Douglass was always grateful to those religious bodies which opened their meetinghouse doors to the touring abolitionists. On one occasion, he described such a congregation as "friends of human freedom and Christian purity," who, though worshipping in comparatively

were not completely estranged from the gospel because of their father's alienation from the Church. Daughter Rosetta wrote that, although there was no family altar in the Douglass home, it was their custom "to read a chapter in the Bible around the table, each reading a verse in turn until the chapter was completed." Anna Douglass was said to be a mother who strove to inculcate in the minds of her children "the highest principles of morality and virtue both by precept and example." Douglass to Thomas Auld, September 3, 1848, in Anti-Slavery Bugle, September 29, 1848; Rosetta Douglass Sprague, My Mother as I Recall Her (pamphlet, Washington, D. C., 1923, Reprint of the 1900 edition), pp. 18, 24.

Holland, Colored Orator, p. 203; Frederick Douglass' Paper, May 26, 1854. Philip Foner has written that, unlike the Garrisonians, Douglass saw a ray of hope in the church schisms of the 1840's. The split between the northern and southern churches showed the ex-slave that the former were not as reprobate and willing to serve the southern slaveholders as the Garrisonians had charged. Thus, while criticizing every manifestation of proslavery and anti-Negro tendencies in the churches, he also let it be known that he was prepared to coperate with the antislavery groups in the northern churches. Foner, Frederick Douglass, pp. 148-149.

small quarters, were "nevertheless a broad light to the whole town."

He often expressed amazement at finding believers who combined "an orthodox faith" with a Christian life, living in communities otherwise bereft of genuine Christian feeling. In meeting with clergymen of this type, Douglass was afforded an all too rare experience. In their manners, the abolitionist found "an absence of all priestly assumption and domination." They conversed with him "in a manly way, on common ground, and on equal terms—a thing rather unusual for ministers to do." He was greatly encouraged by these talks with the type of minister who "nobly stood by the cause of the slave." Let their spirit spread, he noted, and "the jubilee will not be far off." 21

The reaction of the American clergy to several major events of the late 1840's and early 1850's did not allow Douglass to become overly optimistic as to the possibility of a national revival of the true Christianity. He considered the Mexican War to be both a diabolical "slaveholding crusade" and a foul blot upon the American profession of religion. While traveling near Rochester one day, Douglass chanced to overhear a conversation between two people of "apparent gentility and intelligence." One of the men believed that the "cup of Mexican iniquity was full" and that God was using the American troops to punish the people of Mexico. The black abolitionist was outraged that anyone could see the hand of the Lord in such bloodshed and slaughter. To couple religion with the "murderous designs" of the warmongers was outright blasphemy. What did the American clergy say to such charges? In Douglass' opinion, the ministers had simply linked hands with the guilty and attempted to

North Star, March 9, 1849, September 28, 1849; Frederick Douglass' Paper, September 23, 1853.

"float down with the multitude in the filthy current of crime."

Had they been faithful to their Christian duty and preached the gospel of peace, the land might have been spared the "withering curse" of war, but this was not to be. The clergy seemed as "silent as the grave." Their silence was truly the "greatest sanction of the crime."

Douglass' outrage over the "indifference" of the American Church was certainly not assuaged by the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. He had long been sympathetic with the plight of fellow fugitives and, on at least one occasion, lashed out at the "professed Christians" of Boston for not offering fleeing slaves better protection from the "white fanged blood-hounds" which followed close upon their "blood-stained track[s]." He believed the law to be one of the greatest infringements of "Christian liberty" ever enacted. It did not interfere with the singing of psalms or the rite of baptism, but only with the weightier matters of judgment, mercy, and faith. The law made it a criminal act to carry out the principles of the true Christianity. It forbade Americans "to do right," to show mercy, or to follow the example of the good Samaritan. If the nation's churches and ministers were not "stupidly blind, or most wickedly indifferent," they too would recognize the true character of this portion of the Compromise of 1850. Unfortunately, according to the ex-slave, they were once again "utterly

North Star, January 21, 1848, March 17, 1848. Douglass was not entirely correct in his assertion that the American Church was wholly silent. The Congregational, Unitarian, and Quaker Churches opposed the war. During the 1848 Presidential campaign, he also condemned the American clergy for "rallying to the support" of the "Slave-holding Warrior," Zachary Taylor. See Clayton Sumner Ellsworth, "The American Churches and the Mexican War," American Historical Review, XLV (January, 1940), 301-326; North Star, July 21, 1848, June 1, 1849.

silent" in respect to this unjust act which robbed religion of its chief significance and made it "utterly worthless to a world lying in wickedness." The fact that the American Church did not seem to & regard the Fugitive Slave law as a declaration of war against religious liberty proved that the bulk of the churchmen regarded 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. The Church seemed to value "sacrifice above mercy, psalm-singing above right doing; solemn meetings above practical righteousness." Such a religion was surely more of a curse than a blessing to mankind. For his part, Douglass would "welcome infidelity! welcome atheism! welcome anything!" in preference to this sort of religion. Indeed, the ministers of this "cold and flintyhearted" creed had converted "the very name of religion" into an "engine of tyranny and barbarous cruelty" and had served to "confirm more infidels, in this age, than all the infidel writings of Thomas Paine, Voltaire, and Bolingbroke put together have done!"23

During these trying years, Douglass not only felt that the

Church was indifferent to the sorrowful cries of the slave, but he

also believed that the American religious establishment actually

took sides with the southern oppressor. It had made itself "the

bulwark" of slavery and "the shield" of the slave-hunter. He found

that many of its most eloquent divines had willingly given the sanc
tion of religion to the slave system and had taught that the relation

Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, November 8, 1842, in Liberator, November 18, 1842; Speech at Rochester, July 5, 1852, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 196-198; Speech at Fittsburgh, August 11, 1852, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 207-208. See also North Star, June 2, 1848.

of master and slave was ordained of God. Some, like the "shameless" Dr. Lord of Buffalo even preached that to return an escaped bondsman to his master was the clear duty of all who professed to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Douglass believed these men to be "wolves in sheep's clothing--thieves and liars" who tortured the pages of the Holy Bible into sanctifying criminal acts. They were capable of doing more in one hour to undermine man's reverence for the Bible "than the most skillful infidel could effect in ages." 24

The black abolitionist's personal experiences during this period were also calculated to make him despair of any hope for an improvement in the moral character of the American people. Despite the instances of clerical kindness which he occasionally found on the antislavery lecturing circuit, a more common occurrence was that which took place in 1849 at Oswego, New York. When his Oswego friends heard of his plans to speak there, they attempted to obtain the use of one of the city's church buildings, but were turned down by every congregation on the grounds that the ex-slave would speak against the Church. The meetings were finally held in the town hall, giving Douglass yet another example of the patently uncharitable nature of "professed Christians." When a similar situation occurred a few weeks later, forcing the abolitionists to meet in a hotel ballroom, Douglass wrote: "Thus it is, and thus it has ever been. The cause of God is received more gladly by the world than by a corrupt and hollow church."25

At Bath, that "dark corner of the State of New York with

Speech at Rochester, July 5, 1852, in Foner, <u>Life and Writings</u>, II, 197; <u>North Star</u>, January 16, 1851.

²⁵ North Star, September 21, 1849, October 5, 1849.

Methodist preacher who further decreased his respect for the ministry. Rev. Aldin hailed the abolition party, which on this occasion also included Charles Lenox Remond and Joseph C. Hathaway, and proceeded to start an argument. In answering the cleric's charge that the church had no more right to abolish slavery than to abolish whiggery, Douglass asked why this opinion was not given at the recent public antislavery gathering. Aldin replied hotly that he did not speak out at the meeting because he would not put himself "on a level with a <u>nigger</u>"--and then walked away. The editor of <u>The North Star</u> told his readers that such ministers "steal the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in." They were hypocrites, professing to love God "while they despise God's children." 26

Incidents of this nature did not dissuade Douglass from continuing to rely upon certain Garrisonian doctrines and rhetorical techniques in mounting his anti-clerical attacks, but only served to broaden the scope of his campaign. 27 (Between 1847 and 1850, the black abolitionist tried to convince Negro Christians to follow his example and "come out" from the "pro-slavery" churches. Douglass' "come-outerism" was composed of two different, but complementary aspects, the first of which was rooted in his experience at Thomas James's church in New Bedford, while the second evidenced his hatred of "complexional institutions."

Within James's small group of believers, as well as in the

²⁶ North Star, April 7, 1848, April 14, 1848, March 9, 1849.

²⁷For further examples of Douglass' impassioned criticism of the American church and clergy during these years see North Star, January 7, 1848, February 18, 1848, March 24, 1848, October 12, 1849, November 2, 1849, April 26, 1850, June 27, 1850.

much larger, more influential black congregations of the North,

Douglass had hoped to witness the birth of a strong antislavery
spirit. Such an occurrence would have evidenced the willingness of
the black Christians to make important personal sacrifices in order
to facilitate the liberation of those fellow countrymen still held
captive in the house of bondage. Unfortunately, he found that, on
the whole, "those who have the ear of our people on Sundays, have
little sympathy with the anti-slavery cause, or the cause of progress in any of its phases." The black ministers were too frequently
disposed to "follow the beaten paths" of their predecessors and to
reason that if their fathers "got along pretty well" without meddling in abolitionism, they could do the same. The most that they
"aim at," said Douglass, was to "get to heaven when they die"--and
this was not enough to satisfy a believer in the true religion of
love to God and man. 28

In May, 1849, at a meeting of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, Douglass commented on a resolution urging the assembled abolitionists to leave the Church. Noting that he had faced the same problem of conscience when he first discovered the "sinful position" of American religion, the black abolitionist told the audience that the only way to convert the Church to the abolition position was to come out and stand aloof from it. Antislavery men should feel that a religious organization which fellowshipped with or countenanced slavery in any of its aspects was not a Christian body, but a sinful body and, hence, should not receive their support. Although he had once considered the Methodist Church to be the purest in the

²⁸ Speech at Troy, New York, October 6, 1847 in North Star, December 3, 1847; North Star, July 14, 1848.

world, Douglass never regretted leaving the communion to which he had adhered for "some dozen years." At first he had been afraid that he would not be able to live a Christian life without the encouragement of a Christian Church, but he eventually came to the conclusion that a "true man" must have such confidence in principle end such an "attachment for righteousness" as to be able to stand alone, and upright, in any situation. Douglass was fully convinced that those antislavery advocates who remained within the Church soon became so interested in religious affairs that they neglected the antislavery cause "almost entirely." For himself, he could no longer worship in any of the so-called Christian churches of the land any more than he could in the hold of a pirate ship. When he attended any of them, he went as a spy, in order that he might more clearly exhibit their hypocrisy and inconsistency to his abolition audiences. 29

During this period, Douglass' anti-clerical remarks were often aimed at several of Philadelphia's black congregations. He was especially critical of St. Thomas' Protestant Episcopal Church, which barred its doors against the cause of the slave, but "welcomed

²⁹Liberator, June 8, 1849. Later in the year, Douglass showed that his opposition to the American Church did not stem from any fervent anti-institutionalism on his part. In the August 10, 18^{49} issue of his paper, he urged the creation of a "National League" which would unite the free colored people in a "general organization for opposing slavery and improving their own condition." When he saw that his proposal was generating little interest, he promptly attacked the black Christians. "We have reason to believe," he wrote, "that sectarianism is not among the least of the causes of the hesitation and coldness with which the movement has been received." The "bigotry of sect" was so narrow and near-sighted that it could "see good nowhere beyond the limits of its own particular communion." This "ignorance and intolerance," championed by those "little Popes and Bishops, who claim and assume to decide for the colored people what shall be the religious opinions of those who undertake to instruct them," stood "directly in the way of that union 'so devoutly to be wished' for." North Star, August 10, 1849, October 26, 1849.

Episcopalian slaveholders and slavery defenders" to its pulpit. The black Episcopalians excused themselves for not opening their church to the abolitionists on the ground that to do so would be to misuse a building dedicated to the worship of God. Douglass did not accept their reasoning. Instead, he compared their belief in the sanctity of church buildings to the "temple worship" of the ancient Jews. The Jewish religion sanctified times and places, setting them apart for certain forms and ceremonies, but Christ placed mercy above sacrifice, man above the Sabbath, and worship above time or place. To regard the house of God as a place too holy to "plead the cause of injured man" was to make clean "the outside of the cups and the platter, whilst disregarding the uncleanness within." Indeed, the whole notion of regarding church buildings with peculiar reverence and thinking that the Almighty regarded them with special favor was "diametrically opposed to the very genius of Christianity" and had no sanction in the New Testament scriptures. "Houses are for men." Douglass wrote, "they need them--God does not." 30

The second aspect of the black abolitionist's "come-outerism" was revealed in a series of articles which appeared in The North
Star during the early months of 1848. If the black man must attend a church, he seemed to say, why could he not do some good by asserting

North Star, October 13, 1848. See also North Star, December 8, 1848, December 29, 1848. In 1849 Douglass also criticized the trustees of New York's Zion Church for opening their large building to the abolitionists only after demanding and receiving a rental fee of thirteen dollars per evening. This incident made Douglass hang his head and "blush to think myself associated with such a people." He found that, like many white religionists, these Negroes placed "sacrifice above mercy, and getting religion above doing the will of God." How strange it was, the black abolitionist marvelled, that "even colored men, themselves under the ban of proscription and oppression, can adopt the detestable airs of the very men who are oppressing them!" North Star, April 27, 1849.

several important human rights while doing so. Thus, Douglass launched a campaign to convince the black religionists that it would be in their best interests to abandon their Negro churches and to attach themselves to predominantly white congregations. Separate religious organizations were merely "negro pews, on a higher and larger scale." As such, they were at variance with "the glorious cause of liberty and human equality" and diametrically opposed to the spirit and precepts of the gospel of Christ. Black churches, like black temperance societies, fraternal organizations, and schools had been encouraged "by the very men who hate us, and wish to get rid of us." Negroes had long considered these institutions to be necessary because of the proscription they met when attempting to join white organizations; but now the time had come to withdraw from all complexional institutions, to "go for equal and universal brotherhood, and demand admission to all institutions enjoyed by other men." If, on "the very next Sabbath," every black church could be abandoned, their members flocking to the doors of the nation's white churches and demanding admission on equal terms with white people, the dramatic scene which would be offered to the nation "would do more to open the eyes of the public to the character of our wrongs, than any other which we can now think of." "Come, brethren," Douglass implored, "let us be men, equal men--Christians and equal Christians; let us show that we know our rights, and mean to assert them."31

March 24, 1848. Ferhaps reflecting on his own experiences in New Bedford, Douglass wrote that, due to the poor "mental qualifications" of most black ministers, Negro Christians would have gained much more "in point of elevation and improvement" by remaining in white churches than they had in forming their own separate religious bodies. He also

Just as he sought to have black Christians become aware of the "true nature" of the American Church, Douglass tried to convince the readers of The North Star that the religious revivals of the day were divorced from the true spirit of Christ. On the lecturing circuit, he often found the attendance at abolition meetings to be substantially reduced if a revival was in progress nearby. In such cases, he charged the local ministers with telling their congregations that abolitionism was injurious to the cause of religion -- that it would retard the progress of the revival. These encounters, as well as his "whole experience as a slave, and as a freeman at the South and at the North" served to confirm for him that "the high claims of outraged humanity" were never more disregarded than "in times of what are popularly called religious revivals." To Douglass' mind, "an out-pouring of the spirit of God" in the days of Christ and the apostles was of a much higher, holier character. A "revival" in those times was "in perfect keeping" with seeking to do good, to relieve distress, and to improve the mental and physical condition of mankind. Indeed, the abolitionist's critical attitude toward revivals was not meant to be confused with a criticism of Christianity itself. It was only a condemnation of those revivals which went "hand in hand with the slave trade" and of those revivalists who were "loud in their zeal for God." but "heartless and indifferent about the welfare of man." Against men and events of this character Douglass vowed to "hurl the most pointed rebukes, and brand them

criticized the Negro churches for the "countenance and support" which they gave to colored schools "and indeed to every other institution founded on complexion." Douglass further noted that separate churches were an unnecessary drain on the scarce economic resources of the northern black community. North Star, March 3, 1848, March 10, 1848.

with the deepest condemnation."32

Not surprisingly, the impact on Douglass of the break with Garrison, the Mexican war, the Fugitive Slave Act, and the continued "indifference" of the American Church to the plight of the slave produced in him a brief period of spiritual depression. Shortly after the passage of the Compromise of 1850. Rev. Henry Ward Beecher visited the abolitionist in his Rochester office. Beecher's inquiry as to the state of Douglass' health brought an unexpected, but understandable response from the black editor. "I am all broken up," he sighed, "done with your church, your Christianity, and your hypocrisy. You have given your country over to slavery, and to slave catchers, and your church sanctions it, as authorized by the Bible." Seeing that Douglass was in need of some spiritual encouragement, Beecher promptly sat down with the worried and discouraged abolitionist. Taking Revelation 19:6 as his text, he ministered to Douglass' wounded spirit. 33 "When I arose," Douglass later noted, "I arose a changed and delivered man. Now, I am in the trade winds of the Almighty."34 Subsequent events were to show that the ex-slave was

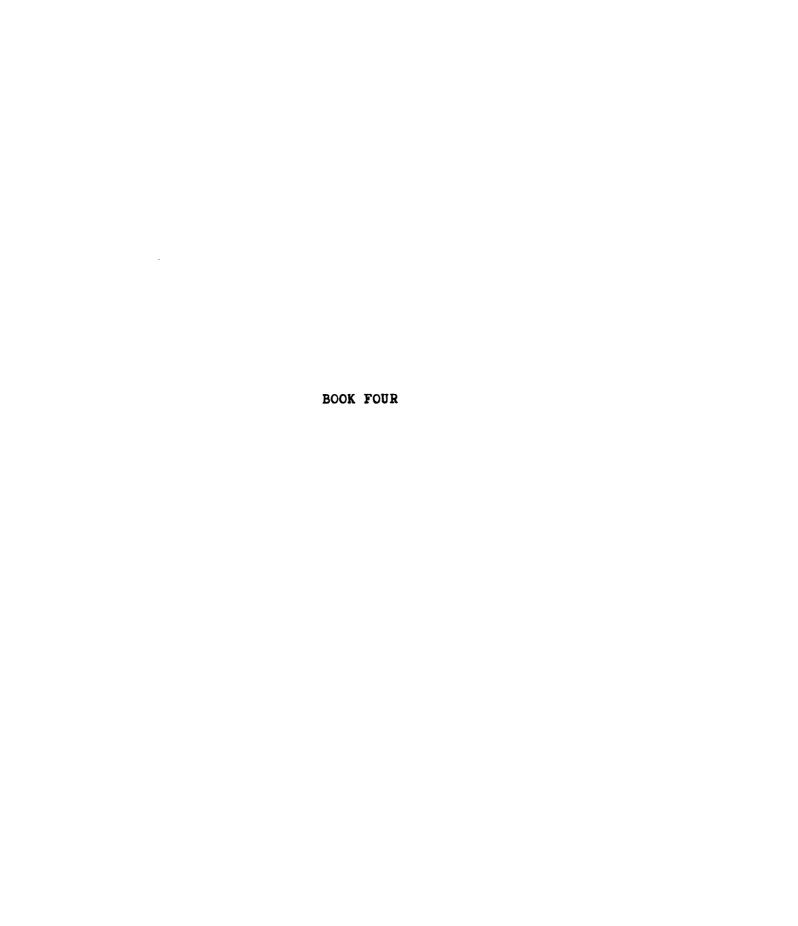
North Star, March 3, 1848, March 31, 1848, March 9, 1849. Douglass had criticized the Millerites, those advocates of "the doctrine of the speedy destruction of the world by fire" because their doctrines had impeded the antislavery movement. "Instead of laboring to reform the world," he wrote, "they are laboring to convince the world that it cannot be reformed. Instead of looking for Christ as the regenerator of the world, they are looking for him as the destroyer of the world. The consequence of all this is, a virtual abandonment of all moral and religious reform on their part." Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, March 6, 1844, in Liberator, March 15, 1844.

³³Revelation 19:6 reads: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

Douglass, In Memoriam, p. 27; Holland, Colored Orator, pp. 256-257; Washington Evening Star, February 25, 1895.

indeed becoming somewhat of a changed man--but in ways which Rev.

Beecher, and perhaps Douglass himself, did not yet fully understand.



CHAPTER VIII

STUDENT OF INFIDELITY

The term "infidel" is a surer proof of honesty of purpose and goodness of heart, in this degenerate age and country, than that of Christian.

--William Lloyd Garrison March 20, 1857

During the late 1840's, William Lloyd Garrison again infuriated his critics by writing and circulating a call for a convention to oppose the laws punishing Sabbath-breakers. The Boston Evening Transcript believed that those who signed the call were attempting to replace "orthodoxy" with "Parkerism, or some other ism." The editor of the Boston Trumpet declared that he would not be surprised to find the antisabbatarians launching a campaign "to have all the meeting-houses closed perpetually, except those they assemble in themselves." The Christian Watchman denounced the "movers in this piece of folly and wickedness" and compared the forthcoming meeting to the Chardon Street Convention of 1840--that "bootless convention of ill-starred visages, long heads, long noses, and flat pates."

Undisturbed by such "priestly clamor and bigoted uproar,"

Garrison asserted that the time had come to "lay bare imposture, to expose falsehood, to tear off masks." The anti-Sabbath movement could no more be suppressed than the earth could be kept from turning

Swift, Garrison, p. 293; Liberator, January 21, 1848, February 11, 1848.

on its axis. Even though virulently assailed by "a corrupt and arrogant priesthood," the "righteous cause" was supported by the example of Jesus and by those followers of the Savior who proclaimed "entire deliverance from the bondage of the law." Its "universal triumph" was certain.²

The Anti-Sabbath Convention, held at Theodore Parker's Melodeon on March 23 and 24, 1848, accomplished little of importance beyond a series of lengthy resolutions; but the mere fact that it was held seemed reason enough for one Boston paper to label Garrison the "Prince of New England infidelity." The Boston Recorder noted that the most influential speaker, "whose dictates, whether opposed or not, swayed the whole course of things, was the redoubtable Garrison.... At every turn in the business, his hand grasped the steering oar; and let his galley-slaves row with what intent they would, he guided all things at his will."

According to the abolitionist editor, sabbatical enactments were similar to those "tyrannical" laws which had, in times past, sent men to the stake "in the name of God and for his glory." They were animated by the same spirit which, in all ages, had persecuted those who sought to be loyal to God and to their consciences. "Let the first day of the week stand on its own basis, as the second or third day stands," he told the Melodeon audience, "and I am satisfied that it will be much more rationally observed...." As long as the mass

Liberator, January 21, 1848. See also Liberator, March 17, 1848; Garrison to Elizabeth Pease, June 20, 1849, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

³Garrison and Garrison, <u>Life</u>, III, 226; <u>Liberator</u>, April 7, 1848. Garrison supported the call for another Anti-Sabbath Convention in 1849, but was unable to attend. See <u>Liberator</u>, March 16, 1849, April 20, 1849.

of Americans held to the observance of a "holy Sabbath" they would continue to make a "show" of religion on Sunday while behaving in a decidedly irreligious manner during the rest of the week. In Garrison's opinion, to "tie men up" to the idea that one day was more holy than another and to enforce that idea by the infliction of penalties in cases of disobedience was to make them religious hypocrites rather than genuine Christians. Certainly God was able to give men the strength to consecrate their entire lives to the work of "doing good continually" without any regard to days, times, or seasons.

Linking Sabbatical laws with superstition, Garrison urged working men and women to "hold on to this day of rest, not superstitiously, not as a peculiarly holy day, but intelligently and rightfully." If they would only put away the vices, crimes, and sins which so heavily taxed their time and labor and earnestly seek peace, knowledge, and "true piety," they would be able to "redeem all days from servile toil," and enjoy a "perpetual Sabbath." Many were the "terrific stories" which the "priesthood" told about the inflictions which an allegedly angry God brought upon Sabbath breakers, but, asked the abolitionist, why did we never hear of the idolatrous, the covetous, or the adulterous being visited in this manner? Was the fourth commandment the only one in the Decalogue whose violation excited the special displeasure of Heaven? According to Garrison, the answer to these questions was "apparent to all who have any vision." Since the Sabbath was "the day of the priesthood"--the day on which

Proceedings of the Anti-Sabbath Convention, Held in the Melodeon, March 23d and 24m (Boston, 1848), pp. 25-26, 28-30, 137. See also Liberator, March 31, 1848, April 21, 1848.

the ministry promoted and perpetuated their craft--it was to be expected that they would "bring in God" to smite those who would not "hallow their harvest day, nor recognize as valid their spurious credentials."

During the afternoon session of March 23, Garrison moved that the officers of the convention prepare a memorial to be circulated throughout the state, signed, and then presented to the next session of the Massachusetts legislature. Later, in commenting upon this memorial for the repeal of all laws enforcing the observance of the Sabbath day, he showed how closely his antisabbatarianism was tied to his advocacy of freedom of conscience. Noting that there was a time when the rights of conscience were much more trammelled by legal prohibitions and penalties than at present, he nevertheless asserted that at least one yoke remained unbroken -- the compulsory observance of Sunday as "the Lord's day." To Garrison's mind, the Massachusetts legislature, in passing the Sabbath laws, had mistaken its powers and duties. Conscience was not to be governed by political majorities and therefore it was imperative that the government "be made to repeal what it has had no right to enjoin." Such a wholesale repeal would mean that the legislature had finally come to recognize "the sacredness of conscience" in matters of religious faith and practice.

Speech at Boston, March 23, 1848, in <u>Liberator</u>, June 2, 1848; Speech at Boston, March 23, 1848, in <u>Liberator</u>, June 16, 1848. In a letter to Joseph Congdon, Garrison wrote: "You are aware that the prevalent superstition in regard to the holiness of the first day of the week has been found a mighty obstacle in the path of every reform, and that it is the stronghold of priestcraft, and of a pharisaical religion. The most vigorous and systematic measures are in operation to strengthen that superstition, and to make its yoke heavier upon the necks of the people." Garrison to Joseph Congdon, December 15, 1848, Garrison Fapers, Boston Public Library.

Speech at Boston, March 23, 1848, in <u>Liberator</u>, March 31, 1848; <u>Liberator</u>, November 2, 1849.

During the late 1840's and throughout the following decade, Garrison continued both to lash out against "Christian superstition" and to champion freedom of thought. In November, 1848, he met a young lady who had been an invalid from childhood as the result of a fall. Upon learning the identity of the abolitionist, the young woman asked him to "write a piece in her Album." As Garrison leafed through the book, his eyes were drawn to an article which had been written by "an aged and much respected Doctor of Divinity, of the Calvinistic stamp." The minister had urged the crippled girl to remember that "her illness did not spring out of the ground" -- the inference being, at least in Garrison's interpretation, that her condition was the result of a special divine visitation rather than the natural consequence of her fall. Apparently this act of God was designed to teach the seemingly unfortunate victim humility, to induce her to pray, to bring her to repentance, and to lead her to Christ. The abolitionist recoiled at such an inference. He thought it to be "bad logic, and worse theology." Certainly there was nothing "miraculous, marvellous, or uncommon" in being prostrated by sickness. An imparied constitution was neither the condition nor the product of humility. Emanating "neither from above, nor from beneath," illness, if curable, was to be cured by natural processes without regard to any of the "Christian graces." A resigned and humble spirit, though desirable at all times, could not straighten a curved spine or mend a fractured limb.

Early the next year, the Boston editor reviewed a book entitled Golden Gems for the Christian. In it, the author recounted one of the "several striking instances" in which the prayers of

⁷Liberator, November 17, 1848, December 29, 1848.

Rev. John Flavel were miraculously answered. On one occasion, when the English fleet was engaged in a fierce naval war with France, the British minister had called his people to a solemn fast and had "wrestled in agony with God for the church and nation, but especially for the poor seamen of Dartmouth, that they might obtain mercy." According to the account, the Lord apparently heard Flavel and answered him for "not one of that town was killed in the fight, though many were in the engagement." To assert that a miracle was performed for the special benefit of the Dartmouth seamen—and to claim that it was done "at the pious request of Mr. Flavel, who does not appear to have felt any concern for the poor seamen of France, whether they were slaughtered or otherwise" was, to Garrison, the height of imbecility. "This," he wrote, "surely, is not very Christ-like, but it is very superstitious and absurd."

By 1849 Garrison had also come to hold some decidedly unorthodox views on the divine nature and atoning mission of Christ. In discussing the atonement, the abolitionist noted that he did not believe that the righteousness of any being, however "exalted and holy," could become a substitute for the unrighteousness of any other being. Finding it just as paradoxical to talk of the supererogatory merits of "any of the Romish saints," he asserted that one man's intemperance could never be cancelled by the strict abstinence of another—no man could be morally or religiously good for another any more than, by eating an extra quantity of food, he could "appease the appetite of one who is dying from hunger."

Garrison was of the opinion that American Christians tended

Liberator, January 19, 1849.

to engage in a "great deal of pious sentimentalism" about the atonement of Christ. In many instances their wrongheaded views served as a "cloak for iniquity." In other cases this "sentimentalism" had "begotten a most pernicious superstition." Surely, he told his readers, Christ was "no better than he should have been." He fulfilled, but could not surpass the righteousness of the law. Jesus laid down his life for his enemies. He was obedient even unto the death of the cross. He was holy, harmless, undefiled. Endeavoring to promote peace on earth and good will among men, he exemplified that "spirit by which alone the human race can be reconciled to each other and to God." In all of these "noble characteristics" Christ was worthy of imitation, but, according to Garrison, "for what he did and suffered, the credit is his alone, and can never rationally be put to the account of another, who is a transgressor."

Garrison also believed that the "forms and ceremonies" which were held so dear by many evangelical Christians tended to support "superstitious beliefs." A loss of "religious vitality" was clearly evident in any denomination which practiced liturgical or ritual forms in their worship services. "The more of forms, the more of formality;" he wrote, "the more of formality, the less of real spirituality." To Garrison it seemed both a lamentable and damning fact that while Christians viewed times, seasons, and ordinances as sacred, they invariably forgot to "remember who man is, and what he is."

American Christians were taught to regard "external things" as "sanctified and holy," but had never learned to treat man in the same manner—and men were created in the Divine image. According to Garrison,

^{9&}lt;sub>Ibid</sub>.

the churches "must reverse the whole of this." There should, he noted, be nothing sacred under heaven but man. Forms, seasons, and times were not of heaven, but of man. If they were of any use at all it was only to elevate man. If such "forms" did not tend to promote his freedom and happiness, he concluded, they ought to be "trampled under foot or cast aside."

Given the nature of Garrison's religious evolution, it was not too surprising to find that the former Baptist choir boy had abandoned his early zeal for the "ceremony" of baptism. As early as 1839 he had described a group of believers in Greenfield, Indiana by noting that they held to "baptism by immersion, and the breaking of bread every first day of the week." By adhering to these "rites" they showed that they were "a sect...in legal bondage." Four years later he asserted that the "religious hopes and reliances" of those Christians who believed in "ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary"--who adhered to "outward baptism, and to the formal observance of the eucharist" were "as frail and as worthless as the spider's web." By the 1850's, therefore, it was quite understandable that Garrison, when asked by his daughter, Fanny, whether she had ever been baptised, could reply, "No, my darling, you have had a good bath every morning and that is a great deal better."

Garrison believed that the "creed" of a "model religious organization" need be no more complex than that approved by Christ in Luke 10:27: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, ... and thy neighbor as thyself." No "discipline" for such a body

¹⁰ Liberator, June 1, 1849, January 7, 1853.

llGarrison to Samuel J. May, June 22, 1839, in Ruchames, Letters, II, 494-495; Liberator, February 10, 1843; Villard, Non-Resistance, p. 7.

would work as effectively, or keep the association "so pure and vital" as untrammelled speech" and the "largest liberty of discussion" since these precious rights were wholly incompatible with superstition, tyranny, corruption, and phariseeism. 12

During the late 1840's and continuing throughout the 1850's, the abolitionist championed this freedom of thought and expression. In 1848, he complained that laws still existed in several of the states which forbade atheists to testify in court. "Every man." said Garrison, "must decide for himself, and no one decide for him, as to the Deity he shall recognise.... Let us be careful how we trample on human liberty or human conscience." Three years later, in saluting the appearance of an American edition of Henry George Atkinson and Harriet Martineau's Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development -- a work which had been condemned by the clergy as "an atheistical production," Garrison noted that there was no investigation which an honest mind feared or which an enlightened mind condemned. The "evil that is in the world" was not that men spent too much time in reflection or that they refused to be "fettered by traditional teaching." On the contrary, it was that men were generally disposed to take things upon trust, to blindly reverence the past, and to "believe in the existence of a God as they accept of any other popular notion." Certainly, the man who "honestly doubts" was not necessarily a "dangerous member of society." Surely an "inquiring spirit" was not an inherently irreverent one. 13

¹²Garrison to Joseph A. Dugdale, May 19, 1853, in <u>Liberator</u>, July 1, 1853.

¹³ Proceedings of the Anti-Sabbath Convention, pp. 29-30; Liberator, August 8, 1851.

Resting his case on "the grand fundamental Protestant doctrine of the right of private judgment and individual conscience," Garrison sought to justify what the more orthodox Christians termed his "heresies" in regard to the Scriptures. "Concede the right to every soul to decide for itself what is true, or what is inspired," he wrote, "and no man can be an infidel, except he be false to his own standard." Those Protestants who raised the cry of "infidelity" against him because he did not accept their view of the Bible were actually Papists in disguise who greatly enjoyed wearing "the robes of Infallibility." Upon close examination such men were invariably found to be "swollen with conceit, stultified through superstition," and "contracted by ignorance." Refusing to "heed their fulminations" or "submit to their rule, for one moment," the Boston abolitionist asserted that when he was willing to give up his own independent judgment and to pin his faith upon a mortal "sleeve," he would "repudiate Protestantism, turn Catholic, and kiss the great toe of the genuine, unadulterated Fope at Rome."14

In Garrison's opinion, much of the confusion and controversy over the question of biblical interpretation arose from the "common error" of regarding the Bible as a unit--a work prepared by a single, divine mind. In actuality, it was a compilation of Jewish and Christian manuscripts, written in different parts of the world, in ages more or less remote from one another. As to its genuine authorship, no book was involved in more obscurity. Therefore, inasmuch

¹⁴Garrison to editor London Anti-Slavery Advocate, March 18, 1856, in Liberator, March 21, 1856; Liberator, September 20, 1850, January 13, 1854. See also speech at Providence, January 11, 1855, in Liberator, January 19, 1855; Speech at Rochester, February 11, 1857, in Liberator, February 27, 1857.

as the Bible was "not one production, but many productions,"

Garrison found it easy to understand why, when theologians treated it as a unit, every portion of which was deemed to be equally sacred, they were able to justify so many "jarring sentiments" and "conflicting practices" by referring to different portions of Scripture.

A "dextrous theologian" found it an easy matter to cull out such passages as would seem to substantiate a doctrine or defend a practice which he was zealous to maintain. 15

Since the Bible was the product of many different minds and had never been "designed to be a single volume," it was obvious to Garrison that the book was not to be received "as of infallible authority or divine origin." Already, during the first four decades of the nineteenth century, many "enlightened minds" had rejected the "dogma" of plenary inspiration as a "monstrous absurdity." What "miraculous endowment" was needed to record the fact that unto Job were born seven sons and three daughters, asked Garrison--or that Paul left his cloak at Troas; or that Soloman had six hundred wives and concubines? Likewise, the abolitionist questioned the assumption that the Scriptures were the "only rule of faith and practice." Who except "an idolator, a bigot, or an ignoramus" would pretend that the rights of man originated in or depended upon a piece of parchment?

Liberator, November 24, 1848. See also Liberator, May 25, 1849. In March 1849, Garrison told his readers that the Bible was "nothing more than the popular interpretation of it; and that interpretation is ever carefully made to conform to the state of public opinion, by its clerical expounders.... Once, in this country, it set forth the divine right of kings; now it is made to conform to the Declaration of Independence,.... Once it went for the Union of Church and State; now it teaches no such duty, but the opposite, according to the American mode of reading it.... In the hands of the spirit of Progress, then, the Bible is plastic as clay in the hands of the potter." Liberator, March 23, 1849. See also Liberator, February 25, 1848.

Was it not widely held to be a "self-evident truth" that all men were created equal and endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights to liberty? Certainly no contempt was cast upon the Bible by the affirmation that man was "before all books." 16

Although Garrison admitted that he had abandoned his "traditional and educational notions of the holiness of the Bible," he claimed that he still believed it to embody an "excellence so great" as to make it "THE BOOK OF BOOKS." Those orthodox believers who read the accounts of the 1853 Hartford Bible Convention undoubtedly had much difficulty in believing his latter claim. 17 The resolutions which Garrison offered at this meeting, which had been called for the purpose of "freely and fully canvassing the origin, authority, and influence of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures," were greeted with stamping and hissing from the galleries—a portion of the convention hall occupied largely by divinity students from nearby Trinity College. While admitting that it would be "as absurd as

Liberator, November 24, 1848, September 20, 1850. See also Liberator, January 12, 1849; Garrison to Theobald Matthew, n.d., in Liberator, October 5, 1849. In 1849, Garrison asked, "What has orthodoxy gained by its belief in the doctrine of plenary inspiration? Has it thereby been rendered more humane, more virtuous, more honest, more regardful of the rights and interests of mankind, than the party rejecting it? What light does such a belief throw on any subject, or how has it aided the cause of science or human elevation? Let an honest and truthful answer be given to these inquiries, and it will be seen that the doctrine alluded to is of no practical utility whatever. To make it a test, therefore, of religious character is sheer effrontery. It is merely a theological shuttlecock." Liberator, March 2, 1849.

¹⁷ Liberator, November 24, 1848. In discussing the Bible, Garrison also noted: "As a divine book, we never could understand it; as a human composition, we can fathom it to the bottom. Whoever receives it as his master, will necessarily be in bondage to it; but he who makes it his servant, under the guidance of truth, will find it truly serviceable.... Whatever excellence there is in it will be fire-proof; and if any portion of it be antiquated or worthless, let that portion be treated accordingly."

untrue" to deny that the Bible embodied "a large amount of truth," he nevertheless asserted that it was not less absurd and untrue to deny that it also contained many "fallacious contradictions, misconceptions, misrepresentations, fabulous stories, incredible assertions, and hurtful errors." Instead of being, "as a book," the pure, unchangeable Word of God given by divine inspiration, the Bible was merely a "mixture of good and evil, light and darkness, truth and error" which was to be read with discrimination and neither "accepted nor rejected in the gross." This being the case, it was obvious that the doctrines of the "American church and priesthood" which held the Bible to be God's Holy Word and the "only rule of faith and practice" were "self-evidently absurd, exceedingly injurious both to the intellect and soul, highly pernicious in its application, and a stumbling-block in the way of human redemption." 18

Following the June convention, the abolitionist once again found it necessary to defend his radically unorthodox beliefs. In mid-December he noted that any characterization of the Hartford gathering as an "Anti-Bible Convention" would be a "gross departure from the truth." It had simply been an occasion for "a free and kind interchange of opinion on an important subject." Later that month, in responding to Harriet Beecher Stowe's charge that his paper tended to "rob 'Uncle Tom' of his Bible," Garrison told the readers of The Liberator that the more the "anti-slavery coin" was rubbed,

¹⁸ Garrison and Garrison, Life, III, 383; Liberator, April 22, 1853; Proceedings of the Hartford Bible Convention (New York, 1854), pp. 142, 339. See also Liberator, July 1, 1853, July 22, 1853. Garrison defined the term "human redemption" as a "progression in knowledge, in wisdom, and in truth; thus perfecting ourselves; simply a matter of progression--redemption from a low and fallen state, bringing us up to a high and exalted one." Hartford Bible Convention, p. 204.

the brighter it shines, the more <u>Uncle Tom's Cabin</u> was assailed, the more impregnable it was seen to be, and the more the Bible was "sifted" the more highly it would be prized--"if it be all holy and true." Garrison found it hard to believe that a "full discussion of the merits of the Bible, pro and con," would induce "Uncle Tom" to cast the Scriptures aside when even the "infernal cruelty" of Simon Legree could not shake his trust in God and Christ. 19

During the remaining years of the decade, the abolitionist editor had numerous opportunities to reaffirm and restate his belief in the maxim which held that if there was truth in the Scriptures men should receive it, if error, they should discard it. To judge matters independently, to try them by the "eternal rule of right" and not by appealing to a certain book as the absolute and conclusive authority was to behave rationally and wisely. While rejecting the "absurd idea" of the Bible's plenary inspiration, Garrison found so much truth, so much of the "prophetic spirit," and such "burning denunciations of oppression" in the Bible that he could call it a "wonderful book" and note that his pulse quickened whenever he read its "solemn warnings and stern rebukes." At an antislavery gathering held in 1858, Garrison said that for the past 30 years he had gone to the Bible, quoting and using it in support of justice and freedom more than any other man in the land. During that same period of time, the American clergy had gone to the same book in order to find support and sanction for the institution of slavery. Reflecting on these two diametrically opposed usages of Scripture, he could not help but conclude that the man who best honored the Bible was

^{19 &}lt;u>Liberator</u>, December 16, 1853; Garrison to Harriet Beecher Stowe, November 30, 1853, in <u>Liberator</u>, December 23, 1853.

the one who used it for the most worthy purposes and ends. 20

Garrison was both supported and influenced in his religious beliefs during the 1840's and 1850's by several of the nineteenth century's more liberal religionists. In 1849 he told the readers of his weekly that, when still believing the Bible to be "an inspired volume, from Genesis to Revelation," he had entered into a conversation with Lucretia Mott on the subject of war. Startled by her declaration that God had not "authorized or sanctioned war, in any age or nation," the abolitionist realized that, while having no doubt as to the prohibition of all war in the New Testament, he had never before thought of questioning the integrity of the "Jewish record." He then asked her how she could dispose of those portions of the Cld Testament which said that the Lord had commanded Moses, Joshua, and others to "wage even wars of extermination." In answering Garrison's question. Mrs. Mott asserted that she could "more easily believe that man is fallible, than that God is changeable"--meaning that it was more likely that the "unknown writers of the Jewish Scriptures" erred in their impressions of the Lord's requirements than that "God himself had changed in his moral attributes." Garrison told his readers that in this reply "so full of good sense and true wisdom," he had since found an "easy solution" to many "scriptural difficulties."

²⁰ Speech at Philadelphia, October 20, 1854, in <u>Liberator</u>, January 12, 1855; Speech at Worcester, Massachusetts, January 15, 1857, in <u>Liberator</u>, January 23, 1857; <u>Liberator</u>, September 3, 1858. See also <u>Liberator</u>, April 21, 1854, June 18, 1858. At an 1855 antislavery gathering at Providence, Rhode Island, Garrison urged his listeners to plant their feet firmly on that eternal principle of right inherent in the soul of man which was above, before, and superior to all books, parchments, and institutions. He nevertheless declared that the Bible did not sanction slavery, but rather contained the most abundant and powerful testimonies against it. Speech at Providence, January 11, 1855, in Liberator, January 19, 1855.

Instead of being "killed by the letter" he had been "made alive by the spirit." During the 1850's the abolitionist continued to "therish almost a filial love and the most profound veneration" for Lucretia Mott and her husband. James. 21

Another formative influence on Garrison's religious evolution was his loyal associate in reform, Henry C. Wright. The Boston abolitionist had welcomed the former Congregationalist minister to the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1835 by noting that he was a "valuable acquisition to our cause--a fearless, uncompromising and zealous christian." Since that time Garrison had ably "taught" Wright the tenets of radical reform while the ex-Andover seminarian "instructed" the abolitionist in matters of theology. 22

During the 1840's Garrison not only permitted Wright to introduce and to carry on the "Bible controversy" in the pages of his weekly, but also showed considerably more sympathy with the views of the "heretical" Wright than he did with those of William Goodell, Henry Grew, and others who sought to defend the doctrine of a divinely inspired Bible. In 1845, noting that "he's true to God who is true to man," the editor of <u>The Liberator</u> offered the "hand of fellowship" to Wright "as a modern 'infidel' of the right stamp." According to Garrison, his fellow reformer's views on the nature, spirit, and design of Christianity, on the brotherhood of the human race, and on

Liberator, November 9, 1849, November 26, 1852. See also Romans 7:6 and II Corinthians 3:6.

²² Garrison to Henry E. Benson, December 5, 1835, in Merrill, Letters, I, 569. Lindsay Swift has noted that Wright and Noyes "preached their own heresies with less force than Garrison, though he was in theological matters but their pupil." Swift, Garrison, p. 375. See also Merrill, Wind and Tide, pp. 184-186; Child, "Garrison," p. 235.

the corruption of existing political, religious, and governmental institutions were more nearly identical to his own than those of "almost any other individual." Expressing his deepest sentiments, he wrote in 1844 that there was "no one, on the wide earth, among the great circle of my friends, for whom I entertain greater love and respect" than Henry C. Wright. 23

Garrison also continued to be influenced by the ministry of Theodore Parker. In the controversial divine the abolitionist found a preacher whose discourses gave him both moral and intellectual satisfaction. "You have touched, quickened, inspired thousands of minds," he wrote Parker in early 1859, "which in their turn shall impregnate other minds with generous and noble sentiments...."

Garrison so greatly admired the clergyman because he felt him to be somewhat of a kindred spirit. Parker was neither "spell-bound by tradition," "stultified by ghostly authority," nor "victimized by pious credulity." He was a bold, indefatigable seeker after the truth--a man who dared to do his own thinking, to speak his own thoughts, and to put into practice the apostolic injunction, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."²⁴

²³Garrison and Garrison, <u>Life</u>, III, 266; <u>Liberator</u>, Cctober 3, 1845; Garrison to Henry C. Wright, October 1, 1844, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

Parker, January 15, 1859, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Liberator, January 21, 1859. See also speech at Boston, January 23, 1859, in Liberator, January 28, 1859; I Thessalonians 5:21. Russel Nye has noted that the abolitionist "read Theodore Parker's liberal Unitarian tracts avidly and held interminable discussions with Parker." In their biography, Garrison's sons wrote: "we were encouraged also to go to Sunday-school, at the warren-street Chapel and afterwards with Theodore Parker's congregation." They asserted that "without theological profession or attachment," their father "virtually became a member" of Parker's "slender congregation." In 1851, Garrison himself asked a critic: "Surrounded as I am by pro-slavery churches and a pro-slavery clergy, where would you have me attend

Garrison's lauding of Parker for espousing "the cause of the weak against the strong, the persecuted against the persecutors, the oppressed against the tyrannical" gave evidence of the fact that those men and women who most importantly influenced the Boston editor's religious views during the ante-bellum period also tended to be sympathetic to the abolition cause. While not in agreement with everything a Parker, a Wright, or a Mott believed, Garrison found that the "fruits" which such reform-minded people bore were ample proof of their "PRACTICAL RIGHTECUSNESS." To set an upright example of "manly courage and conscientious integrity" not only showed that a person was spiritually liberated from the "corrupt and wrong-headed" notions forwarded by the nation's "time-serving" clergymen, but it also gave one access to Garrison's mind. 25

Just as he believed that there could be "no affinity between the God who goes for slavery and the God who goes for freedom," he felt that there could be no affinity between himself and those who failed to meet his standards of righteousness in regard to the suffering bondsmen. Convinced that antislavery was "of God," he refused to "walk with those who believe it to be of the devil." Holding slavery up to condemnation both as an inhuman and an anti-Christian

public worship? There is one occupant of a pulpit in this city, THEODORE PARKER, who bears a bold and unfaltering testimony against slavery and its abettors; but, religiously, he is branded as a heretic. If I listen to his ministration, will you recognize me as attending a place of Christian worship'?" Nye, Humanitarian Reformers, p. 137; Garrison and Garrison, Life, III, 243; Garrison and Garrison, Life, IV, 336; Garrison to editor London Morning Advertiser, n.d., in Liberator, September 19, 1851.

^{25&}lt;u>Liberator</u>, January 21, 1859, January 28, 1859. Garrison also continued to laud Thomas Paine for "laying the axe at the root of the tree of popular superstition, and unmasking religious imposture, whatever may have been his short-comings in other matters." See Liberator, March 28, 1856, January 28, 1859.

institution, Garrison would not receive religious instruction from those whose conduct was made "thoroughly atheistical" by their refusal to oppose the slave system. He would, instead, fellowship with those who agreed with him that, "since the advent of the Founder of Christianity, no effort for the melioration of the condition of man has been more largely imbued with the religious element, in its purest and most vital form, than the Anti-Slavery movement." 26

In Garrison's opinion, a truly religious man regarded principles more than persons, the present more than the past, truth more than tradition, and humanity more than parchment. He was the man who refused to go along with the multitude "in any evil way." Returning good for evil and living above that "fear of man which bringeth a snare," such an individual was ever willing to "be made of no reputation, and to suffer the loss of all things, for righteousness' sake." The object of Christianity, as taught by its founder, was to "undo the heavy burdens of suffering humanity," not to increase those burdens. It was to "diminish the hours of toil," not to multiply them. Could the majority of the nation's churchmen truthfully say that their adherence to these high moral standards was perfect enough to make them suitable models for the conduct of others? Garrison's answer was a resounding, "No!" From one end of the country to the other, "with honorable exceptions," those who claimed to be the "authorized expounders of the Word of God" had undertaken to prove that slavery was in accord with the Old and the New Testaments, that it was consistent with both natural and revealed

Liberator, December 27, 1850, October 20, 1854. See also speech at New York City, May 7, 1850, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 24, 1850; Speech at Syracuse, May 7, 1851, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 23, 1851.

religion, and "as a logical deduction," that the antislavery movement was an infidel movement which conflicted with "the will and word of God." Therefore, said the abolitionist, it was up to the antislavery "infidels" to vindicate the Christianity of Jesus and to affirm the non-Christian character of those who would claim that Christ "winked at slavery, connived at it, or sanctioned it." 27

Garrison "would not, for the world" want to be considered a Christian "in the popular sense." Eighteen hundred years ago the question "Do you believe in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah?" was "a test question to the Jewish nation." It "proved all classes," from the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees to the lowly "rabble," because whoever answered the question in the affirmative did so "at

²⁷ Liberator, December 27, 1850; Anti-Sabbath Convention, p. 135; Speech at New York City, May 9, 1855, in Liberator, May 25, 1855. See also Garrison to editor Christian Witness, n.d., in Liberator, December 4, 1846; Liberator, March 30, 1849; Speech at Abington, Massachusetts, July 4, 1853, in Liberator, July 15, 1853; Speech at Boston, January 27, 1854, in Liberator, February 3, 1854. Garrison spared few denominations or benevolent organizations in his denunciation of Christian apostasy. While he felt a "special attachment" to "progressive Quakerism," the abolitionist believed the main body of Friends to be "fearfully degenerated, through a ceremonial, bigoted and time serving spirit." Garrison to James Miller McKim, September 11, 1858, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Liberator, December 24, 1852. See also Swift, Garrison, p. 208; <u>Liberator</u>, December 3, 1852; Garrison to Oliver Johnson, May 5, 1863, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. Garrison believed that Roman Catholics and Protestants agreed "most harmoniously in principle and practice as to their views of slavery." In 1849 he wrote: "Not a Catholic priest, not a Catholic journal, can be found in this great country, pleading for the liberation of the enslaved; on the contrary, they most heartily stigmatize the abolitionists and all their movements." Garrison to Theobald Mathew, n.d., in Liberator, September 14, 1849. See also speech at New York City, May 7, 1850, in Liberator, May 17, 1850; Garrison to editor Boston Transcript, n.d., in Liberator, May 31, 1850. For a discussion of Garrison's quarrel with Father Mathew over fidelity to the antislavery cause see Thomas, Liberator, pp. 369-370; Merrill, Wind and Tide, pp. 253-254. For his strictures on the various missionary and tract societies see Liberator, January 21, 1853; Speech at Boston, January 26, 1854, in Liberator, February 3, 1854; Garrison to annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, October 20, 1857, in Liberator, October 23, 1857.

the certainty of being regarded as the offscouring of all things."

In the 1850's, however, this question was of no value as a test of character. The Christian name had long since ceased to be odious and had become "respectable and popular." From being a "badge of infamy, and decisive evidence of heresy" which cost those who assumed it their "reputation, ease, wealth, personal safety, and life itself," it had degenerated into a "fashionable appendage." The Christ recognized by the modern-day believer was not the same one who bore the cross and the crown of thorns. Instead of being buffeted, outlawed, and rejected by the rulers and abhorred by the priests, he was "exalted to the 'skies" and "evangelically deified." Those men who were proud, wealthy, ambitious, and reputable--"scribes, pharisees, priests, lawyers, judges, governors, presidents, emperors" were now the foremost among those claiming the discipleship of Christ. 28

What did this "popular faith" indicate as to love of God or concern for man? asked the abolitionist. "Nothing," was his reply. The bold and faithful support of "unpopular reform" was now the true test of love to God and man that the profession of faith in Christ and His gospel had once been. Garrison believed that if Christianity was to be considered a faith worthy of acceptance it had to hold all human beings equally precious in the sight of God. It had to teach that all men were to be redeemed by the same blood under the same eternal law, and that they would eventually be judged at "the same common tribunal." According to Garrison, it was the failure of American Christians to put these basic tenets into practice which

²⁸ Speech at Boston, January 28, 1859, in <u>Liberator</u>, February 11, 1859; Garrison to editor <u>London Morning Advertiser</u>, n.d., in <u>Liberator</u>, September 19, 1851; Speech at Hartford, June 5, 1853, in <u>Liberator</u>, July 22, 1853. See also Liberator, January 5, 1849.

had resulted in "the enslavement of every seventh person in our land, to be owned, and bought, and sold, and treated as a beast of burden. 29

Since he considered it to be "the effect of true religion to undo the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free," it was not surprising to find Garrison speaking out against those revivals of religion which did not strike a direct blow at the slave system. During the spring of 1858, he viewed the revivals which were then spreading "like an epidemic in all directions, over a wide extent of country" as an "emotional contagion without principle." an "imposition upon weak and unenlightened minds." The revival ferver was a diversion from the field of reform and the work of "practical righteousness" to the furtherance of "a pharisaical piety and sectarian narrowness." It was "not of heaven," but "of men"--of men, moreover, who were known to be "enemies of progress, in all its unpopular manifestations." While the abolitionist granted that some "incidental good" might come from a national revival of religion, he felt that it would be more likely to promote meanness and delusion than humanity and genuine piety. Garrison believed that the rapidity with which the revival spirit had spread without encountering any opposition from "popular wickedness and organized villany" was conclusive evidence of its "spurious and worthless" character. Since it was viewed with complacency and approbation by "all who are hostile or

²⁹ Speech at Hartford, June 5, 1853, in <u>Liberator</u>, July 22, 1853; Speech at Philadelphia, December 4, 1853, in <u>Liberator</u>, December 9, 1853; Speech at Abington Massachusetts, July 30, 1859, in <u>Liberator</u>, August 5, 1859; Speech at Boston, May 26, 1857, in <u>Liberator</u>, June 12, 1857. See also speech at New York City, May 7, 1850, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 17, 1850; Garrison to editor <u>Boston Transcript</u>, May 17, 1850, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 24, 1850; Speech at New York City, May 10, 1854, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 19, 1854; Speech at Boston, May 27, 1857, in <u>Liberator</u>, June 5, 1857.

indifferent to the cause of down-trodden humanity," he was certain that the revival would give no alarm to "the corruption, the demagogueism, or the demon spirit of slavery in the land." According to the Boston editor, the appearance of a genuine religious revival would "scare James Buchanan so that he could not sleep o'nights." The entire South would then be "up in arms" attempting to resist the "invading spirit," and, "if possible, to lynch it."

Garrison greatly lamented the fact that, after some twentyfive years of unrelenting antislavery labor, an "overwhelming proportion" of the nation's church members were still disposed "not merely to 'apologize for the sin of slavery,' but to deny that holding slaves is necessarily a sin at all." From the beginning, he said, the antislavery movement had sought the cooperation and help of all men, parties, and religious bodies. The abolitionists themselves were members of these various denominations and parties and had remained in them until all hope of their joining the antislavery crusade was extinguished. When the reformers saw that the churches were "arraying themselves on the side of slavery," they abandoned their pews and stood by the side of the slave. Immediately the churchmen tried to discredit their testimony by calling them "fanatics" and "infidels." "Were it not for the position of the clergy and the churches every where," wrote Garrison, "how speedily would the Anti-Slavery cause be triumphant in all the North!" For their numerous acts of consummate wickedness the American church and clergy had been, and would continue to be censured by the abolition

New York City, May 11, 1858, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 21, 1858. See also speech at Boston, May 30, 1855, in <u>Liberator</u>, June 8, 1855.

party. "Surely, Garrison noted, "a fearful responsibility is resting upon them; and to them is applicable all the righteous denunciations of the prophets to the oppressive and obdurate Jews." 31

Liberator, May 7, 1858, September 3, 1858; Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, October 29, 1858, Garrison Fapers, Boston Fublic Library. See also Liberator, August 8, 1851; Speech at Philadelphia, December 5, 1853, in Liberator, December 9, 1853; William Lloyd Garrison, No Compromise with Slavery: An Address Delivered in the Broadway Tabernacle, New York, February 14, 1854 (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1854), pp. 3-4.

CHAPTER IX

REJECTION OF THE CHRISTIAN'S GOD

Our worship abounds with honor for God, and contempt for man. Away with all such worship; the sooner the world is rid of it, the better.

--Frederick Douglass October 13, 1848

when Frederick Douglass rejected the slaveholding "servants obey your masters" theology, broke his bonds, and fled to the North in 1838, he bore witness not only to the fact that he had been struggling with the complex problem of personal liberty, but also that he had begun to formulate a concept of the relationship between God's spiritual power and man's physical presence in working out solutions to the problems of a sinful world. Uncle Lawson had taught him both to trust in the lord for deliverance from bondage and to prepare himself for and to work toward the day of freedom. Heeding this advice, the young slave prayed to God while eagerly seeking the knowledge and skills necessary to live the life of a free man. If, as he later noted, the Holy Bible was "peculiarly the companion of liberty," then surely the process of learning to read the Sacred Book was an important stepping stone on the path toward that liberty.1

Douglass, "Bibles for the Slaves," p. 125. At an American Anti-Slavery Society meeting in 1853, Henry Ward Beecher made the comment that he would rather wait 75 years for slavery to be abolished by Christianity than have emancipation be decreed in only 50

At midcentury, Douglass continued to believe that "all things are possible with God," but that man must himself play a major role in alleviating the world's problems. By this time he had become alienated from the American profession of religion and the Church of his youth. He had witnessed too much prejudice, proscription, and hypocrisy in the religious bodies of the land to ally himself with such a pharasaical faith. The ex-slave would, instead, cling to the true Christianity of his Savior and to those men and organizations which evidenced a love for this "pure, peaceable, and gentle" creed. The change which occurred in Douglass' religious views after 1850 was more in the nature of a shift in emphasis than in a wholesale abandonment of past beliefs. He had already become disillusioned with the spiritual character of the earthly church. Now he appeared to be losing some of his early faith in the power of the Heavenly Father. The complementary nature of the God-man relationship in attempting to eradicate the problems of slavery, poverty, and vice became a relationship weighted on the side of man. During the 1850's and 1860's, Douglass' love of God was subtly transformed into a veneration of man and his works while the doctrine of true Christianity was changed into a personalized social gospel.

In 1848 Douglass had asserted that the anchor of the reformer's faith must "repose in the bosom of God" rather than in the unstable and ever-shifting sands of worldly expediency. There alone could one find security from the temptations presented by the love

years from motives of a selfish commercial interest. To this assertion Douglass replied, "If the reverend gentleman had worked on plantations where I have been, he would have met with overseers who would have whipped him in five minutes out of all his willingness to wait for liberty." Holland, Colored Orator, p. 214.

of ease and the desire to "stand well" with a wicked and perverse generation. By having this trust in the Supreme Being, mortal man could go up against the most terrible storms of adversity and still stand "as firm as the pillars of heaven." In these sentiments Douglass evidenced his belief in the vital interaction between God and man. Through God, the reformer would be supplied with the confidence and courage necessary to wage an all out battle against earthly wickedness. At a celebration of West India Emancipation in August of that year, he again demonstrated this belief in the interdependence of the earthly and heavenly powers. The object of the assembly, Douglass noted, was to congratulate "our disenthralled brethren" of the west Indies on their peaceful emancipation, to express "our unfeigned gratitude to Almighty God, their merciful deliverer," and to bless the memory of "the noble men through whose free and faithful labors the grand result was finally brought about." Surely the liberation of the bondsmen would not have come about unless there had been a union of purposeful action between God and man.

ready begun to shift the emphasis in the God-man equation to the side of the mortals. In an article entitled "What are the Colored People Doing For Themselves?," the editor of <u>The North Star</u> asserted that the black man's destiny in America, "for good or for evil, for time and for eternity, is, by an all-wise God, committed to us." Negroes would become "improved and elevated" only as fast as they endeavored

Speech on William Smith O'Brien, 1848, Douglass Fapers, Library of Congress.

³Speech at Rochester, August 1, 1848, in North Star, August 4, 1848.

to effect the changes themselves. They would rise or fall, succeed or fail, by their own merits. "Get wisdom-get understanding," he urged his readers. "It is idle, a hollow mockery, for us to pray to God to break the oppressor's power, while we neglect the means of knowledge which will give us the ability to break this power." God would continue to help those who helped themselves, but according to Douglass, it was imperative that the black man place more emphasis on the cultivation and development of the human intellect than on the seeking of divine assistance.

Indeed, not only the human intellect, but also the entire human form was becoming more and more sacred to the ex-slave. In discussing the Missouri Compromise and the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in 1854, Douglass told his audience that a person who would enslave a child of God would not hesitate to disregard even the most sacred of compacts. Nothing could be properly respected when mankind was despised and trampled upon in this manner. "Beneath the sky," he said, "there is nothing more sacred than man." By 1861 he was ready to bridge the gap between earth and heaven and to condemn the American system of slavery for making deliberate warfare against human nature—for striking down "the God-like form of man."

⁴North Star, July 14, 1848.

Speech at Chicago, November, 1854, in Foner, Life and writings, II, 324; Douglass' Monthly, July, 1861. Douglass further evidenced his belief in the nearness of Humanity to Divinity by writing, "The man that will go to God, or to the Bible, to look for arguments in support of a desire to work his brother man without wages, is a hypocrite as well as a scoundrel, and is below the level of argument. Some things are too evidently wrong to admit of argument or apology. Humanity instinctively turns from Slavery with a shudder. We have here the utterance of the voice of God in man, and to its high and instantaneous teaching we may listen in preference to any voice for Slavery drawn from the Bible." Douglass' Monthly, March, 1861.

The lecture on self-made men, which Douglass wrote in 1855 and delivered many times thereafter is a prime example of the new God-man relationship which Douglass formulated. These men were "indebted to themselves for themselves." If they traveled far, it was because they had made the road on which they traveled. If they ascended to the heights, it was because they had built their own ladder. Flung overboard in a midnight storm on the "broad and tempest-tossed ocean of life" without oars, ropes, or life preservers, they nevertheless "bravely buffeted the frowning billows with their own sinewy arms" and swam to safety. As architects of their own fortunes, such men had either shunned or had been prohibited from entering the world of schools, academies, and other institutions of learning. Nevertheless, they somehow managed to get an education and to "hew out a way for themselves." The "hewing" was hard work, but the selfmade man realized that "faith itself does not seem worth much, if anything, in the absence of work." That Douglass considered himself to be this type of man is obvious. "I plead guilty at once to the implied charge that I am a self made man," he wrote, "--and what is more, I am not ashamed of that charge."

In the June, 1861 issue of his new publication, <u>Douglass'</u>

<u>Monthly</u>, the black abolitionist gave another example of his new emphasis on the power of man in solving the problems of mankind. On

Holland, Colored Orator, pp. 250-255; Speech on Self-Made Men, n.d., Douglass Papers, Library of Congress. See also Douglass' Monthly, March, 1859; Foner, Frederick Douglass, pp. 173, 405. Douglass' speech also contained a telling rebuke of the black clergy: "Our colored ministers are somewhat remarkable for the fervor with which they pray for knowledge; but, thus far, they are not remarkable for any wonderful success; in fact, they who pray loudest seem to get least. They are able to give us abundance of sound for destitution of sense." Holland, Colored Orator, p. 252.

this occasion he felt that it was necessary to warn the abolitionists that their work was not completed while the bondsmen remained in chains. He accused the antislavery forces of hoping and believing "that by some means now inscrutable," Providence would bring freedom to the slaves. Douglass, too, was hopeful, but did not expect to see "the waters roll asunder, and give to those now in bondage a dry road to freedom, and then roll back again and swallow up the pursuing hosts of our modern Pharaohs." He did not expect God to send manna from heaven to satisfy the hunger of the emancipated bondsmen nor did he hope to see water gush forth from solid rock to quench their thirst. In saying these things he did not wish to be understood as casting aside the "consoling support" which came from the assurance that "all the Divine powers of the universe" were on the side of freedom and progress. In fact, no people ever needed to have faith in this proposition more than those who were contending against the powerful and insidious system of American slavery. The important point, however, was that the abolitionists needed this faith to make them more able to work. If they were to fold their hands and leave the cause of the slave to Providence, they would be guilty of the same "great and deadly sin" that the American Church and clergy had committed. The religionists had avoided "every cross which required of them manly and heroic qualities." By committing "all" into the hands of the Lord they had created a standing excuse for inaction -- a perpetual apology for their guilt and complicity in the crime of slavery. The slaveholder himself was "quite secure" from Divine wrath if he could only escape the animus of mortals. An "anti-slavery movement in heaven" gave such tyrants no alarm as long as it remained divorced from earthly affairs. Indeed, a meeting for

prayer was far less alarming to the slaveholder than "a meeting for works."

Just as Douglass placed a new emphasis on man in the God-man relationship, he also began, more than ever, to focus his concern on those aspects of the true Christianity which urged mankind to help those in need and to "visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction." The cure for the ills of society was to be found only in a revival of the genuine, practical Christianity of the New Testament. The "grand reason" for the continued existence of slavery in America was that the nation was too "religious." It had substituted a form of godliness, an "outside show," for "the real thing itself." American Christians had substituted religion for humanity. The pharisaical Christians would gladly send Bibles and missionaries "from the rivers to the ends of the earth," but were not nearly as eager to take up the cause which was so near to the heart of Christ. At the very outset of his mission among the children of men, Jesus placed Himself on the side of the enslaved, the oppressed, and the needy. He preached the gospel to the poor, ministered to the brokenhearted, and "set at liberty them that are bruised." Here. indeed.

Douglass' Monthly, June, 1861. In December, 1868, a friend urged Douglass to place his trust in God: "I have not lost my faith and hope for you, but it does seem a solemn serious time, as if you had now to decide what your future life is to be.... You have much real strength of character, why will you not use it for your own good-there is only one safe path, one true unfailing help, they who day by day, keep near to God, never fall into eire--you know it is so. [H]ow very thankful I should be, if I knew, you would try for this. [I]t makes thousands happy and blessed..., but I never yet heard of any one, who became better or happier by deserting its protection." E. Peirson to Frederick Douglass, December 22, 1868, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

Douglass here refers to the Messiah's kingdom as described in Fsalm 72:8 and Zechariah 9:10.

⁹Douglass here refers to Luke 4:18.

was the exemplar of the true Christianity. To Douglass, those
Christians who would reject such a gospel of compassion were unworthy of the great name of the Savior. The neglect of the oppressed,
the fatherless, and the widow was incompatible with "acceptable worsnip." It changed solemn forms of piety into disgusting shams "to
be denounced both of Heaven and of men." He felt that any religious
skepticism which arose out of a consideration for justice and humanity was far less to be dreaded and deplored than "sound creeds" which
were coupled with a heartless indifference to the rights of the "lowly and despised ones of earth." He would always prefer the fellowship of a skeptic who recognized slaves as men to that of a devout
saint who could only regard them as chattels excluded from the dignity of humanity. "Forever commend us to a sound man in preference
to a rotten religionist," he wrote. "The latter is far more dangerous to a genuine Christianity than the former."

10

The changes in Douglass' conception of the true Christianity and of God's relationship to man did not signify a radical break with the past, but rather a shift in thought which was deeply rooted in his early life. As his reaction to Sandy Jenkins's herbal magic had shown, the ex-slave was an early disbeliever in non-Christian supernaturalism. Thus, it took only a simple mental step for him to become critical of all forms of supernaturalism, including the

It is obvious that Douglass distinguished between the power of the Creator-Judge God and the example of the Christ who came to earth "in the likeness of sinful flesh." Douglass' Monthly, April, 1859, June, 1860; North Star, June 1, 1849; Speech at Rochester, January, 1855, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 345. In July, 1859 Douglass wrote that Christ's religion "was for man, as well as for God, and for the poor man, especially and peculiarly for the poor man.... The religion of Jesus is like himself, a copy of himself. His heart is with the bleeding heart of humanity...." Douglass' Monthly, July, 1859.

intervention of God into human affairs. As James McCune Smith noted in 1855, Douglass possessed "an original breadth of common sense" which enabled him to see, and weigh and compare whatever passed before him, but which "never succumbed to the marvelous nor the supernatural." 11

This "common sense" made Douglass attribute certain characteristics of the natural world to the workings of the Laws of Nature, rather than to God, the Creator. In his "Self-Made Man" speech, the black abolitionist noted that Nature was a great worker, tolerating no contradictions to her wise example without certain rebuke. She caused inaction to be followed by stagnation, stagnation by pestilence, and pestilence by death. "General [Benjamin] Butler, busy with his broom, could sweep yellow-fever out of New Orleans; but this dread destroyer returned when Butler and his broom were withdrawn, and the people piously ascribed to Divinity, what was simply due to dirt." 12

On another occasion, the editor of <u>Douglass' Monthly</u> asserted that, in their support of the slave system, the slaveholders were fighting against the eternal Laws of Nature. Even if they temporarily succeeded in compelling the North to sue for peace, "Nature with the aid of free discussion would set her-herself right in the end." Nature, Truth, and Humanity were great forces and they must prevail. Douglass told his listeners: "A great man once said it was useless to re-enact the laws of God, meaning thereby the laws of Nature. But a greater man than he will yet teach the world that it is useless

Douglass, Bondage, pp. xviii-xix. See also Mays, Negro's God, pp. 124-127.

¹² Holland, Colored Orator, p. 253.

to re-enact any other laws with any hope of their permanence."13

Douglass' increased reliance on the power and wisdom of man can also be traced to his early realization that it was not God, but man who was responsible for the evils of slavery. He had come to this conclusion after reflecting upon the events which he had experienced and witnessed both on the plantation and in Baltimore. Surely it was not God who had chained his forefathers to the hold of a crowded slave ship. The guilty party was human--perhaps the same type of human as Thomas Auld, who could claim to have entered into a close spiritual relationship with God while continuing to inflict countless cruelties upon the slaves. If certain men were alone responsible for the creation of the slave system, could not a different group of men be alone responsible for its destruction? The Douglass of the 1860's answered this question in the affirmative. 14

Later events in the life of the ex-slave also influenced him toward his new, more liberal beliefs. The shift from being merely one of the Garrisonian reformers to becoming an editor and an important national figure in his own right encouraged him to value more highly the acts of the individual. By severing his ties with Garrison he became, more than ever, his own man. The newspaper career expanded the scope of his abilities, gave him an increased sense

Monthly, March, 1863. See also <u>Douglass' Monthly</u>, January, 1859; Speech at Chicago, November, 1854, in Foner, <u>Life and Writings</u>, II, 317.

Douglass did not, of course, completely abandon his respect for God and His power. See Douglass to William Still, July 2, 1860, in William Still, The Underground Rail Road (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872), p. 598; Speech at New York City, May 11, 1857, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 411-412; Speech at Canandaigua, New York, August 4, 1857, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 434; Douglass' Monthly, January, 1859, February, 1859.

of authority, and made him more aware of his responsibilities as a spokesman for the poor and needy. For some six years prior to the launching of The North Star, Douglass had traveled almost exclusively in company with white abolitionists and had moved in a white widdle class milieu. In the office of the Star, Douglass could concern himself with all problems growing out of the color line instead of simply concentrating on abolitionism. His attention could reach out to the question of Negro exclusion from "white" churches, to the practice of racial segregation in the public schools, and to an analysis of the principles underlying separate accommodations for the two races. As Benjamin Quarles has noted, after assuming the editorship Douglass "showed a keen awareness of the problems confronting the rank and file of Negroes...." This awareness helped shape the contours of his new version of the true Christianity. 15

Having largely alienated himself from the more orthodox members of the clergy by his stand against the American profession of religion, Douglass came to associate with many of the nation's most liberal religionists. Indeed, the mere presence of men such as Henry C. Wright among the Garrisonian ranks was enough to make many orthodox Christians eschew association with the antislavery movement in any of its aspects. That Douglass did not run from the presence of several of these men is a significant fact—one which links him with the more liberal theology of the day and which bears witness to another important influence upon his religious views.

Booker T. Washington has written that Douglass was more fully under the influence of the theological opinions of Theodore Parker

¹⁵ Quarles, Frederick Douglass, p. 96; Douglass, Life, p. 264.

than of any other school of religious thought. "His best friends and associates were among the Unitarians, the Quakers, and others of liberal faith." Indeed, when Parker, whose sermons had been welcomed into the columns of Douglass' paper, passed away in 1860, the black abolitionist paid him a glowing tribute. Among all of the "great and good" people of New England, Douglass recognized none greater or better than the Unitarian divine. The controversial minister was an honest man -- open, firm, and fearless. Like Christ, his strong heart beat in sympathy for the oppressed and injured while, at the same time, it burned with the hottest indignation toward those oppressors and tyrants who "lorded it over the humble and helpless." These qualities endeared Farker to the ex-slave's heart and caused Douglass to include him in the ranks of "genuine" Christians. "Ten thousand times over" would he prefer the religion of Theodore Parker, with its downright honesty, its sympathy for the poor, "its honor to man as man" without respect to "color, class or clime" to that "miserable trash" which passed as evangelical religion in America. 16

Later in life, on a trip to Florence, Italy, Douglass visited Farker's burial plot. As the elderly abolitionist looked upon the grave, he could not help recalling the many services which the minister had rendered to the cause of freedom--"freedom not only from physical chains but the chains of superstition--those which not only galled the limbs and tore the flesh--but those which marred and wounded the human soul." He thought back to the time that he had delivered an antislavery lecture in Parker's church in West Roxbury,

¹⁶ Washington, Frederick Douglass, p. 321; Quarles, Frederick Douglass, p. 85; Douglass' Monthly, July, 1860.

Massachusetts. "That its doors opened to me in that dark period was due to him," Douglass noted. "I remember, too, his lovingkindness when I was persecuted for my change of opinion as to political action. Theodore Parker never joined that warfare upon me.... He was the large and generous brother of all men." 17

Douglass also had great respect for America's most infamous agnostic, Robert G. Ingersoll. The black abolitionist first met this "distinguished lawyer and eminent philanthropist" after a friend had urged him to spend the night at the Ingersoll residence in Feoria, Illinois. In Ingersoll the abolitionist found a man with "real living human sunshine in his face, and honest, manly kindness in his voice." The heartfelt greeting which he received that day caused Douglass to compare him with those pious Christians who "hate the Negro while they think they love the Lord." Incidents such as this, he wrote "have greatly tended to liberalize my views as to the value of creeds in estimating the character of men." They brought him to the conclusion that to be an "infidel" no more proved a man to be selfish, mean, and wicked than to be an "evangelical" proved him to be honest, just, and humane. 18

¹⁷ Douglass' Diary, May 11, 1887, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress; Douglass, Life, pp. 588-589.

Douglass, Life, pp. 461-462, 540, 566; Quarles, Frederick Douglass, pp. 293-294; Parker, "Reminiscences," p. 553. In 1885
Douglass told an audience in Washington, D.C.: "Well, my friends, better be an infidel and a so-called blasphemer than a hypocrite who steals the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in. Infidel though Mr. Ingersoll may be called, he never turned his back upon his colored brothers, as did the evangelical Christians of this city on the occasion of the late visit of Mr. Moody." Of that earlier infidel, Thomas Paine, Douglass wrote in 1859: "[E]ven he, was not so lost to all that is just, honest and humane, as not to see and feel that slavery was a great wrong. He not only held slavery to be a great wrong, but had the courage and manliness to denounce it as an abomination. Ten thousand times over we prefer the

Douglass' new emphasis on the power of man did not cause him to single out his former companion, william Lloyd Garrison, for any special praise. In fact, during this period, the black abolitionist seemed to be striving to downgrade Garrison's image as the prime mover of the antislavery crusade. During January, 1855, in a speech before the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, Douglass denied that any man then living had the right to claim the antislavery movement "as a thing of his invention, or of his discovery." The spirit which animated the abolitionists was not a "new thing under the sun," but had, like the great forces of the physical world. "slumbered in the bosom of nature since the world began." While William Lloyd Garrison had helped to revive the spirit in the United States, it was due to truth to say that the Boston editor "neither discovered [abolitionism's] principles, originated its ideas, nor framed its arguments." The only new concept that he brought to the movement was the doctrine of immediatism -- and even this was borrowed from other sources. 19

no-religion of TCM PAINE, with his hatred and denunciation of oppression, to the miserable, time-serving, hypocritical, and sneaking piety of the American Tract Society..." Speech at washington D.C., 1885 in Philip S. Foner, ed., The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass, IV (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 425; Douglass' Monthly, July, 1859.

¹⁹ Speech at Rochester, January, 1855, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 336, 339, 341. See also speech at Canandaigua, New York, August 4, 1857, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 428; Douglass to Charles Sumner, April 24, 1855, Sumner Papers, Harvard University. In 1860, Douglass explained this shift away from his earlier characterization of Garrison as "the Moses raised up by God to deliver the black man from bondage": "I have been very much modified both in feeling and opinion within the last fourteen years. When I escaped from slavery, and was introduced to the Garrisonians, I adopted very many of their opinions, and defended them just as long as I deemed them true. I was young, had read but little, and naturally took some things on trust. Subsequent experience and reading have led me to examine for myself. This has brought me to other conclusions. When I was a

The boston editor was even less charitable to his former friend. He characterized Douglass' autobiography as a volume "reeking with the virus of personal malignity" toward the Garrisonians. Although ably written, it was nevertheless full of "ingratitude and baseness." The bitter feeling between the two abolitionists eventually became so intense that they refused to speak to each other. In February, 1857, following an antislavery meeting in Syracuse, Garrison told Helen that "Douglass was present at the meetings, but wisely and fortunately remained dumb throughout. I did not and would not speak to him." Three years later, in a letter to Samuel J. May, he asserted that the ex-slave was thoroughly base and selfish. "In fact," wrote Garrison, "he reveals himself more and more to me as destitute of every principle of honor, ungrateful to the last degree, and malevolent in spirit. He is not worthy of respect, confidence, or countenance."

Douglass reacted to this criticism in a fairly calm, though far from pacific manner. He noted that a man could not work "in earnest and confiding affection" with a group of his fellows for twelve or more years without having his "inmost soul" become entwined in a

child, I thought and spoke as a child." Speech at Glasgow, Scotland, March 26, 1860, in Foner, <u>Life and Writings</u>, II, 479-480.

²⁰ Garrison to George Thompson, in <u>Liberator</u>, January 18, 1856; Garrison to Helen Garrison, February 17, 1857, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to Samuel J. May, September 28, 1860, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Guarles, "Breach," p. 154. Both of the abolitionists continued to attend the annual meetings of the parent society until Garrison's withdrawal in 1865. After an 1863 session Garrison wrote, "Frederick Douglass ventured to show himself, and participated in the discussions, which created some little friction. In view of his ungrateful and treacherous course towards our Society, his assurance seemed to me excessive. 'Confidence is a plant of slow growth,' and in his case will be particularly so with me. Still, I admire and wonder at his ability." Garrison to Helen Garrison, May 14, 1863, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

network of "subtle and mysterious cords." Some of these cords, though broken, would undoubtedly continue to cling about him through all the years of his life. Nevertheless, whether this philosophy was genuinely sound mattered little in this case. It was enough to mention the "simple truth" about the continued interest which he felt in "the life and fortunes" of the "sect" to which he had been, or thought he had been, strongly attached. This interest would not, however, prevent him from feeling a certain degree of honest satisfaction over "any little healthy, though disagreeable commotion" that he might be permitted to witness in the operations of the sect.

Douglass thought that to hold such a feeling toward the Garrisonians was only right and proper since they were continuing to carry on a veritable war against him "with no delicate regard to the means." 21

The "war" which was carried on in the columns of The North

Star and several other papers during these years centered on the older issue of giving Bibles to the slaves. At the fifteenth annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Douglass denounced those who thought that the best method of freeing the bondsmen was to circulate tracts and Bibles among them. Give them freedom first, he said, and then they will find the Bible for themselves. These remarks were in sharp contrast to the address which Henry Bibb gave a few weeks later at a meeting of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in favor of the Bible distribution plan. Douglass found Bibb's speech to be "made up of a most illogical display of cant phrases about the bible" and its power to abolish slavery if given

Douglass' Monthly, July, 1859; Douglass to Secretary of the Edinburgh New Anti-Slavery Association, July 9, 1857, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

to the slave. The speech was "a poor thing," but one which would undoubtedly satisfy that "namby-pamby" class of persons who cared a great deal about the souls of men while caring nothing for their bodies. It was all well and good, Douglass declared, to champion the slave's right to the Bible and the spelling book, but neither of these rights should be made to take precedence over the great and comprehensive assertion of his "right to personality," as the foundation of all other rights. 22

Samuel Ringold Ward and Henry Highland Garnet soon joined the controversy on the side of Bibb. Rev. Garnet was not content to stay on the Bible issue, but instead charged Douglass with several heresies against the Christian faith. To the charge that he was opposed to giving the Holy Scriptures to the slave, Douglass replied that instead of inferring that he regarded the Bible as a "pernicious book," Garnet should have noted that he was an ardent advocate of "giving the slave himself, as the only condition upon which he could really own a Bible." For the minister's charges that he had denied the inspiration of the Scriptures and had spoken "lightly and contemptuously" of the religious conviction of the colored people, Douglass had only contempt. When accused of deserting the Methodist Church after once being a preacher of that communion, however, the ex-slave readily agreed. Those who were acquainted with the character of that body and who had a spark of self-respect, or felt a single pulsation of sympathy for the downtrodden slave would surely commend him for doing so. 23

^{22 &}lt;u>Liberator</u>, May 18, 1849; <u>North Star</u>, May 18, 1849, June 22, 1849.

North Star, June 15, 1849, June 22, 1849, August 17, 1849. In July, 1849, Douglass announced that he had received 100 Bibles

Douglass' opinions on several other issues of the day also guaranteed charges of infidelity from his detractors. During the early months of 1859, the editors of the Congregational Herald criticized him for neglecting to offer the customary formal prayers of thanksgiving to God at an abolition lecture in Chicago. Douglass quickly responded to this charge by noting that such prayers were but the "outside of the cup and the platter" -- they were no proof of genuine Christianity. Surely the Herald could find no special command or example from the life of Christ to support the belief that public meetings should be commenced and concluded with a prayer. It was not formal worship which was acceptable to the Savior, but "worship in spirit and in truth." Douglass further noted that he had been raised "in the midst of such shams" and had no further use for them. His Christian masters had been fond of praying and singing hymns, but had been less willing to exhibit a heart filled with justice, moral honesty, and Christ-like kindness. These observers of "times and seasons" were the same men who could "sell a babe from the breast of its mother, and sell a husband from a wife without a sigh or regret.²⁴

Douglass struck out against another "religious form" when in

and Testaments from the British and Foreign Bible Society for gratuitous distribution to the Rochester black community. Any person who did not own a copy of the Scriptures would be provided one at the North Star Office. In May, 1857, he said that it was "no evidence that the Bible is a bad book, because those who profess to believe the Bible are bad. The slaveholders of the South, and many of their wicked allies at the North, claim the Bible for slavery; shall we, therefore, fling the Bible away as a pro-slavery book? It would be as reasonable to do so as it would be to fling away the Constitution." North Star, July 27, 1849; Speech at New York City, May 11, 1857, in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 423.

Douglass' Monthly, April, 1859.

September, 1861, he criticized President Lincoln's proclamation of a National Fast Day. He had little faith in the efficacy of this day of national prayer because, rather than a true repentance of the "National Sin" of slavery, it appeared to be merely a repentance of the consequences of that sin. The people of the North deplored the calamity which slavery had brought upon them, but did not yet deplore the slave system itself. "Like the criminal in the hands of the officer of justice," he wrote, "we are less sorry for the theft than for the blunder of allowing ourselves to be caught. We would fain have the rebellion abolished, but we would not lift a finger to have that which causes the rebellion put down and abolished." To honest men, such an observance could only be "a stench, an abomination, a solemn mockery." According to Douglass, the Fast Day borrowed much from the rites of the ancient Hebrews when it should have been modeled after the religious practices "enjoined by the Prophets" in Isaiah 1:10-17. This more acceptable type of endeavor respected the rights, duties and responsibilities of individual men toward each other and stood for practical righteousness "as against all forms and ceremonies." Indeed, there could be no doubt of the "subjective good influence" of all prayers sincerely uttered for good objects because men who prayed in this manner usually set about answering their own prayers. If they really felt that their sins had made them an abomination in the sight of heaven, they would seek goodness and endeavor to act in a worthy manner. By "ceasing to do evil and learning to do well" man could answer his own entreaties to God. 25

Douglass' Monthly, October, 1861. Isaiah 1:10-17 reads: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt

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The black abolitionist also continued to believe that religious revivals were simply hollow pretentions to piety. These so-called works of regeneration were said to be peculiar signs of Divine favor and vast steps toward the destruction of the ways and works of the Devil when, in fact, they merely left the nation's religionists more at peace with themselves, and with oppression, than ever before. Indeed, at the conclusion of a revival, Christians seemed less disposed to exclude slavery from the Christian communion than they did at its outset. In February, 1860, Douglass urged an English audience not to give their unqualified approval to the religious shows and pious demonstrations of faith that were being carried on in the United States until the revivals brought forth "fruits meet for repentance"—until they saw a disposition on the part of "revived" Americans to put away the "foul, haggard, withering, blasting, damning, hell-black" curse of slavery. 26

In like manner, he condemned the work of the nation's missionary organizations and benevolent societies. If revivals of religion and revivals of the slave trade went hand in hand, then surely

offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; 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 unto 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. Wash ye, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." See also Isaiah 58:3-11.

²⁶Speech in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, February 23, 1860, in <u>Douglass' Monthly</u>, April, 1860; <u>Douglass' Monthly</u>, February, 1859.

the slaveholder and the missionary were also co-partners in crime. Douglass charged that the men who took the gospel to the Cherokee Indians also took with them the slave, the chain, and the bloodhound. They taught the red man how to enslave the black man and to place him, as a chattel, "among sheep, and horses, and oxen." Such "religious influences," in Douglass' opinion, tended to sink the Cherokees "lower and lower in the gulf of barbarism" rather than to "refine, embellish, and elevate" them. It was to be expected that mission boards would acquiesce in these practices since they had long been silent, time-serving, and compromising on the subject of slavery. Apparently greatly concerned about the religious enlightenment and salvation of heathens living in foreign lands, they annually raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to forward that work, but "never raised one cent" for the enlightenment and salvation of the black millions who lived in a state of forced heathenism in the American South. To put one's faith in such missions was to assume that a religious organization could be "steeped to the lips" in the guilt of slaveholding and yet be profoundly concerned for the salvation of souls; that men could serve both God and mammon at the same time; that God would be "pleased to see their uplifted hands, though they be stained with blood."27

In criticizing the nation's benevolent organizations, Douglass

Paper, February 1, 1856; Douglass' Monthly, February, 1859, October, 1859. In attacking plans to colonize Negroes in Liberia, Douglass wrote, "My heart can never be indifferent to any legitimate movement for spreading the blessings of Christianity and civilization in that country. But the effort must not be to get the Negroes out of this country but to get Christianity into that." Douglass to Benjamin Coates, April 17, 1856, William M. Coates Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Foner, Frederick Douglass, p. 393.

reserved his most pointed barbs for the American Tract Society. Here was an organization which stood before the world as a prominent representative of the evangelical religion of the United States. Its mission was to carry the light of the Gospel to the poor, to the wretched, and to those who sat in spiritual darkness. It was formed to reflect the loving-kindness of Jesus Christ toward "the helpless and woe-smitten children of men." Lofty purpose, however, did not always lead to sound and meaningful action. Douglass found the Tract Society to be in a "peaceful, harmonious, kind and brotherly" relationship with slavery. It practiced that type of religion which, "while professing to save our soul from hell, would not move a finger to save our body from stripes." Refusing to bear testimony against the infamous slave institution, the Society instead sought to hide its treachery and hypocrisy behind a finely woven net of sophistries, subterfuges, and falsehoods. Its "dears" and "beloveds" were bestowed upon pious man-thieves and their supporters while the bleeding slave was left unnoticed. Its many publications flooded the land and filled the air with "attenuated leaves of hot-bed piety." but offered not a word of earnest rebuke to the slaveholder. Indeed, its "vital godliness and sound morality" was actually more of a hideous devilishness which sprang from the same dark roots as slavery. According to Douglass, people who allied themselves with such an organization were joined in spirit with "the smooth-faced hypocrites who murdered the son of God." They were the true successors of the ancient scribes and Pharisees. 28

During this period, the ex-slave's campaign against such

Douglass' Monthly, June, 1859, June, 1860.

pharisaical Christians was once again carried to the very doors of the American Church. Prior to 1860, Douglass sometimes commented favorably on apparent changes in the tone of the northern press and pulpit. "Times have changed very much of late,..." he noted in April, 1859. "The public sentiment has been gradually rising, the distance between the people and the Reformer has been steadily decreasing." He found new hope for the slave in the formation of a Church Anti-Slavery Association in Worcester, Massachusetts, and gloried in the antislavery ministry of Rev. George B. Cheever, pastor of New York's Church of the Furitans. Nevertheless, he soon came to the conclusion that this new movement among the nation's religionists had been "chilled in its very birth, by the icy indifferences of the great mass of American evangelical churches and ministers." The American people still had no earnest wish to destroy slavery or the slave trade. By October, 1060, the only visible effect of the abolitionists' words upon the nation's conscience was the creation of a widespread "Sentimental Abolitionism" in the North. Antislavery sentimentalists such as Henry Ward Beecher made fine speeches when spurred on by a sudden crusading impulse, but gave ground when pressed by stern opposition. The editors of the New York Independent occasionally struck a heavy blow against "some outwork of the citadel of oppression," but then turned almost as fiercely against those abolitionists who would level the citadel into rubble. There were many ardent antislavery Presbyterians and Methodists, but they continued to remain in voluntary communion with "man-stealers and cradle-plunderers."29

²⁹ Speech delivered before various antislavery bodies, 1855, in Douglass, Bondage, p. 458; Speech at Rochester, January, 1855,

By 1362, antislavery sentiments seemed to be more visible than ever throughout the North, but Douglass was not to be deceived. He knew that a desire for national self-preservation and national safety, rather than any regard for the bondsman as a man and a brother was the root cause of the new humanitarian trend. To Louglass' mind, northern hostility toward the southern institution was less the outgrowth of a high moral conviction against slavery than a protest against the troubles which the slaveholders had brought upon the country. He would have the southern institution condemned for that and more. Douglass believed that a person who hated slavery only for what it did to the white man stood ready to embrace it the moment its injuries became confined to the black man. To the exslave, the existence of this feeling meant that White Christian America was not yet ready to make a full and frank acknowledgment of the Negro's manhood. 30

in Foner, Life and Writings, II, 335; Douglass' Monthly, April, 1859, May, 1859, July, 1859, November, 1859, June, 1860; October, 1860. William Lloyd Garrison believed that Rev. Cheever was less consistent and vigilant in antislavery matters than in "heresy hunting." In 1859 the Boston editor told those assembled at the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society that Cheever must either "continue to advance to our position, or else 'beat a retreat.' If he goes backward, he is lost; but if forward, his salvation is sure. I believe he is conscientiously working out the problem for himself, that we have long since clearly solved in our own minds; and he is learning a new lesson every day in this matter, by the treatment which he is receiving at the hands of his Orthodox clerical brethren generally, who either strongly condemn or timidly stand aloof from him." Speech at Boston, May 26, 1859, in Liberator, June 3, 1859; Speech at New York City, May 11, 1859, in Liberator, May 27, 1859. See also Liberator, December 17, 1858.

³⁰ Speech at Boston, February 12, 1862, in <u>Douglass' Monthly</u>, March, 1862; Speech at New York City, February, 1863, in <u>Douglass' Monthly</u>, March, 1863. See also <u>Douglass' Monthly</u>, June, 1861. In view of Douglass' continuing condemnation of the American profession of religion, it seemed somewhat strange to his contemporaries that he would willingly attend Sunday worship services in Rochester's Plymouth Church while its doors remained barred against antislavery

lecturers. In response to criticism of his attendance Douglass replied, "We go to hear Mr. Edwards preach, just as we go to Corinthian Hall to hear a lecture, responsible for our own convictions and conduct, and for those of no other hearer, free to receive what we may regard as true and valuable, and equally so to reject what may be erroneous and hurtful. We hardly see how we are to live in this country on any other principle than this...each man must determine for himself as to the best mode of testifying against the position of the church, and we shall certainly choose ours, whether denounced or commended." Douglass' Monthly, April, 1861. See also Rochester Post Express, February 25, 1895.

BOOK FIVE

CHAPTER X

A SPIRTUALIST'S HEAVEN

I believe in immortal life, --not as a matter of logic or of metaphysics, for it does not come within the scope of these, --but I feel it in every fibre and nerve of my system, in every drop of my blood, in the very instincts, necessities and desires of my nature.

--William Lloyd Garrison May 31, 1860

Despite his longstanding disapproval of "Christian superstition," William Lloyd Garrison nevertheless developed what one of his associates described as "a ready credulity on all subjects pertaining to Spiritualism." In their biographical study of Garrison, the abolitionist's sons also "freely admitted" that their father was "too credulous in regard to marvels, such as the 'spirit photographs,'..." and noted that his standing with the clergy was certainly not improved by his belief in the reality of "the so-called spiritual manifestations."

Ever hospitable to new thoughts and facts, from whatever quarter they might come, Garrison became fascinated with the mid-nineteenth century phenomena of spiritualism, avidly followed the debate over the "manifestations," and hoped to find proof of their reality. In

lsamuel May, Jr. to John B. Estlin, March 7, 1848, in Robert W. Delp, "Andrew Jackson Davis: Prophet of American Spiritualism," Journal of American History, LIV (June, 1967), 45; Garrison and Garrison, Life, IV, 338-339.

May, 1852 he told the readers of <u>The Liberator</u> that he had "heard the rappings, seen the tables moved and overturned as by an invisible power, had correct answers given to mental test questions, become acquainted with several estimable 'mediums,' and had many astounding statements made to us on the most reliable authority" Finding the idea of carrying on a direct personal correspondence with his departed friends to be "very pleasant," Garrison could "philosophically,...see nothing of absurdity clinging to it." After a "long and close" investigation of the subject, he concluded that it was "more or less practicable" for those who had "left the body" to hold communion with relatives and friends still in the flesh--making their presence known by "signs and tokens in the shape of what are called 'manifestations.'"²

While asserting that "spirit intercourse" had occurred in all ages and in all countries of the world, Garrison was not afraid to admit that the proof of such conversations was often "most unsatisfactory." In reviewing Isaac Post's <u>Voices from the Spirit World</u>:

being Communications from Many Spirits, the editor of The Liberator

²Johnson, Garrison and His Times, p. 376; Swift, Garrison, p. 300; Thomas, Liberator, p. 373; Liberator, May 7, 1852, November 26, 1852; Garrison to J. S. Adams, January 31, 1871, in Garrison and Garrison, Life, IV, 338. Frederick Douglass' reactions to the claims of spiritualists were quite different from Garrison's. In 1850 he told the readers of The North Star "firstly, that we have heard 'the rappings;' secondly, that we have put questions, and received what were alleged to be answers to the same, thirdly, that those answers were sometimes correct, and sometimes incorrect; fourthly, that the answers returned were always just such as might be given by a living and moving human being, and needing 'no ghost to tell us that,' fifthly, we have never received any intelligence from these alleged spirits; they are 'of the earth, earthy,' and possess no more illumination than we, who are yet in this clod of cumbrous clay. With this impression, we have contented ourselves with holding communion with our fellow mortals yet in the flesh, and have not lately sought to converse with those whose only language is knocking on the floor." North Star, April 5, 1850.

noted his dissatisfaction with the idea that "these lucubrations are from the 'spirits' indicated by name." Garrison could find no sound reason to explain why it was, for example, that if a man such as the late John C. Calhoun could communicate his thoughts at all, he could not do so with "characteristic terseness and strength." It was obvious that the material contained in Post's book bore none of the "genius and ability" which marked the writings of this most fluent individual while on earth. Indeed it could be said that the style of the "communications" contained in the volume resembled one another so closely as to "seem the product of one mind."

Even though he believed that his friend, Post, "would be among the last persons on earth we should suspect of collusion or imposture," Garrison felt that <u>Voices from the Spirit World</u> merited criticism as a part of the "mass of verbiage" which was bringing spiritualist beliefs into disrepute. If spiritualism could produce no stronger evidence to sustain itself than "the general feebleness or positive imbecility of its literature," it most assuredly deserved to be "satirized from one end of Christendom to the other."

Declaring in 1863 that he had "never yet seen a communication

⁵Garrison to J. S. Adams, January 31, 1871, in Garrison and Garrison, Life, IV, 338; Liberator, May 7, 1852, May 28, 1852, November 7, 1856. Garrison found it much easier to believe in the existence of those spirits which he could "see." In May, 1874 he asked Oliver Johnson: "Has Wendell put into your hands a card photograph of me, (taken by Mumler, the "spirit photographer,") on the negative of which appear the form and features of Charles Summer, (nine days after his decease,) he holding a broken chain over my right breast, symbolical of the slaves' liberation? All who have examined it have been much impressed by the phenomenon. Mumler did not know who I was at the time of my sitting; and I saw the negative immediately after it was taken from the camera. Recently, I have witnessed some extraordinary marvels in the materialization of spirit hands, utterances by spirit voices, etc., etc." Garrison to Oliver Johnson, May 25, 1874, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. See also Merrill, Wind and Tide, p. 325.

purporting to come from Socrates or Plato, Milton or Byron,
Swedenborg or Wesley, George Washington or Benjamin Franklin, or any
other distinguished personage" that he could accept as genuine, the
abolitionist editor told his readers that it was only to be marveled
at that more ridicule had not been heaped upon spiritualism as a result of the drivel which was published "on the authority and in the
names of such luminous minds."

Although he realized that there were many "discrepancies, incongruities, and absurdities" attending the spiritual manifestations of the day, Garrison found nothing to be "so puerile, or so preposterous," as the various theories which attempted to account for them, "short of a spiritual origin." Aside from the "pretentious and common-place communications" recorded by men like Isaac Post, he did not doubt that a "spiritual agency" was being exhibited in many of the "multitudinous 'manifestations'" which were attracting so much attention and awakening so much curiosity among the citizenry. Even though he felt that there were all too many "weak-minded and deluded" spiritualists in the United States--men and women who were easily imposed upon by unprincipled mediums and who foolishly wasted a great deal of time in "gratifying a morbid love for the marvellous,"

Liberator, May 28, 1852, August 17, 1855, October 2, 1863. Garrison was critical of Swedenborgianism even though the members of the New Church believed in the existence of a very real and tangible spirit world. In 1854, he noted that Swedenborgianism, like every other form of religious faith, was to be tested by a practical standard--"not by its speculations, but its fruits." In regard to reform, Garrison asserted that he knew of nothing "more conservative, or less inclined to find or bear a cross" than the religion of Emanuel Swedenborg. "It does not favor freedom for all;" he wrote, "it gives no countenance to the cause of emancipation; it takes no interest in the movement for the elevation and enfranchisement of woman; it is not peaceful in spirit, but warlike as the army and navy of the United States...." Liberator, September 29, 1854.

Garrison believed that their follies were no more harmful to spiritualism than the "extravagances of professed Christians" were to Christianity.⁵

During the same years in which he was engaged in examining the claims of the spiritualists, Garrison was modifying his views on non-resistance. Throughout the 1840's and most of the 1850's, he continued to believe that God, as a "just, beneficent, and unchange-able being," never did and never could authorize his children to "kill and exterminate" one another. Anyone who thought differently was to be justly accused of libelling the Creator's goodness and of "asserting what everything in nature contradicts." The non-resistance doctrine was not to be sneered at as inculcating a state of passivity. On the contrary, it was passive only in the sense that its adherents refused to return evil for evil. Non-resistance was a "state of activity," ever fighting the good fight of faith and always prepared to assail "unjust power." Garrison considered it to be "the blending of the gentleness and innocency of the lamb of God with the courage and strength of the Lion of the tribe of Judah."

DGarrison to Lydia Maria Child, February 6, 1857, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Liberator, October 2, 1863; Garrison to J. S. Adams, January 31, 1871, in Garrison and Garrison, Life, IV, 338-339.

Speech at Boston, December 30, 1848, in <u>Liberator</u>, January 5, 1849; Garrison to Elizabeth Pease, June 20, 1849, in Garrison and Garrison, <u>Life</u>, III, 270; <u>Liberator</u>, April 27, 1849. See also <u>Liberator</u>, December 24, 1841, March 30, 1855, March 14, 1856, April 4, 1856, November 14, 1856, July 22, 1859; Speech at Boston, December 30, 1846, in <u>Liberator</u>, January 15, 1847. At the Hartford Bible Convention of 1853, Garrison asserted that it was "not in the power of God, as he is constituted and made, ever to make the lie a truth, or to make the truth a lie; and so it is not possible for him morally to be a God of peace, and then at another time to be a God of war, any more than he can be a God of veracity, and then at some other time be a God of falsehood." <u>Hartford Bible Convention</u>, p. 261.

Declaring that there was "an impassable gulf--a difference heaven-wide" between worldly patriotism and Christian heroism, the abolitionist asserted that any form of religion which justified war, or the use of "darnal weapons," to redress wrongs or to punish enemies was directly "antagonistical to the gospel of Christ." Believing as he did, it was to be expected that Garrison would question the Christianity of those churches which did not speak out against the Mexican War. In 1846 he asked, "Where are the ministers of the gospel of peace--where are the churches which claim for their leader the Prince of Peace ...? Do they imagine that they can remain dumb, and not be chargeable with all the blood that may be shed in this unholy conflict?" To Garrison's mind, the war was a criminal, "all-crushing pro-slavery movement" which could only result in a further bloodying of the already terribly soiled "robes" of both the nation and its churches. 7

Three years later the editor of <u>The Liberator</u> rebuked the Hungarian patriot, Louis Kossuth, for calling upon his countrymen to "seize the axe, the scythe, the sword, the firebrand, every weapon of death and destruction within their reach, and wield them with exterminating effect against their Austrian and Russian invaders."

While agreeing that Hungary's fight for freedom and independence was both "laudable and noble," Garrison was disappointed to see "a good object defended by the same weapons and the same measures as those which are used to uphold a bad object." Could cruelty be used to destroy cruelty or sin to abolish sin?, he asked. Surely a belief

Liberator, September 10, 1841; Garrison to Richard Davis Webb, February 27, 1842, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to Charles K. Whipple, June 19, 1846, in <u>Liberator</u>, August 21, 1846. See also <u>Liberator</u>, August 4, 1870.

in the ancient, outmoded "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life" philosophy was no help in diffusing love and good will throughout the world.

Garrison felt that such love and good will could best be disseminated by those who, like Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom," exemplified the "nature, tendency, and results of CHRISTIAN NON-RESISTANCE." In commenting upon this fictional character who, according to Mrs. Stowe, was almost robbed of his Bible by the Boston abolitionist, Garrison noted that no insult or outrage seemed to be able to disturb the Christ-like meekness of his spirit or to shake the steadfastness of his faith. Toward his "merciless oppressors" Tom cherished no animosity and "breathed nothing of retaliation." Like his Lord and Master, he was willing to be "led as a lamb to the slaughter," returning blessing for cursing, and anxious only for the salvation of his enemies.

Garrison was curious to know whether Mrs. Stowe believed in the duty of non-resistance for the white man as well as for the black. He felt that her worth as a "religious teacher" would either be "greatly strengthened or lessened as the inquiry might terminate."

In the American South of the 1850's it seemed to be "everywhere taken for granted" that the bondsmen ought to repudiate all carnal weapons, be obedient to their masters, abstain from all insurrectionary movements, and wait for a peaceful deliverance. Surely they could not be animated by a Christian spirit and yet return blow for blow. They were required by the Bible to put away all wrath and to submit to every conceivable type of outrage without resistance. But for those

⁸Liberator, August 31, 1849.

whose skin happened to be of a slightly lighter color, the case appeared to be materially altered. When white men were spat upon, buffeted, or outraged, it was not proper to speak of a non-resisting Savior. To talk of overcoming evil with good in such a case was deemed fanaticism and madness. "How is this to be explained or reconciled?...," asked Garrison, "when it is the whites who are trodden in the dust, does Christ justify them in taking up arms to vindicate their rights? And when it is the blacks who are thus treated, does Christ require them to be patient, harmless, long-suffering, and forgiving?" 9

The shocking and violent events of the 1850's made the abolitionist examine this "double-standard" of non-resistance ever more closely. After John Brown's October, 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry, Garrison modified his belief in the inherent wrongness of belligerence by greatly increasing his emphasis on the non-resistance doctrine's "state of activity." At a memorial meeting held at Boston's Tremont Temple on the day of Brown's execution, he asked how many nonresistants were present in the audience. When only a single person responded in the affirmative, Garrison paused a moment and then said that he too was a peace man--an "ultra" peace man who had labored unremittingly to effect the peaceful abolition of slavery. Nevertheless, he was now prepared to say "Success to every slave insurrection at the South, and in every slave country." By making such a declaration, he did not consider himself to be compromising his "peace profession." Wherever there existed a contest between the oppressed and the oppressor his sympathies were always with the

⁹Liberator, March 26, 1852.

former and against the latter. Therefore, he noted, "whenever commenced, I cannot but wish success to all slave insurrections." "Give me," said Garrison, "as a non-resistant, Bunker Hill, and Lexington, and Concord, rather than the cowardice and servility of a Southern slave plantation." Rather than seeing men wearing their chains in a "cowardly and servile spirit," Garrison would, "as an advocate of peace," prefer to see them "breaking the head of the tyrant with their chains." He asserted that it not only was "an indication of progress, and a positive moral growth," but it was also one way of reaching the "sublime platform of non-resistance" for those who believed in "the right and duty of wielding carnal weapons" to "take those weapons out of the scale of despotism, and throw them into the scale of freedom." Surely this was "God's method" of dealing retribution upon the head of a tyrant.

Having thus in effect sanctioned belligerance in support of a righteous cause, Garrison was able to support the Civil War as the instrument needed to free the slaves. Convinced that he was clinging "as tenaciously as ever" to the principles of peace, Garrison

¹⁰ Merrill, Wind and Tide, pp. 269-273; Thomas, Liberator, pp. 396-398; Speech at Boston, December 2, 1859, in Liberator, December 16, 1859. Benjamin Quarles has written that as a result of his 1848 visit to John Brown's home in Springfield, Massachusetts, Frederick Douglass also "found it necessary to refashion his thinking." Brown's insistence that there was "no possibility of converting the slaveholders" weakened Douglass' faith in "the Garrisonian principle of non-resistance." Nevertheless, neither this shift in thought nor the black abolitionist's reliance upon the power of man in effecting reform could convince Douglass that he should support Brown's plan to seize the government arsenal at Harper's Ferry. Quarles, Frederick Douglass, pp. 171, 176-179. For more comprehensive accounts of Douglass' relationship with John Brown see Quarles, Frederick Douglass, pp. 169-185; Foner, Frederick Douglass, pp. 137-139, 174-182; Benjamin Quarles, "Frederick Douglass and John Brown," in Rochester Historical Society Publications, Vol. XVII (Rochester: Rochester Historical Society, 1939), pp. 291-299; Benjamin Quarles, ed., Blacks on John Brown (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), pp. 7-10, 54-66; Douglass, Life, pp. 271-275, 302-303, 305-325.

believed that if the American people had accepted those principles during the ante-bellum years, there would have been no slavery and no war. Nevertheless, since the war had come, he would support it because, while there was relatively little wrong or injustice to be found on the side of the Union, the secessionist camp contained countless "'thieves,' 'robbers,' 'traitors,' and 'pirates'"--men who were capable of "committing any crime, violating any pledge, disregarding any obligation, and inflicting any outrage, however monstrous or savage."

Garrison tended to speak of the war as a judgment of God inflicted upon a sinful and decidedly corrupt land. It was a product of the "natural and inevitable operation of the law of eternal justice." Due to its citizens' "hardness of heart and blindness of mind" the United States lay "prostrate in the dust." The nation's guilt was identical to that of Edom in "the matter of oppression, and of complicity with oppressors." For too long its people had "laughed to scorn" all warnings of danger, all accusations of sinfulness, and all threats of divine retribution. The day of reckoning was at hand. In the "retributive conflict" of the war, the God of the oppressed was "signally vindicating his justice" and demonstrating that he had not been at any time insensible to the tears, the cries, and the agonies of those who had for so long been "held in the galling fetters of chattel servitude." At the same time He was showing that, although the war would fearfully scourge the nation, His judgment was to be mingled with mercy. After "merited chastisement" the land would have

¹¹ Thomas, Liberator, p. 413; Liberator, June 7, 1861; Merrill, Wind and Tide, pp. 276-277.

rest, a lasting peace would be secured, and universal freedom would reign triumphant. 12

As the war neared its conclusion, Garrison offered his unfeigned thanks to the God of judgment and mercy. At a February, 1865 gathering held in Music Hall, Boston, he celebrated the long-awaited appearance of the Thirteenth Amendment by declaring: "I feel to-night in a thoroughly methodistical state of mind-disposed at the top of my voice, and to the utmost stretch of my lungs, to shout 'Glory!' 'Alleluia!' 'Amen and amen!'" With the Psalmist of old he would exclaim: "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." He would say to both young and old, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for his mercy endureth forever." 13

While not ignoring the work of the abolitionists, Garrison was careful to give God a major portion of the credit for the success of their crusade. The Boston editor considered himself to be "one only of a multitude of noble men and women" in various parts of the country whose combined efforts were necessary to bring about the downfall of slavery. Early in 1865 he remarked that there had been no tear shed, prayer offered, pecuniary contribution made, or testimony borne which had not been "indispensable to the achievement of the triumph of our cause, as it now stands before our country and the world." Nevertheless, it could truly be said that slavery was being destroyed by the "righteous judgment of God" and that it was "not in

¹² Speech at Williamstown, Massachusetts, August 4, 1862, in Liberator, August 29, 1862; Garrison to J. R. W. Leonard, November 25, 1864, in Liberator, December 9, 1864; Garrison to Oliver Johnson, April 19, 1861, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. See also Ezekiel 25:12-14, Obadiah 1.

¹³ Speech at Boston, February 4, 1865, in <u>Liberator</u>, February 10, 1865. See also Psalms 106:1, 126:3.

the power of men or devils" to save the infamous system from extinction. As he noted in 1870, "it was by the help of God that I was enabled to stand in the evil day, and by the same Divine strength and trust were the great body of Abolitionists sustained in every emergency." 14

Although Garrison's views on non-resistance were altered by the traumatic events of the late ante-bellum period, his religious beliefs remained remarkably unchanged. During his later years, the Boston reformer continued to champion the cause of freedom of conscience against the forces of "Christian superstition." Believing that the "worst heresy" was a slavish conformity to the "orthodox standards of the hour" and that "fruits render all professions superfluous," he was proud to have discarded "all human authority" in matters of religious belief and practice. Holding to the "fundamental doctrine of Protestantism," he continued to maintain that it was both the right and the duty of every Christian to decide for himself what

¹⁴Garrison to H. J. Brown, May 15, 1870, in New Era, May 26, 1870; Speech at Boston, January 26, 1865, in Liberator, February 17, 1865. See also speech at Charleston, South Carolina, April 14, 1865, in Liberator, May 12, 1865; Speech at Charleston, South Carolina. April 15, 1865, in Liberator, May 5, 1865; Liberator, December 22, 1865; Speech at London, England, June 29, 1867, in Garrison and Garrison, Life, IV, 213-217. In an address delivered at the 32nd Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in May, 1865. Garrison noted: "We are now a united people--never before. We have now high hopes of the future. We have decreed the abolition of slavery, our great national transgression; and now we may confidently look up to God for his blessing upon us, as a people, and He will not fail us.... Though the South is at present a desolation, and the North is still wailing for her lost, yet there is in store for us, because we have resolved to put away the evil thing from among us, abiding peace and abounding prosperity." Speech at New York City, May 9, 1865, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 19, 1865. See also Garrison to Charles Sumner, February 11, 1866, Houghton Library, Harvard Univercity; Independent, April 12, 1866.

constituted truth and what error. 15

In one of the many articles which he wrote for the New York Independent during the post-war years, Garrison examined "The Rights of Conscience." By doing so, he showed his readers that he considered the universal possession of "full liberty of conscience" to be a sort of supernal panacea which would spell the end of "all wrath and bitterness, all self-conceit and pharisaical assumption." and "all oracular anathematizing and sectarian proscription." Freedom of thought and inquiry was a powerful force for good. It forbade religious intolerance, furnished "the best soil" for the growth of mental independence, encouraged moral excellence, and allowed "the truth to stand upon its own merits, without any adventitious props." Moreover, such a great liberty precluded the "bandying about" of the epithets "heresy" and "infidelity" because only "infallibility" could determine what constituted hereay. Essential to the "just maintenance of popular government" and a veritable scourge to the "unhallowed union of church and state," freedom of conscience gave "unlimited scope to investigation, "--providing man with the opportunity to "press onward to a higher attainment and a more shining mark." 16

¹⁵ Garrison to Mr. Marshall, April 27, 1877, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

Independent, November 25, 1869. While Garrison hoped that William J. Potter's Free Religious Association would prove to be "a potent instrument in the overthrow of bigotry and superstition, and the furtherance of civil and religious liberty," he did not choose to ally himself too closely with this group of "brave independent, upright souls who are for taking nothing upon trust, and everything according to its intrinsic value, in matters of religious faith and practice." In the spring of 1875 he declined to have his name placed in nomination for the Vice Presidency of the Association due to "personal reasons." Garrison to William J. Potter, October 11, 1873, Garrison to William J. Potter, April 15, 1875, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

Opposing the advance of the rights of conscience were those religionists who continued to honor ecclesiastical authority by believing in "Papal and Protestant infallibility." According to Garrison, while it was true that only the "Romish Pope" claimed to be infallible, there was nevertheless much of the Papal spirit permeating Protestantism. Many of the "self-styled" evangelical clergy were as "bigoted, proscriptive, and self-inflated" as the Pope himself. Even though they were obviously "recreant to the fundamental doctrine of the Reformation," they did not like to be charged with priestcraft. Instead, they gloried in "putting on the robes of infallibility" and in treating free thought, free inquiry, free speech, and individual non-conformity as offenses in the sight of heaven. 17

Following the Civil War, Garrison continued to criticize the type of Christianity to which the "Protestant priesthood" invariably adhered. Declaring that "the cheapest thing in the market is professional veneration for Christ," he asserted that, "in the present state of public sentiment," the term "Christian" had no practical value. It had lost its original significance and, through "utter perversion" had become worthless as a reliable test of religious character. "Certainly," wrote Garrison in 1870, "Jesus was not a Christian, in the modern use of the term; for that implies what is most respectable—close conformity to what is established and popular—blind veneration of the past." In Garrison's opinion, those who claimed to be the followers of the Nazarene had to show that they were animated by "at least something of his spirit" in a readiness

¹⁷Garrison to William J. Potter, October 11, 1873, Garrison to Oliver Johnson, April 9, 1873, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. See also <u>Independent</u>, June 9, 1870.

to "bear testimony to unpopular truth, cost what it may." If a profession of Christian faith was certain to be followed by persecution, outlawry, or perhaps even death itself, as in the apostolic age, it would then be of "vital significance."

During the year 1868, the former abolitionist published several articles in The Independent dealing with the shortcomings of the American pulpit. Noting that there was no surer sign of religious degeneracy than "constant sermonizing about obsolete tests and bygone events." Garrison held that ministerial inability and unwillingness to confront the "dangers and trials of the present hour" could usually be found to exist "in proportion to the disposition to extol the heroes, saints, martyrs, and saviours of past ages." As long as the "pulpit homilist" occupied himself in discussing the "acts and actors of buried ages." he would surely excite no alarm in the breasts of the wicked. Certainly it could not be denied that such inspiration was to be gained by studying the lives of the "martyrs and confessors." Their heroic examples would give strength, hope, and comfort to those who were endeavoring to battle the sins of their own day and generation. Nevertheless, it was one thing to refer to such figures for example and illustration and quite another to become so enamored with their "continual laudation" that current

Independent, July 14, 1870, November 3, 1870. In 1867 Garrison asserted that to talk of "the merits of the Savior" and to "make everything of his atoning blood" furnished no real evidence of "religious attainment." He was not interested in knowing "what any one may say or profess in regard to those of the far distant past, 'of whom the world was not worthy.'" While such opinions were often "readily accepted as evidence of piety," Garrison felt that they proved nothing because they cost nothing. Even the Pharisees, he noted, had made an attempt to prove their regard for true religion by saying, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have participated in stoning the prophets." Garrison to Mrs. Arthur Albright, October 23, 1867, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

responsibilities and duties were neglected. Garrison claimed that if the "fifty thousand occupants of pulpits" in the United States would cease to waste their time in the discussion of "topics worn threadbare by repetition" and would, instead, give themselves unreservedly to the task of testifying against "living transgressors of the Divine Law," they would "better evince their appreciation of the prophets of old" and more acceptably demonstrate their reverence for Christ. 19

The modern day "transgressors" of whom Garrison spoke were adjudged to be those individuals who, despite the fact that the institution of slavery had been "abolished beyond all hope of reestablishment," continued to make the color of a man's skin the criterion for deciding whether one was a superior or an inferior being. To Garrison's mind there was "no atheism worse than this; no rejection of Christianity more positive than this," yet the disease of "COLORPHOBIA" seemed to be everywhere present. Upon the banner of the Democratic party was emblazoned the "heathenish" motto, "Down with the nigger! This is a white man's government!" If it were in their power, the men who believed in this motto would instantly reduce the black man to a state of bondage--placing him once again among goods, chattels, and marketable commodities. They would wrest the elective franchise from the hand of the ex-slave and rob him of every human right. Could it not then be said, wrote Garrison, that the existence of this proscriptive spirit proved that an "American ANTI-CHRIST" was stalking the land? 20

¹⁹ Independent, February 27, 1868. See also Independent, September 10, 1868.

Independent, February 27, 1868, September 3, 1868.

Christian religion to be "everlastingly divorced from all that is oppressive, unjust, partial, and clannish." Those who considered themselves to be "witnesses for God" had to speak out against the evils of color prejudice in "accents loud and clear." What sense did it make, he asked, for American Christians to seek the abolition of caste in India while perpetuating an even more unnatural and debasing caste in their own land? A genuine Christianity never sanctioned any form of "human degradation," but was ever willing to take the side of the weak against the strong. If they were ever to be deserving of the name "Christian," the nation's ministers had to put their religious teachings into practice by meeting the Great Adversary face to face--"not in Judea, as an effete sentiment, but in the United States, as a living principle."

During his later years, Garrison remained critical of religious "forms," Sabbath observances, and revivals. In an 1862 letter to his son, Wendell, he noted that his "aversion to a liturgy, with its responses, deepens every time I listen to it." The worship of God as a set, mechanical, stereotyped observance was to him "nothing better than a solemn mockery." In like manner, he continued to oppose those laws and social customs which gave Sunday a "moral predominance" over the other six days of the week. In April 1872, he told his friend, Oliver Johnson, that Henry Ward Beecher was to be commended for supporting the opening of the New York Public Libraries on the Sabbath. Perhaps recalling his own experience as an antisabbatarian, Garrison noted wryly, "Will he not catch it, though, from his more

²¹ Independent, January 30, 1868; February 27, 1868; September 3, 1868.

evangelical brethren?" That he did not consider himself to be of the "evangelical stamp" was evidenced by his reaction to the ministry of Dwight L. Moody. In 1877 Garrison wrote his daughter, Fanny, that "Moody and [Ira D.] Sankey are here with their sensational 'revival.' Thousands flock to hear them every day--curiosity, no doubt, being the predominating incentive. I am inclined to think more people will 'lose their heads' than will save their souls."²²

inspiration of Scripture. Firm in his belief that, rather than having been inscribed in a "Holy Book," the rights of man were "written upon the human faculties and powers by the finger of God," he hoped that William Lloyd, Jr. would regard the Bible as a "volume to be studied, criticized, and judged, without prejudice, credulity, superstition, or regard to any popular or prevailing interpretation thereof." Since it was not "the Word of God," as many "dogmatically" assumed it to be, the Bible could be examined with the same freedom "as any other book or compilation of ancient manuscripts." Nevertheless, Garrison assured his son that even with "reason and conscience holding mastery over it," the Bible was "deserving of the highest consideration" because of the "incomparable truths, solemn warnings, and precious promises" which it contained. 25

Despite the strong aversion which he felt toward many of their

²²Garrison to Wendell P. Garrison, August 10, 1862, Garrison to Oliver Johnson, April 23, 1872, Garrison to Fanny Garrison Villard, February 8, 1877, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. See also Garrison to Maria W. Chapman, February 16, 1877, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

²³ Speech at Philadelphia, December 3, 1863, in <u>Liberator</u>, December 18, 1863; Garrison to William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., January 21, 1875, Garrison Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

beliefs and practices, Garrison joined with the nation's more orthodox churchmen in denouncing intemperance. In an 1857 address, the abolitionist had noted that if he was guilty of devoting less time and energy to the temperance cause than he had while at the National Philanthropist it was not because he had lost interest in the success of the movement, but could be attributed to the fact that an ever increasing number of men and women had discovered that it was "respectable" to speak out against strong drink. Having had his sympathies "early awakened" to the cause of the slave, it was only natural that he would devote the bulk of his time and energy to the less popular antislavery crusade. 24

After the Civil War, Garrison was once again "free" to approach the problem of intemperance with something of the same vigor which he had exhibited prior to 1830. In May, 1868 he referred to moderate drinking as "that snare and delusion of all snares and delusions." Favoring the reimposition of the recently repealed Massachusetts prohibition law, he damned those foreign-born citizens of the Commonwealth who seemed to be "easily duped and misled by unprincipled demagogues in any moral contest presented at the polls." Such men were "to a large extent quite unintelligent and uneducated; born and reared under the most unfavorable conditions with habits of drinking never cared for, never sought to be restrained, never called in question on their own native soil." Largely unaware of the "responsibilities and duties which attach to freemen in the maintenance of popular institutions" they nevertheless had "votes in their hands" and were "always prompt at the ballot-box." It was imperative,

Speech at Boston, May 3, 1857, in <u>Liberator</u>, May 8, 1857.

wrote Garrison, for men of this character to understand that a prohibition law was needed "in order that the liberties of the people
may be preserved, their welfare consulted, their moral condition elevated, their material wealth increased, their happiness and security
placed on a sure foundation."

25

According to Garrison, alcohol was "the most seductive of all poisons." Claiming that the widespread use of strong drink accounted for "three-fourths of all the insanity, pauperism, crime, and wretchedness" in the community, he believed that to prohibit its sale was "among the first and highest duties of legislation." To Garrison's mind. if there was "anything left to us worth contending for ... as a principle of society," it was the right not merely to restrain but to suppress the liquor traffic. To "legislate men into piety" was one thing, but to destroy the "nurseries of vice and wretchedness" by statute law was "quite another." In defending the re-enactment of the Massachusetts prohibition law in 1869, Garrison asserted that a law which was designed for the good of all could not be proscriptive of any. "All Legislative enactments should be in conformity with human needs and the eternal law of right," he wrote, "When they are otherwise, then it is both wise and patriotic to demand their obliteration." Judged by this standard, he believed the Prohibitory Law to be "worthy of all acceptation." Any and all attempts to discredit the statute or impair the strength of its provisions could only "tend

²⁵ Independent, May 28, 1868. See also Independent, March 25, 1869. In November, 1870 Garrison declared that as "a tectotaler for more than forty years, and desirous of seeing the sale of all intoxicating liquors prohibited for drinking purposes, I am nevertheless opposed to seeking this end by the formation of a distinct political party, whether in Massachusetts or elsewhere, believing it will retard rather than advance the cause so dear to all true friends of temperance." Independent, November 24, 1870.

to an increase of immorality in proportion as they shall be crowned with success."26

Garrison's eminently orthodox manner of attacking the sin of intemperance did not serve to shelter him from the barbs of critics who disapproved of the methods which he had used in the fight against the sin of slavery. Despite the fact that, during the decade of the Civil War, the national conscience had moved closer to that of the abolitionists' than at any other time in the history of the antislavery movement, Garrison found it necessary to defend himself against those charges of his old enemies which were being re-stated in various post-war accounts of the abolitionist crusade. In his defense, the elderly reformer denied that he was the protagonist in the longstanding conflict between the churchmen and the Garrisonians. "It was the church that was the real assailant all through the protracted struggle," he wrote, "resisting every appeal of the oppressed millions for its sympathy and aid, and actively bringing the whole weight of its tremendous influence to crush abolitionism to the dust." Those instances where a local church or pastor was outspoken or uncompromising in the cause of the oppressed were "like angels" visits, few and far between."

Independent, July 29, 1869, October 14, 1869, March 3, 1870, July 6, 1871. Garrison was also opposed to the use of "that noxious weed and injurious narcotic--tobacco." In 1865, he noted that it was a constant source of surprise and regret for him "to find many, who claim to be in the ranks of reform and progress, and who are really doing good service in their special field of labor, completely enslaved to the hurtful and disgusting use of tobacco; so that all appeals to them on the score of consistency, virtue and exemplary conduct are utterly in vain." Including in his charges those who were "addicted" to tobacco in any of its forms, Garrison believed that a reformer who smoked, used snuff, or chewed tobacco was "palpably deficient in symmetry of character." Garrison to George Trask, May 27, 1865, in Liberator, June 9, 1865. See also Liberator, August 20, 1831.

According to Garrison, the apostasy of the nation's religious bodies was "well-nigh universal," but the abolitionists, by their sacrifices, labors, and testimonies had shown themselves to be "animated by the deepest religious convictions, and by a vital appreciation of the life and teachings of a compassionate Redeemer." The cry of "infidelity" raised against the Garrisonians was merely one of the methods used by the "time-serving, pro-slavery church and clergy" in their attempt to destroy the work of these courageous men. By willingly subjecting themselves to "overwhelming contempt and obloquy," the abolitionists had evidenced a rare moral courage, a profound sympathy for human suffering, and an "absolute trust in God." 27

Garrison summed up his defense in a sonnet which appeared in The Independent during the winter of 1867:

It is a good thing to be a heretic-Disturber of the peace--blasphemer bold-When Satan's minions, unto evil sold,
Who at no slanderous accusation stick,
Apply such epithets both fierce and thick-For so they stigmatized the Christ of old,
Prophets, apostles, martyrs manifold,
And still resort to the same fiendish trick.
It is sure proof of towering rectitude,
Love of truth, and reverence for right,
A soul with godlike principle inbued,
And lofty courage to maintain the fight,
When one is thus maliciously pursued;
For darkness hath no fellowship with light.

During his later years, as he contemplated the tumultuous events of the ante-bellum period, the problems encountered by the

²⁷Garrison to George W. Stacy, January 18, 1879, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to Samuel Hunt, December 26, 1876, Garrison Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College; Independent, December 10,1868. See also William Lloyd Garrison, The "Infidelity" of Abolitionism (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860).

²⁸Independent, January 31, 1867.

temperance crusaders, and the puzzling phenomena of spiritualism, the former abolitionist also became aware of the fact that his old co-workers were "fast disappearing from this earthly stage" and that, in accordance with the laws of mortality, he too "must follow them at no distant day." 29

Garrison believed that it would be "unspeakably pleasant" to greet his companions in reform "on the other side of the line." In March, 1874 he urged James Miller McKim to "hold fast" to the assurance that death was no dreadful calamity, but rather a most beneficent arrangement. Although separated for a time from those dear friends who were yet living, the newly deceased person would undoubtedly be surprised at "how quickly the broken links will be reunited, and how many beloved ones on the other side are waiting to receive us again to personal communion and visible fellowship." Later in the year, Garrison told David Lee Child that, "having labored with you and your dear and noble wife, for so many years, to make this world better than we found it -- ... I hope to join you in another sphere, animated by a similar spirit, and consecrating the same faculties and powers to 'the general welfare.'" Should the reformers find that "the sum of all villany" had managed to gain a foothold in the after-life, Garrison would, he avowed, join with Child, "as in

²⁹Garrison to Samuel J. May, February 9, 1871, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. In a letter which he penned in 1858, Garrison viewed the future life in a thoroughly spiritualist manner. He considered death to be "a translation--a spiritual birth--one of the links in the chain of eternal progression." He not only believed in immortality, but also held that "our departed loved ones and friends are around and with us, though unseen by mortal eyes, endeavoring to comfort and strengthen us in the hour of trial, and under every bereavement." Garrison to Louisa Loring, May 24, 1858, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

'auld lang syne,' in a war of extermination."30

Regarding death as "simply an exchange of spheres for the better." Garrison could not understand why any rational being should be apprehensive or fearful in regard to such a translation. If the present life was attractive, it necessarily followed, "in accordance with the law of progress," that the life to come would be "increasingly advantageous and desirable." Wherever one might be in the universe, and whatever his condition, Divine Love would most assuredly be "as solicitous for our welfare and happiness as now." Those who believed otherwise were sadly deluded. Garrison thought it unfortunate that so many men and women considered death to be a cause for dismay and anguish -- as though it were "an awful thing in itself." In viewing man's "earthly exit" as "a manifestation of Divine displeasure on account of the alleged misconduct of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, ... tainting and dooming all their posterity to the end of time," these people showed that they had been greatly influenced both by "unreasoning superstition" and by the "false teachings of priestcraft." To adhere to such a theory of life and death was to limit divine compassion and goodness. "Away with all such Goddishonoring views!" he wrote in an 1874 letter to McKim, "You and I

Garrison to James Miller McKim, March 31, 1874, Garrison to David Lee Child, May 18, 1874, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to Fanny Garrison Villard, April 19, 1872, Houghton Library, Harvard University. See also Garrison to Samuel J. May, December 10, 1865, Garrison to Maria W. Chapman, January 18, 1877, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to John G. Anthony, May 17, 1874, Garrison Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College. In his letter to Child, Garrison noted: "I expect in the future life to be governed 'by Shrewsbury clock,' or some other one not less reliable, and to take cognizance of the procession of the seasons and the revolutions of the planets, as now in the flesh." Garrison to David Lee Child, May 18, 1874, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

were early taught to believe them; but, happily, we have lived to perceive their folly and impiety."31

³¹ Garrison to Wendell P. Garrison, December 12, 1878, Houghton Library, Harvard University; Garrison to Samuel May, Jr., December 19, 1874, Garrison to James Miller McKim, May 29, 1874, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library; Garrison to John G. Anthony, May 17, 1874, Garrison Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

CHAPTER XI

AN EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE

I dwell here in no hackneyed cant about thanking God for this deliverance...my thanks to-night are to willing hearts and the willing hands that labored in the beginning, amid loss of reputation, amid insult and martyrdom, and at imminent peril of life and limb.

--Frederick Douglass April 26, 1870

However skeptical Frederick Douglass may have been about the willingness of White Christian America to make a full and frank acknowledgment of the Negro's manhood, he nevertheless hoped that the blessings of political and civil equality would be granted to men of all races as a logical consequence of the Union victory. Thus, it was to be expected that he would raise his voice in thanksgiving at the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in March, 1870. What came as a rude shock to many of his contemporaries was the fact that his thanks were offered exclusively to man while the God of the oppressed was shunned.

Douglass' speech at the ratification celebration in Horticultural Hall, Philadelphia, on April 26, was an important milestone in his theological development, graphically marking the degree to which he had modified the beliefs of his youth by shifting the emphasis in the God-man relationship from heaven earthward. He looked upon the

Quarles, Frederick Douglass, p. 222.

great revolution which had taken the Negro "from the lowest depths of bondage to the loftiest heights of citizenship" as having been accomplished by men, through the spirit of their common humanity, rather than by any special intervention of Providence. "I dwell here in no hackneyed cant about thanking God for this deliverance," he said. "...my thanks to-night are to willing hearts and the willing hands that labored in the beginning, amid loss of reputation. amid insult and martyrdom, and at imminent peril of life and limb." These were the people who, in an evil hour, had the courage and devotion to stand by the cause of liberty and to demand that the bondsmen be freed. Such men took the "great powers" which God had granted to man and attempted to work out their own salvation -- the salvation of society. Armed with eternal justice, goodness, mercy, wisdom, and knowledge, they labored to reform mankind. Those who desired to take the credit for the slaves' deliverance away from these men and place it with God were the very people who had hindered the abolitionist cause by "telling us that God would abolish slavery in his own good time."

Douglass' remarks greatly angered an important segment of Philadelphia's black clergy. Not only did they disagree with the exslave, but they were also afraid that his observations would be accepted as the sentiments of the great mass of the Negro people. Under the leadership of Bishop Jabez P. Campbell of the Philadelphia Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, a meeting was called for the evening of May 18. After the usual devotional exercises, Reverend James Williams addressed the capacity audience which filled every

²Philadelphia Press, April 27, 1870.

seat in Bethel Church. With an air of sorrow, he gently rebuked the abolitionist. "We have assembled to-night to give utterance to our views," he declared, "and while we love Frederick Douglass, we love truth more. We admire Frederick Douglass, but we love God more." The next speaker, Reverend J. Frisby Cooper, was somewhat harsher in his criticism of the Horticultural Hall address. Black men should not follow Douglass' advice, but should instead thank God for their deliverance. "We believe in God," he said, "and therefore worship him. It is our duty to give thanks unto God for the many good gifts we receive. If we put our trust in man he will deceive us; he will be with us to-day and against us to-morrow." It was an awful thing to say that man could not give thanks to the Heavenly Father. Had it not been for His controlling influence, the slaves would still be in bondage. Jeremiah Bewley Murray echoed these sentiments by noting that, just as the children of Israel had been delivered from a servile bondage, the chattels of America had been rescued from slavery by "an evident interposition on the part of Heaven." Isaiah C. Weir then concluded the evening's oratory by asserting that "for all that we have received and enjoyed, to God alone belongs the praise and glory."3

Those black religionists who had followed the progression of Douglass' religious thought throughout the 1850's and 1860's were at least somewhat aware of the views which he had come to hold by the

Cooper intimated that Douglass' "heresies" may have sprung from a desire for "notoriety or popularity." Weir noted that, in expressing such heretical sentiments at Horticultural Hall, Frederick "made a mistake, and after so much had been said to pamper him, it is not surprising that he has fallen." Philadelphia Press, May 19, 1870. See also Foner, Frederick Douglass, pp. 270-271; Herbert Aptheker, "An Unpublished Frederick Douglass Letter," Journal of Negro History, XLIV (July, 1959), 280.

time of the Horticultural Hall address. While he had offered the customary thanks to God during several previous celebrations, his post-bellum veneration of man's power was made clear on April 19. 1870, at the final meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society.4 On this occasion, he noted that while many gave credit to God for the successful conclusion of the abolitionist crusade, he would rather offer his thanks to man. He wanted to express his gratitude to God by thanking the faithful men and women who had devoted the great energies of their souls to the welfare of mankind. "It is only through such men and such women," he asserted, "that I can get a glimpse of God anywhere." A few days later in Albany, New York, at a meeting celebrating the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment. Douglass again paid tribute to the people who had contributed most sacrificially to the great victory. His heartfelt thanks went out to Wendell Phillips, Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, and others, but he did not list God as being among those primarily responsible for the achievement of equal suffrage. By the time of his April 26 address, rumblings of disapproval had already begun to surface among the nation's black religionists.5

If the reaction of the Philadelphia clergymen to Douglass'

See speech at Boston, January 1, 1863, in Boston Journal, January 2, 1863; Speech at Watkins, New York, August 1, 1867, in Holland, Colored Orator, pp. 319-320. See also speech at New York City, February 13, 1864, in Philip S. Foner, ed., The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass, III (New York: International Publishers, 1952), 386-387.

⁵Aptheker, "Letter," p. 280; Foner, <u>Frederick Douglass</u>, pp. 266-269. At a May 19, 1870 celebration in Baltimore, Douglass noted, "I loved everything of Maryland except slavery--it was that I ran away from thirty-two years ago.... I found that God never began to hear my prayers for liberty until I began to run. Then you ought to have seen the dust rise behind me in answer to prayer." New Era, May 26, 1870.

speech was to be expected, the abolitionist's response to their criticism of his remarks was even more predictable. In a letter to the Philadelphia Press. Douglass told his critics that in lauding the works of man he was speaking only for himself and for no one else. None of his remarks at Horticultural Hall were likely to cast the least doubt upon the theological soundness of the Bethel Church ministers because that church had never been noted for heresy. Such clerics would undoubtedly continue to "walk scrupulously in the old clothes of Methodist theology of a half century ago, and indulge in the same wild worship." Since heresy implied thought, inquiry, and reflection, they were safe from its corrupting influence. Douglass believed that instead of calling church meetings to "try distant heretics like myself." Bishop Campbell should honestly work to reform the character, manners, and habits of "the festering thousands of colored people" who lived in the vicinity of Big Bethel. By doing so, he would do more to prove his church sound than by making wordy speeches about thanking God. Lest anyone think that these cutting remarks were a disavowal of the position which he had taken on April 26, the ex-slave reaffirmed his stand. The deliverance of black men from bondage, their elevation to citizenship, and their subsequent enfranchisement did not stem from any miracle or from a special interposition of Divine Providence, but was a result of "the certain operation of natural causes inherent in the very constitution of human nature." Human society operated under a set of inexorable laws. Since the American people had continued to violate the eternal code of justice, love, and liberty, it was understandable that these laws, which were "written in the human soul," would eventually be vindicated through war, blood, and pestilence. As slavery was created by human selfishness and greed, so it was abolished by human justice and benevolence. Indeed, if the "sin-cursed" earth was ever to be made better, it would become so through the faithful exertion and wise application of human energies. "When anything is to be done in this world," Douglass wrote, "some denizen of this world has got to do it, or it will go undone."

Douglass declared that he could have escaped the censure of the religionists by saying that God had abolished slavery in answer to the prayers of the American Church and clergy, but he had refused to stultify himself. During the forty years of moral effort to overthrow slavery in America, the "hell-black" system had found no more secure shelter than amidst the popular religious cant of the day.

Years ago it had been predicted that the day would come when the nation's churches would claim the honor of abolishing slavery. They were now doing so. Long aware of their time-serving and cowardly subservience to the southern institution, and "knowing Bethel to be like unto the rest," he could not countenance the pretentions of the American churches. Thus, he had declared what he believed to be the literal truth--that the abolition of slavery was due to "natural causes."

In rebutting the charges of the Philadelphia clergy, Douglass defended man's right to freedom of thought. At Horticultural Hall he had asserted his deep respect for this right. "I am a lover of freedom," he asserted, "I am a Protestant. I believe in a free conscience, both religiously and politically. I go in for this first, second, and last,..." Later, in June, 1870, Douglass wrote that he

⁶Philadelphia <u>Press</u>, May 30, 1870; <u>New Era</u>, July 14, 1870.

had no doubts that the avowal of his "liberal opinions" would alienate him from many of his former friends and cause him to be excluded from numerous lecture platforms, but such was the penalty which was meted out to those who allowed "a new truth" to enter their minds. The black religionists who were so disturbed over his speech had undoubtedly been divested of a love for philosophical inquiry by the slave experience. Because of their background and training, they had no desire to engage in such intellectual endeavor and were, in fact, afraid of it. They could not trust their "natural powers," preferring to "lean upon authority more like children than grown up men." As for himself, Douglass declared that he felt perfectly free to follow his personal convictions wherever they might lead and vowed that he would bow to no priests "either of faith or of unfaith."

Against men of all persuasions he claimed perfect freedom of thought.

Douglass' argument for freedom of thought in religious matters extended to the use of the Bible in the public schools. In his address of April 26, the ex-slave held that it was unwise to insist upon the reading of the Scriptures in the public schools and contended for a complete separation of Church and State as the "true course of

Philadelphia Press, April 27, 1870; Douglass to Mr. Koehler, June 14, 1870, in Aptheker, "Letter," p. 278; Douglass to William Whipper, June 9, 1870, American Negro Historical Society Papers, Leon Gardiner Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In the letter to Koehler, Douglass noted that he had found it "very easy" to like all of Koehler's "Free thinking circle." In 1874, he declined an invitation to the Free Religious Convention in Boston, but noted, "The word 'free' has a charming sound to me. Perhaps, my life in slavery (only made endurable by the hope of some day being free) may account for it. At any rate, I find myself without effort in full accord with every earnest movement for larger freedom to mankind both of body and mind. I know the works of the good men and women of the Free religious convention and that they are full of promise to the spirits in prison." Douglass to Mr. Potter, May 15, 1874, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress. See also Holland, Colored Orator, pp. 334-335.

safety" for all institutions. According to Douglass, the schools of the country were established to teach men "what can be known." not to instruct them in what could not be known or in what someone else believed concerning the unknown. Moreover, the question of Biblereading in the public schools inevitably brought up the problem of Frotestant infringement of Catholic rights. In his opinion, to impose the reading of the King James Version of the Bible upon Roman Catholic students was an unjust act. It was therefore preferable to remove the whole question of religion from the schools and to place it where it belonged -- in the home and in the pulpit. If any man has a faith, said Douglass, let him teach it to his family, let him teach it from the pulpit and the press, let him teach it by his life, but do not allow him to call upon the powers of government to enforce the use of any one book of religious ideas. "Religious liberty. Oh! what a liberty it is." he exclaimed. The right to think, to believe, and to differ with the majority was a precious possession which should not be compromised. His charge to the Church, whether Catholic or Protestant, was "hands off the Government." Likewise, his command to the government was "hands off the Church."

⁸Philadelphia <u>Press</u>, April 27, 1870, May 30, 1870. Of freedom of religion in England Douglass wrote, "The religious liberty enjoyed by the people of Great Britain is another of those old traditions, and to be sure, one which never was founded on anything but sham and mockery. The horrid laws, dictated by the very spirit of cruelty, bigotry, and religious persecution, by which the Irish Catholics were made the Pariahs of society, worthy of the darkest days of fanaticism, disgraced the very name of England as late as about a half century ago, and nearly another half century was allowed to elapse before they were relieved from the intolerable burden of supporting a State Church..." As for himself, the editor of The New National Era asserted that "no man need expect anything from my pen of a sectarian character. All who labor to lead our people out of the wilderness of social, moral, and physical evils, of whatever religious opinions, will be hailed here as 'countrymen, clansmen, kinsmen, and brothers beloved.'" New National Era, August 17, 1871, September 8, 1870.

Those remarks caused no less furor among the black clergy
than the other portions of Douglass' Horticultural Hall address.

J. F. Cooper told the audience assembled in Bethel Church that the
removal of the Bible from the schools would lead to its removal from
the nation's courts of law and even from the churches. Society would
sink into a moral morass. Theft, murder, and "every crime known"
would run rampant. To prevent this national catastrophe, all men,
both black and white, were duty bound to vote for the retention of
the Scriptures in the educational process. "You have trusted in God
for a final deliverance and it has come," he said. "Let our votes,
then, be for the Bible in the public schools." Jeremiah Murray seconded Cooper's remarks and vowed that black Christians would "rally
around the Bible and our God if it costs us our lives."

The black editor did not let his critics deter him from championing a cause which he believed to be just. In January, 1872, he criticized the expulsion of a number of Catholic students from a public school in Hunter's Point, New York, for allegedly refusing to participate in the reading of the King James Version of the Bible and in the singing of Protestant hymns. According to Douglass, a flagrant violation of the fundamental laws of the country was undeniable in this case. In politics the majority had to rule, but in matters of religion the smallest minority was entitled to the same

Philadelphia <u>Press</u>, May 19, 1870. Among the resolutions adopted at the Bethel Church meeting were these: "Resolved, That it is the duty of every American citizen, especially those of our people, to thank God for his interposition in the deliverance and enfranchisement of our race..."; "Resolved, That we recommend all men everywhere to vote for the retention of the Bible, the book of God, in the public schools..."; "Resolved, That we will not acknowledge any man as a leader of our people who will not thank God for the deliverance and enfranchisement of our race, and who will not vote to retain the Bible, the book of God, in our public schools."

rights and considerations as the largest majority. The conviction of the surpassing excellence of one's own faith was surely no excuse for compelling others to submit to its forms; "besides everyone thinks his own the best, if not the only one leading to salvation." The Protestant school officials involved in this affair apparently never realized that they were establishing a dangerous precedent by their actions. By extending the theory of majority rule to religious affairs they had taken hold of "a sword that cuts both ways." The number of Roman Catholics in the United States was steadily increasing and it was by no means improbable that they would eventually gain control of the public schools in some areas. How, asked Douglass, would the Hunter's Point officials like it if their school opened each morning with the Ave Maria and the litanies. Under these conditions, perhaps, they would not be such devoted adherents to the ancient doctrine: "My doxy is orthodoxy, and your doxy is, heterodoxy."10

Lest it be assumed that Douglass was less critical of Roman Catholics than of Protestants, it must be noted that he reserved some of his harshest invective for those Catholics who would "appropriate Heaven to good papists exclusively" while consigning the members of all other denominations to perdition. During January, 1871, he

New National Era, January 4, 1872. In 1869 William Lleyd Garrison wrote: "As a matter of principle, may we not as reasonably insist that only the Protestant religion shall be tolerated in the land as that our Protestant Bible shall be read in the public schools;...? We must adhere to what is fundamental in Protestantism in matters of faith--namely, the right of private judgment;...or we must go back to Rome. There is no half-way stopping-place between. Any attempt at religious training by the state is the union of church and state; and that can never be sanctioned by a people who mean to be free." Independent, November 11, 1869. See also Liberator, December 17, 1858; Garrison to Oliver Johnson, December 27, 1869, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

struck out against the author of a recent article in The Catholic World who insisted "with great Vehemency and self-complacency "that the Protestant Bible was no Bible at all, but merely "a piece of miserable patchwork" artfully fabricated by Luther and other early German reformers -- a gross imposture "palmed upon us by bad men at the beginning of the Reformation." In Douglass' opinion, to charge that the Book which the Protestants had received as the Holy Scriptures was actually only an artfully produced scheme of heretics required an astonishing degree of presumption and more than an ordinary share of bigotry. The King James Bible had been examined by the world's ablest scholars and critics for over 350 years. All had combined in bearing testimony to "its general faithfulness and its extraordinary force and beauty." How grandly it compared with the Douay Version of the Scriptures! Before the "Romish bigot" made his damning charges he should have remembered the rebuke which Christ administered to the boasting Pharises. 11 He should have taken heed lest he and all others who were continually thanking God "from the street corners and the house tops" that they were "not as other men"

¹¹ See Luke 18:9-14. Of the King James Bible, Douglass wrote, "That it is the true Word of God. and not man's invention. let its divine precepts and its influence upon the world be the proof...." More commonly, however, the black editor was not at all eager to become involved in complex discussions about the plenary inspiration of the Bible. In an 1886 letter, he wrote that he had neither the time nor the inclination to discuss the subject of the plenary inspiration of the Bible. Douglass considered it to be far more important to know "in what sense the Bible is understood" than to know "the kind of inspiration we shall attribute to it." It was certainly essential to know whether it was "for peace or for war, for love or for hate, for charity or for bigotry; whether it welcomes men of all races and colors to the same communion or whether it excludes a part and compels it to go off in a church by itself whether Christianity is a religion for one race, or for all races; whether it favors liberty or slavery; whether free salvation or predestination:..." New National Era, January 5, 1871; Douglass to Theophilus G. Steward, July 27, 1886, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

receive the same just condemnation. 12

Far from sparing Catholicism from criticism during the 1870's. the black editor seemed to be trying his best to convince the readers of The New National Era that Roman Catholics were especially guilty of intolerance and were "hourly trampling upon every precept taught by the Saviour and his disciples when on earth." In commenting upon the remarks of a St. Louis priest who held that the Catholic Church was the only religious body which could control the "fiery passions" of the newly freed Negroes, Douglass noted that those bigots who considered themselves to be the world's only true Christians sometimes forgot that there was just as much morality, religion, civilisation, and prosperity in the United States, England and Prussia -all supposed Protestant countries -- as there was in Mexico. Spain. and France. Perhaps with a little honest inquiry they could also discover that there was quite as much virtue and honesty to be found among Methodists and Baptists as among Catholics. In view of the statistics which showed that the largest proportion of crime in New York City was committed by Roman Catholics. Douglass believed that it would be "but decent modesty" for priests to be somewhat more discriminating in their criticism of Protestantism. 13

New National Era, January 5, 1871. In the following issue of his paper Douglass noted, "We hardly need say to those who know our sentiments, that the article published in our columns of last week, under the caption of Papist Self-Righteousness, should have been published, if published at all, as a communication; for nothing is more foreign to the purpose of this journal than partisanship as between rival religious denominations.... For aught we know, the Douay Bible is as perfect a translation as that of the Protestant version." New National Era, January 12, 1871.

Douglass' remarks on national morality must be looked upon in light of the 1870-1871 Franco-German War. New National Era, September 15, 1870, January 5, 1871. See also New National Era, July 20, 1871, April 18, 1872. The New National Era was also critical

During 1872, as he continued editorially to flail the "Romish bigots." Douglass sounded a warning to Protestant clergymen. Perhaps, he noted, the Protestant ministers of Washington, D. C., did not know that a considerable portion of the city's black population had become attached to the Roman Catholic faith and that the number was steadily rising. Efforts had been made by the priesthood to convince the Negroes that a warm welcome awaited them within the confines of the Catholic Church. They endeavored to win the black man's confidence by admitting him on equal terms with the white man -by exhibiting "practical proofs of anxiety" for the welfare of his soul. If Protestant clergymen and missionaries would only take a lesson from these "wise and ever active rivals" and exhibit a bit more interest in the spiritual welfare of the Negro, the results would be beneficial both to the Protestant faith and to the black man. As the situation then stood, however, there were ministers in Washington who apparently considered Protestantism to be a religion created exclusively for white people. That these clerics were not willing for black men to worship in the same church with them on earth only justified the Negroes' suspicions that white Christians would not willingly "sit at the same table" with black Christians in heaven. This "cold, repulsive policy," unless changed, would continue to drive the colored people "into the embrace" of the Catholic Church. 14

of Mormonism and polygamy during 1871. In November it rejoiced in the fact that "there seems to be every prospect that the nuisance and disgrace of Mormonism will soon be abated. What the laws can't do the Pacific Railroad and the discovery of silver and tin mines will."

New National Era, November 2, 1871. See also New National Era, October 19, 1871.

[&]quot;with some amazement" a letter from a correspondent in Atlanta,

Douglass' religious life in Washington, the city in which
he and his family now resided, did not consist entirely of verbal
blasts aimed at the clergy. 15 Although not a regular churchgoer, he
numbered several prominent clergymen among his closest acquaintances.
The letters which he received from the former pastor of Washington's
First Congregational Church, Jeremiah E. Rankin, president of Howard
University, testified to a high personal regard. According to
Douglass, "No truer man than he ever ascended a Washington pulpit."
His religion, "like the love of his Redeemer," was not bounded by
race or color, but included the whole human family. The black editor never became a member of Rankin's church, but attended services
there often enough to be able to say that he found in it "more sympathy with what I thought the spirit and purpose of Jesus than elsewhere." From its pulpit went forth a "high and beneficent influence," full of justice, mercy, and truth. There he heard the voice

Georgia, who apologized for the race prejudice which prevailed in that city's religious establishment by noting that the failure of the two races to unite in worship was not due to any lack of Christian or brotherly feeling, but rather was inherent "in the nature of things." Continuing to believe that America's religious profession and practice did not harmonize, Douglass held that it was a sad confession of the impotency of Christian love if such love could not permit two varieties of the same human family to worship the Son of God in the same church building. In 1889, Douglass complained that many black people continued to prefer separate churches and schools. policy," he said, "should be to unite with the great mass of the American people in all their activities, and resolve to fall or flourish with our common country. We cannot afford to draw the color-line in politics, trade, education, manners, religion, fashion, or civilization." Douglass to Jeremiah E. Rankin, May 10, 1886, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress; Speech at Washington, D. C., April 16, 1889, in Holland, Colored Orator, p. 376. See also New National Era, October 6, 1870; Speech at Louisville, Kentucky, September 24, 1883, in Foner, Life and Writings, IV, 379; Speech at Washington, D. C., 1885, in Foner, Life and Writings, IV, 425; Holland, Colored Orator, pp. 383-384.

¹⁵ The Douglasses moved to Washington in July, 1872 after their home in Rochester burned to the ground.

of the Savior of Mankind preaching deliverance to the captive. There a black man could attend services "without seriously disturbing Divine worship." It was this "broad christian spirit" which occasionally led Douglass to "take a back seat in its congregation." 16

Douglass was also on good terms with Bishop Daniel A. Payne of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. He had first heard Payne speak during the 1840's in Bethel Church, Philadelphia. Even then, he was impressed with his method of preaching. "It was not the style I was accustomed to in [Baltimore]," Douglass recalled. There was no effort to "raise a shout" or to excite unduly the feelings of his listeners. Payne addressed himself to the mind and conscience of the audience, rather than to their "fervid hopes and imagination." He did not attempt to elicit an immediate expression of enthusiasm, but sought to bring about permanent results by convincing the members of the congregation that they should lead a life of truth and uprightness. While he gave his heart to the church, he gave a much needed helping hand to all mankind. One year before his own death, Douglass noted that age had made his friendship with the recently

¹⁶ Quarles, Frederick Douglass, p. 296; Speech at Washington, D. C., 1885, in Foner, Life and Writings, IV, 425; Douglass to Mr. Deane, November 21, 1890, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress. In 1890. Douglass wrote from Washington. "I speak from experience. I have set this city in serious commotion by my simple presence at a morning service in a respectable church. Is it not strange that I could attend a circus, a theater, a horse race, a ball game, an infidel meeting, and excite no hostile feeling, when I could not attend Divine worship in a christian church without exciting scorn and indignation among the children of grace?.... I see not how any church can dare call itself a christian church and yet turn its back upon any human soul or treat any man with scorn who enters its congregation to hear or to pray. I have no respect for any religion that despises my humanity in this world while it promises me a place in heaven." Douglass to Mr. Deane, November 21, 1890, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

departed Payne "as mellow as the morning light."17

The aversion to the "emotional religion" of his youth which
Douglass evidenced in his eulogy to Payne was another indication of
the changes through which he had passed. He believed this type of
worship to be linked closely with superstition and supernaturalism.

A belief in any one of these aspects of "thoughtless religion" marked
a person as being guilty of "wearing the old cast-off theological
hats and coats of fifty years ago." The religion of emotion abounded
in the wildest hopes and fears and in "blind unreasoning faith." Instead of adding virtue to faith, it tended to substitute faith for
virtue, and hence, was a deadly enemy to the progress of the Negro.
Scarcely in any direction could there be found a less favorable atmosphere for the development of mind or morals than where such a religion prevailed.

18

In view of these beliefs, it was not surprising that Douglass found it commendable that "the old camp-meeting emotional religion" was subsiding among the black people--that thought was taking the

¹⁷ Memorial eulogy to Bishop Daniel A. Payne, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress; Quarles, Frederick Douglass, p. 296. Some of Douglass' most orthodox religious comments can be found in his correspondence with Rev. Francis J. Grimké. See Douglass to Francis J. Grimké, January 19, 1886, in Carter G. Woodson, ed., The Works of Francis J. Grimké, IV (Washington, D. C.: Associated Publishers, Inc., 1942), 3; Douglass to Francis J. Grimké, April 24, 1886, in Woodson, Grimké, IV, 3-4. See also Henry Richardson to Frederick Douglass, September 27, 1882, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

Speech at Elmira, New York, August 1, 1880, in Douglass, Life, pp. 507-508; Frederick Douglass, "The Condition of the Freedmen," Harper's Weekly, XXVII (December 8, 1883), 783. In his Life and Times, Douglass wrote, "[A] Il the prayers of Christendom cannot stop the force of a single bullet, divest arsenic of poison, or suspend any law of nature. In my communication with the colored people I have endeavored to deliver them from the power of superstition, bigotry, and priestcraft. In theology I have found them strutting about in the old clothes of the masters, just as the masters strut about in the old clothes of the past." Douglass, Life, pp. 479-480.

place of feeling. While in slavery, when America held only toil, stripes, and pain for them, Negroes were easily "wrought into paroxysms of momentary joy" by the promised glories of another, more beneficent world. The "wild incoherent Sambo sermons" had undoubtedly been a help to many of the bondsmen. It was something to be told that their suffering would soon be over and that for stripes on earth they would receive stars in heaven. Nevertheless, "the rant of those days" would not do for the more enlightened people of the 1880's. Black men were beginning to see that they could make something of themselves in this world as well as in the next. The young people who had learned to read and write were demanding an educated, chaste, and upright ministry. No longer would they tolerate the oldfashioned preacher who ministered to passion and decried the intellect. Such men of the cloth were rightly looked upon as hindrances to progress whose ministry induced contentment with ignorance and stupidity. 19

Like many other Americans who were influenced by the new currents of thought in the post-war world, Douglass tended to judge all things, religion included, by taking them to "the bar of reason and of science." In a lecture before the Bethel Literary and Historical

¹⁹ Douglass, "Freedmen," pp. 782-783. See also New National Era, October 24, 1872.

New National Era, September 8, 1870, October 6, 1870. In 1870, Douglass lamented the fact that most Negroes seemed to value a scriptural text far more than a scientific truth. It was far more agreeable to them to "pursue what cannot be known than that which may be known." The disciplines of Geology, Chemistry, Astronomy, Botany, Philology, Ethnology, and "profane" History were not highly regarded by black men. According to Frederick, "One sweep of the telescope around the heavens converts Genes[i]s into a m[y]th. The commonest stone on the earth does the work for the six days story. But one would be stoned if he said so in the presence of the religious crowd of colored people, yet all intelligent white men know this and know

Society in Washington, Douglass asserted that "an irrepressible conflict, grander than that described by the late William H. Seward, is perpetually going on." Two hostile and irreconcilable tendencies were in the field--good and evil, truth and error, enlightenment and superstition. All would be well if the forces of enlightenment carried the battle. On the other hand, if superstition was the victor, the nation could perhaps look to a future as dark as that which encompassed the people of the Dominican Republic. 21

On an 1871 tour of that poverty-stricken land, he found superstition "with palid cheek, and awe-struck vision," hoping by prayers,
incantations, and fastings to accomplish for its adherents what they
should have been doing for themselves. The superstitious refused to
see that the world was governed by laws which were in no way controlled by faith. They contented themselves with "listening to the
reveries of dreamers" rather than to the "sober monitions of reason."
As he toured Santo Domingo, he was shown a cross which the priests
allegedly made the people believe need only be carried through the
streets of the city in seasons of drought to cause rain to fall in
abundance. He saw scores of people wandering about, "mumbling
prayers to themselves," and "gazing into the unknown" for the help
that they should have found in their own souls and in the powers

it none the less because they still cling to the Bible." On another occasion, he asserted, "I do not know that I am an evolutionist, but to this extent I am one. I certainly have more patience with those who trace mankind upward from a low condition, even from the lower animals, than with those who start him at a high point of perfection and conduct him to a level with the brutes." Douglass to William Whipper, June 9, 1870, American Negro Historical Society Papers, Leon Gardiner Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Holland, Colored Orator, pp. 335-336.

²¹ Holland, Colored Orator, p. 336.

with which Nature had already supplied them. Obviously, it would be clear to any observer that those who spent so much time engaged in "forms and ceremonies" had little disposition to look rationally into the problems of life or to set about the work of improving their earthly condition. 22

According to Douglass, only enlightened man, aided and supported by the strength of his own intellect, could solve the multitudinous and diverse problems of mankind. The true philosophy of reform which would set man on the path toward solving the world's ills was not to be found in the heavens, but in humanity itself. So far as the laws of the universe had been discovered and interpreted, they seemed to teach that the mission of human improvement was wholly committed to mortal hands. Man could be his own savior or his own destroyer. He had neither angels to help him nor devils to hinder him. It did not appear from the operation of these laws, nor from any trustworthy data, that divine power was ever exerted to remove evil from the world. Divinity never seemed to protect the weak against the strong, the simple against the cunning, the oppressed against the oppressor, or the slave against his master. No power of heaven ever rescued even the most innocent mortal from the consequences of violating a natural law. The babe and the lunatic both perished when they fell from a great height. This was the fixed and unalterable penalty for the transgression of the law of gravitation. If such laws were not "imperative and inexorable," but could be propitiated by prayers or other religious offerings, the "ever shifting sands" of piety or impiety would take the place of law.

²² New National Era, April 13, 1871.

Under these conditions, man would find himself without a standard of right conduct.

The "more thoughtful" orthodox Christians conceded that the laws pertaining to matter were unchangeable and eternal. They had long since ceased to pray for rain or for clear weather. But to save something from the wreck that this admission made in their ancient theological system, they excepted the spiritual nature of man from the operation of fixed and unchangeable law. To Douglass' mind they gained nothing by making this distinction. If the smallest particle of matter in the universe was subject to natural law, it seemed to him that a thing so important as the moral nature of man could not be less so. Even when the orthodox admitted that there were moral laws, they affirmed that the consequences of their violation could be removed by "a prayer, a sigh, or a tear." In such cases, faith took the place of law, and belief, the place of life. Douglass could not accept this "office of faith" because he felt that it struck at the fundamental principles of real progress. All genuine reform had to rest on the assumption that man was a creature of abgolute. inflexible law--both moral and spiritual. Human happiness and well-being could be secured only by discovering and perfectly obeying such laws. 23

Douglass described one such man-initiated reform during a speech at Elmira, New York on August 1, 1880. West India Emancipation came not by bloody revolution, but by peaceful agitation--not by divine interference, but by the exercise of human reason and feeling. It was a revelation of the power inherent in human society,

²³Holland, Colored Orator, pp. 336-338.

showing what could be done against worldly wrong without the aid of "armies on the earth or of angels in the sky." The example of the abolition of slavery in the West Indies gave life and vigor to the abolition movement in America. "Clarkson of England gave us Garrison of America; Granville Sharpe of England gave us our Wendell Phillips; and Wilberforce of England gave us our peerless Charles Sumner," he said. These "grand men" and their brave co-workers took up the moral thunderbolts which had struck down slavery in the West Indies and hurled them with increased zeal and power against the American slave institution. Eventually, "goaded to madness," the slaveholders rent the bonds of union and filled the land with hostile armies and "the ten thousand horrors of war." Out of this man-made tempest came the abolition of slavery in the United States. 24

Humanity could not, however, allow itself to be lulled into inaction by the recitation of past triumphs. Much work remained to be done to uplift the colored people. Their post-war plight had become desperate as they crowded into the poorer sections of the large cities. Even angels, said Douglass, would find it impossible to rear families in those "dreadful dens of bad air and bad morals."

The nation's most populous urban centers were filled with unemployed and destitute Negroes who were living "on the verge of life"--suspended over "the sharp teeth of hunger." To rescue these people from their wretchedness and to show them the way to knowledge, plenty, and independence was a task which called for the labors of a true missionary. Unfortunately, the American religious establishment continued to send them missionaries of a different kind. Thousands of church

Speech at Elmira, New York, August 1, 1880, in Douglass, Life, pp. 496, 498-499.

workers were rushing to save Negroes' souls from a misery which they had never seen while passing by the misery "all around them and every where visible." Christians were eager to take up the cross to save mortal souls from future perditions, but passed by the hells and horrors into which the black man was daily plunged. 25

In Douglass' opinion, the American Church was to be valued more for what it did to promote honorable character and conduct than for its theological pronouncements. He cared less for form than for substance--less for professions than practice. It was on this basis that he decided which churches and religious organizations to support financially during the 1880's. In April, 1881, he noted that he was a subscriber to The Christian Recorder, organ of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, not because he was in agreement with its theological opinions, but because of its "tendency to educate and elevate its readers in all their moral and social relations." Three years later Douglass commended the post-war work of the American Missionary Association in "lifting up" the black man to a higher plane of life. Not only had it taken the church among the freedmen, but it had also remembered to "take the school-house." Ever concerned for the material elevation of his people, the ex-slave evidenced his deepest feelings when, in 1886, he wrote that "it is something to give the Negro religion. It is more to give him justice. It is something to give him the Bible, it is more to give him the ballot. It is something to tell him that there is a place for him in the Christian's heaven, it is more to let him have a place in this Christian

New National Era, September 22, 1870, July 6, 1871.

. . . .

In chapter eight of his <u>Life and Times</u>, Frederick Douglass referred to his European excursion of 1886-1887 as "a milestone in my experience and journey of life." Since, by 1887, Douglass' "journey" had spanned some seven decades of American history, his account of the trip sometimes seemed to speak more of personalities and events from his own past than it did of the historic sites which he had visited in London, Paris, and Rome. Many of the former abolitionist's religious views were also mirrored in this portion of his autobiography—as well as in diary notations made during the tour. 27

During his stay in Paris, Douglass frequently attended religious services in a little chapel in the Rue d'Arras. He went there to hear Father Père Hyacinthe speak. Said to be the most eloquent preacher in the city, Hyacinthe was not a Protestant, but rather called himself an Old Catholic and worshipped "according to the ancient customs of the church." Douglass found that he differed from the more orthodox Catholics in that he contended for a congregational church government, "a Bible open to all," and the right of a priest

Douglass to Theophilus G. Steward, July 27, 1886, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress; Frederick Douglass to Russell Lant Carpenter, April 30, 1881, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress; Douglass, "Freedmen," p. 783; Douglass to W. H. Thomas, July 16, 1886, in Foner, Life and Writings, IV, 444. In his letter to Rev. Steward, Douglass gave another reason for making contributions to various churches: "It is because I would have colored people enjoy advantages for assembling themselves together equal to those enjoyed by others. A large, commodious, and well appointed church in pulpit, choir, and architecture, is attractive to the people who assemble and commands respect from the outside world...." Douglass to Theophilus G. Steward, July 27, 1886, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁷Douglass, <u>Life</u>, p. 557.

to marry. Although his knowledge of French was much too limited to understand all of the speaker's words, Douglass nevertheless "comprehended the noble spirit of the man" and was deeply impressed by his oratorical ability. The ex-slave was especially attracted to Hyacinthe because he had broken many of the spiritual fetters which had bound him to Catholicism. He dared to follow his convictions and to "stand alone in the world" even though this course of action was leading him through the thorny paths of poverty and persecution. Paris Catholics were opposed to his ministry because he had strayed too far from orthodoxy and Protestants withheld their support because he did not "come quite near enough to them." Having broken some spiritual, as well as physical chains in his own day, Douglass could sympathize with Fère Hyacinthe--a man who had "abandoned high position and in the face of poverty and ostracism, dared to break away from spiritual bondage."

But Douglass was not entirely satisfied with Hyacinthe's religious profession. "I cannot understand," he said, "how Father Hyacinthe stopped half way in his religious evolution, and when I see him still going through the service of the Roman Church, I reluctantly ask myself, can it be that he believes in this?"

He was even less satisfied with the type of religion which he found at Avignon. In that city he visited the Palace of the Popes, an ancient building which had been both a place of prayer and a place

²⁸ Speech on Europe, 1889, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress. On Sunday, February 6, 1887, Douglass listened to a sermon in Italian at the Methodist church in Pompeii, Italy. Called upon to say a few words, which were interpreted by the Methodist minister, he congratulated the congregation for having acquired "the liberty to worship outside the Romish Church..." Douglass' Diary, February 6, 1887, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress. See also Foner, Frederick Douglass, p. 346.

of punishment. In the palace were many halls-"halls of judgment, halls of inquisition, halls of torture, and halls of banqueting." When he peered into its dungeons "where people were tortured and doomed to death for rejecting the dogmas of the Romish faith," his critical attitude once again asserted itself. "I almost hated the name of the Church." he wrote. "What a horrible lie that Romish Church has palmed of[f] upon the people of this and other [countries] pretending that its Pope is the Vice regent of God...." The holy men of yesteryear were sometimes more like lions than lambs. In the day of their rule at Avignon, religion allowed no freedom of thought. Believe with the Church or be accursed, accept the "true" faith or be hurled among the damned, had been the pronouncement of the stern voice of religion. Douglass shuddered at the "ghosts of dead and buried fanaticism, superstition, and bigotry" which roamed the palace. He found it hard to believe that men could, from innocent motives, so brutally punish those whose religious beliefs differed from their own, but when he remembered that many pious souls in the United States still despised the Negro while they professed to love the Lord. it became easier to believe that men could indeed behave in such a manner. According to Douglass, a difference of religion in the days of the Avignon palace caused a man to be treated in much the same way as a difference in skin color did in some portions of mineteenth-century America. It was his fervent hope that the same "light" which had "dawned" upon the question of freedom of thought would soon illuminate the color question. 29

Theodore Stanton, "Frederick Douglass in Paris," Open Court, I (April 28, 1887), 152; Douglass' Diary, January 10, 1887, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress; Foner, Frederick Douglass, p. 344; Douglass, Life, pp. 565-566. In 1875 Douglass said, "Who

The diary entries which Douglass made while in Rome reflected another aspect of his continued resentment over the contradictions which existed between Christian theory and practice. He could not help being impressed by the beauty and splendor of St. Peter's Basilica. but nevertheless felt the edifice stood in utter contradiction to the life and lessons of Jesus. The Nazarene was "meek and lowly" but "here was little else than pride and pomp." Through the intervention of a friend, the Douglasses were able to see some of the "interior treasures" of the cathedral. Douglass' anger mounted as he viewed the costly ceremonial vestments decorated with "all manner of precious stones," the gold and silver crosses, and the "other brilliant things" with which the papacy dazzled the eyes of "the credulous and superstitious." The tourists were also shown many sacred relics, among them two of the thorns which had pierced the brow of Christ on the day of His crucifixion, a casket which contained the head of St. Luke, and a lock of the Virgin Mary's hair. Douglass marvelled at the solemnity with which their guide showed them the devil's cloven foot imprinted in stone. He gazed with curiosity at

amongst us wants to go back to those great days of religious faith, when the Church tore men's flesh from their bones with iron pincers, and roasted them alive in fire and flame, because they entertained religious views different from those proclaimed from its pulpit. There are those who would tear men to-day, if they could, for their difference in religion. They call hard names and endeavor to excite prejudice; but we must all rejoice that the day of old-fashioned religious persecution has gone by." Speech at Philadelphia, 1875, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

Douglass esteemed the works of man too highly to be overly critical of St. Peter's. He wrote, "It is well for the world that the age that could rear this wonderful building so perfect in architectural grace has past. Yet in view of what it speaks of architectural skills of man and his possibilities we may rejoice that this marvellous building was erected and that it will long stand to please the eye of man." Douglass' Diary, January 20, 1887, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

the devout who queued up to kiss the statue of St. Feter. "What will not men believe?" he asked. "Crowds of men and women going up a stairway on their knees, monks making ornaments of dead men's bones, others refusing to wash themselves--and all in order to secure the favor of God." To Douglass' mind, these practices "gave a degrading idea of man's relation to the Infinite Author of the Universe." The tour only served to increase his belief in the hollowness of the Catholic faith and to strengthen his conviction that "Science must in the end do for that church what time has done for the vast structures of kingly pride and power--which lie broken and mouldering all over Rome."

The glaring contrasts between wealth and poverty which
Douglass saw in the Eternal City also deepened his belief in those
aspects of religion which ministered to the physical needs of man.
Rome was a city of "divinity and dirt, of Religion and rags, of
grandeur and squalor, piety and poverty"--a place of lofty towers
pointing to heaven and of dark, cavernous rooms never reached by
pure air or sunshine. As a remedy for this situation, he favored
less religion and fewer rags, less piety and fewer beggars, fewer
churches and more pum air and sunshine for the poverty-stricken. In
place of the "all-pervading, complicated, accumulated and mysterious"

Douglass' Diary, January 24, 1887, January 25, 1887,
Douglass Papers, Library of Congress; Douglass, Life, p. 577; Foner,
Frederick Douglass, pp. 344-345. In Paris, Douglass attended a
grand mass in the Saint Eustache Cathedral, but left before the end
of the ceremony. "The superstition made me sad," he remarked in explaining his conduct. After witnessing the Easter services at St.
Peter's in April, 1887, he described the ceremonies as abounding in
"much kneeling, changing of vestments, much posturing, making signs
of the cross-and which seemed to my eyes mere pantomime, but which
to the worshippers I must try to believe was full of devotion."
Stanton, "Douglass in Paris," p. 152; Douglass' Diary, April 15, 1887,
Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

power of the Catholic Church, Rome needed to substitute that "genuine Christianity" which did not neglect the oppressed, the fatherless or the widow. 32

In early February, 1887, the Douglasses decided to extend their tour to Egypt and Greece. While journeying from Ismalia to Cairo, the ex-slave noted that the dark-skinned Egyptian people would be classed with mulattoes and Negroes in the United States. He saw now why the Mohammedan religion appealed to these people, "for it does not make color the criterion of fellowship--as some of our so called Christian nations do." All colors were welcomed into the faith of the Prophet. Later, after observing Muslim society for several days, Douglass noted, "If sincerity is any proof of the truth of their creed they certainly give that proof, but alas! sincerity is no proof." History's most hideous impostures had been defended with equal earnestness. 33

Perhaps the "most hideous" of the impostures which Douglass witnessed while in Cairo was the sight of the Howling Dervishes at worship. Their frenzied shouting and dancing distressed him greatly. Hany of their actions reminded him of the black Methodist camp

Jouglass, Life, p. 575; Foner, Frederick Douglass, p. 348; Douglass to Amelia Douglass, April 29, 1887, Douglass Mss., New York Public Library. Douglass did favor the Roman Catholic Church with at least one compliment. In 1889 he noted: "I met in Paris no manifestation against men on account of race or color.... I think it is in part because the negro has never been seen there as a degraded slave, but often as a gentleman and a scholar,... Perhaps also, the absence of race prejudice may in some measure be due to the presence and prevalence of the Roman Catholic religion. For whatever may be its other faults and defects, the Roman Catholic church welcomes to its altar and communion men of all races and colors, and would contradict its assumption of being the universal church if it did otherwise." Speech on Europe, 1889, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress. See also Stanton, "Douglass in Paris," p. 151.

³³Douglass' Diary, February 18, 1887, February 26, 1887, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

meetings of the American South. It saddened him to think that rational beings "could be made to believe that such physical contortions could be pleasing to God or secure his favour." Yet, he asked, how much better is the form of worship adopted by many other denominations? Was it not strange that men "should imagine to secure Divine favor by telling God how good and great he is--and how much they love and adore him."? God was not glorified by such worship and, more importantly, burnt offerings and incantations tended to "silence reason and degrade manhood." 34

After his return to the United States in August, 1887,

Douglass' addresses and letters continued to speak of those religious beliefs which he had come to hold after seventy years of introspective thought. As Haitian Commissioner at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, he described the sordid relationship which had existed between slavery and religion in the earlier years of the

Juglass' Diary, February 25, 1887, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress; Douglass, Life, p. 587.

³⁵ Various estimates of the intellectual quality of Douglass' thoughts have been made. On an 1869 visit to the Douglass home in Rochester, Richard T. Greener saw the master of the house "not as a lecturer, but as one alive to all the new thought of the time, interested in literature, in music, in politics." Greener recalled that this was "observable from his books and his surroundings." Throughout their discussion of current thought, philosophy, history and politics. Douglass "showed himself well informed, critical and a systematic reader." In 1895. Jane Marsh Parker wrote that the ex-slave "never became a student, even when the victory of his cause had been won, and he had the leisure for study. Composition was never easy for him, unless his soul was stirred in its depths; nor was public speaking, unless his tongue was on fire. His literary lectures upon subjects foreign to his personal experience were largely disappointing ... He liked a good novel -- of the stirring kind. Dumas was one of his favorites, and of 'The Three Musketeers' he never tired." Frederic May Holland added: "His capacity for leading and organising is beyond all question. He may not have been an original thinker; but they are rare." Greener, "Reminiscences," pp. 292-293; Parker, "Reminiscences," p. 553; Holland, "Frederick Douglass," p. 4416.

century. The island nation of Haiti was the first to be "invaded" by the Christian religion and to "witness its forms and ordinances." It was the first to see a Christian church and to behold the cross of Christ. It was also the first to witness the bitter agonies of the Negro bending under the lash of Christian slaveholders. No people had ever shown greater religious zeal or had given more attention to the ordinances of the Church than the Spanish colonizers of Haiti, but it was likewise true that no people had ever treated their fellow men more cruelly or unjustly than those same religious Spaniards. With "religion on their lips, the tiger in their hearts and the slave whip in their hands" they lashed the innocent natives "to toil, death and extinction." The example of Haiti seemed to prove that men could be very pious and yet commit the foulest crimes imaginable. 36

Not until the Haitians "struck for freedom" was the conscience of the Christian world awakened to the horrors of slavery. Haiti's "brave example" startled the Christian nations and made them aware of the Negro's manhood. Until the Haitians revolted, men made fortunes in the international slave trade and yet were considered to be good Christians--"the standing types and representations of the Saviour of the World." The churches were silent and the pulpit was dumb. Slave traders lived and slave traders died. Funeral services were preached over them, the ministers assuring the mourners that their loved ones had "died in the triumphs of the Christian faith." 37

American slavery had also resulted in violence. It was indeed

³⁶ Speech at Chicago, January 2, 1893, in Foner, Life and Writings, IV, 478-479.

³⁷Ibid., p. 485.

a credit to the people of the United States to have blotted out the infamous institution in 1865, but it would have been even more admirable if, along with slavery, Americans had ridded themselves of color prejudice. In the United States a "white scoundrel," because he was white, was more highly respected than an honest, educated black man. A base white man could ride in the first class cars on railroads, could attend the theater, and could enter any hotel or restaurant, while a man with the least drop of African blood in his veins would be refused and insulted. Nowhere in the world was the dignity of manhood more exalted in speech and press than they were in America, but nowhere was "manhood pure and simple more despised than here." This fact was evidenced by the way in which the black man was treated thirty years after the end of the Civil War. He was excluded from every respectably calling, from "workshops, manufactories, and the means of learning trades." Not only was the Negro denied a decent livelihood, but he was also villified and persecuted. The strength and activities of "the malign elements" of the country against equal rights and equality before the law seemed to increase in proportion to the increasing distance between the present day and the time of the war. Indeed, there was nothing in the "history of savages" to surpass the "blood-chilling horrors and fiendish excesses" which were perpetrated against the colored people by the "so-called enlightened and Christian" lynch mobs of the southern states. In the 1890's, the black man continued to remain "outside the Church, and largely outside of the State."38

³⁸Frederick Douglass, <u>The Lesson of the Hour</u> (pamphlet, 1894), in Foner, <u>Life and Writings</u>, IV, 492-493; Holland, <u>Colored Orator</u>, p. 399; Douglass, <u>Life</u>, pp. 535, 539.

That the former abolitionist did not remain completely outside of the Church during the 1890's undoubtedly came as a surprise to some churchmen. In his later years, Douglass, along with his second wife, Helen, attended Rev. J. T. Jenifer's Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church. 39 At Douglass' funeral in February, 1895, Jenifer noted that the elder statesman of the abolitionist crusade "always called this his church and took deep interest in its welfare and in the affairs of the connection." Several times, at the conclusion of the morning sermon, he had grasped the minister's hand saying, "I have been greatly instructed, edified and inspired this morning." On other occasions, Douglass told Jenifer that his soul had been thrilled by Metropolitan Methodist's former pastor, Dr. John W. Beckett, when he sang the old hymn, "Jesus my Savior, to Betheleham came, Seeking for me; for me."

Dr. Jeremiah Rankin did not find it strange for the ex-slave to attend services in Jenifer's church. "It was quite natural for Mr. Douglass to come back here to the bosom of the Methodist Church," he said. By doing so he was saying to his old mother church that the past had been forgiven. He was repeating in his heart the words

³⁹Quarles, <u>Frederick Douglass</u>, p. 297; Helen Douglass to editor of the Washington <u>Evening Star</u>, February, 1895, <u>Douglass Papers</u>, Library of Congress.

Douglass, In Memoriam, pp. 27-28; Washington Evening Star, February 25, 1895. Douglass seemed to take great pleasure in vocal music during these years. In an 1895 interview, Rev. Francis J. Grimké said: "I have never known a person, scarcely, who was so fond of the singing of hymns as Mr. Douglass. Not long ago I was invited to dine at his residence, and in the evening he suggested that we should sing. He selected 'In Thy Cleft, Oh, Rock of Ages,' and his voice rose as if in triumph above the others. He sang every line of every verse, and his face was bright with enthusiasm when he concluded." Washington Evening Star, February 22, 1895. See also Douglass, In Memoriam, pp. 192-193; Rochester Post Express, February 26, 1895.

which Ruth spoke to her mother-in-law, Naomi: "Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God"--hiding himself anew in "the 'cleft of the rock' that was smitten on Calvary." Like a vessel that had made many a rough voyage, but had come back to its final anchorage, "Mr. Douglass each Lord's day sat with his dearly cherished companion in this sanctuary of God."

Despite his attendance at A.M.E. services, Douglass refused to return to the Methodist fold as a formal member. Asked by Rev. Beckett to join Metropolitan Methodist Church in 1891, he answered that he did not feel it his duty to become a member of any one of the "many sects now arrogating to themselves the title of The Church of Christ and considering all outside of them 'ashamed of Jesus.'"

Lest Beckett become curious to know the reason for his church attendance, Douglass noted that he continued to attend services at Metropolitan Methodist "because I believe it is good for people to meet together to worship God and gain religious instruction; because I believe it is a duty to set a good example; because I feel myself mentally, morally, spiritually and socially benefitted; because I feel that your church is doing good to our people in many ways...."

Frederick's church attendance certainly did not mean that he had become a staunch advocate of those pharisaical practices which he had so long condemned. During the 1840's, the editor of The North Star had avoided commenting on the question of Sabbath observance.

Hemorial Words Spoken At His Obsequies (Washington, D. C.: Howard University Print, 1895), pp. 10-11; J. E. Rankin, "The Last Days of Frederick Douglass," Independent, April 23, 1903; Douglass, In Memoriam, p. 206.

Douglass to John W. Beckett, October 28, 1891, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress; Quarles, Frederick Douglass, p. 297.

He claimed to hold no views on the subject which were not perfectly consistent with both the Old and New Testaments and, as such, were "in unison with the obvious dictates of common sense." Yet, Douglass felt that he would be abusing the "high trust" which his subscribers had placed in the <u>Star</u> if a heated discussion of the Sabbath question were to be carried on in the columns of his paper. "There are more important topics that claim, and ought to claim, the attention of mankind just now,..." he wrote, "We need moral rather than theological light." 43

Through his personal actions, however, the black abolitionist showed his scorn for the rigid observance of Sabbath laws. In 1847, while lecturing at Youngstown, Ohio, a deacon of one of the city's churches threatened the antislavery party with prosecution if they dared to set up seats for their audience on the Sabbath day. The threat only caused the abolitionists to summon a number of friends to the meeting site early in the morning to make the necessary seating arrangements. "The meeting was large and spirited," Douglass wrote triumphantly, "The churches were all nearly vacated, and a large portion of their congregations came to worship in God's great temple. and to show their love for the All Good by doing good to His children." For the men who braved the scorn of the local clergymen on such occasions and aided the abolitionists in setting up chairs, he had only praise. Those brave souls were determined to do something for humanity even though, by so doing, they would be ranked with Sabbathbreakers. Truly, the genuine Christianity of Christ prayed "for more of just such sabbath-breakers as these."44

⁴³ North Star, October 27, 1848.

Douglass to Sidney Howard Gay, August 20, 1847, in National

It was not surprising then to find Douglass in favor of keeping the World's Columbian Exposition open on Sunday. He believed that both the doors of the Church and the gates of the Exposition should be allowed to remain open, "leaving to the people absolute freedom of choice between one or the other." He urged policy making officials to "resist the first encroachments of bigotry and superstition." Any such tendency should be "stamped out in the egg." Great questions of human liberty and progress were not to be determined by any text, but were to be left to "reason, experience, and the general welfare." Nevertheless, in this case, he deemed it fortunate that the Christian Scriptures, "not less than reason," rejected the authority of the Jewish Sabbath as a holy day and left men free to choose their own way of spending that day. When Christ was called to account by the church and priesthood of His day for breaking the Sabbath. he told them that the Son of Man was the Lord of the Sabbath. He told them that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. Just as the Pharisees of that day would have shut hungry men out of the cornfields, so today the same class would shut the people out of the Exposition grounds. 45

In like manner, Douglass' church attendance did not mean that

Anti-Slavery Standard, September 2, 1847; Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, November 8, 1842, in Liberator, November 18, 1842. Benjamin Quarles has noted that, while in England, Douglass and Garrison "got in a blow for anti-Sabbatarianism" by spending a September, 1846 Sunday afternoon "rolling balls on the greensward" in company with a Unitarian minister. Quarles, Frederick Douglass, p. 49.

⁴⁵See Mark 2:23-28. Douglass further noted that the Apostle Paul, though brought up at the feet of the Pharisee Gamaliel "after the manner of the perfect law," utterly rejected the bondage of the law and declared that Jewish ordinances, the Sabbath included, were ended in Christ. Douglass to Mr. Butterworth, January 20, [1893], Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

he had radically altered his view of the nature of the God-man relationship. In September, 1890 at Tremont Temple in Boston, he was preceded on the platform by a clergyman who asserted that it was neither the Garrisonians nor the Republicans who were responsible for the abolition of slavery, but that the great deliverance was an act of Almighty God. To this Douglass replied, "The good Lord had had a chance for a long time before the abolition.... I am no pessimist; I give thanks to the good Lord, and also to the good men through whom He has worked." Prominent among these men were William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. They and their associates had made Abraham Lincoln and the Republican party possible. What abolished slavery was the moral sentiment which had been created, not by the pulpit, but by the Garrisonian platform. The churches did more to thwart the abolitionist program than they did to abolish slavery. 46

During the last years of his life, Douglass continued to forward the belief that men, especially black men, should rely upon their own power and upon "the things of this world" to solve their worldly problems. During an address at Baltimore's Centennial African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1891, he spoke of his preference for "natural things" over "the spiritual." "When a child first comes into the world," he noted, "it don't cry for metaphysics or for theology, but for a little milk." How could the black man get some of this "milk"? In 1892 he answered this question by asserting that the Negro had to "contend and strive" for the things which were freely granted to other citizens "without effort or demand." This conflict was, however, far from being a curse—it was ennobling. Conflict was

⁴⁶Holland, Colored Orator, pp. 390-391.

better than stagnation. It was bad to be a slave, but much worse to be a willing and contented slave. Since American Negroes were men, their goal for the future should be "perfect manhood, to be men among men." Truly, the situation of the black people in the 1890's demanded that they have faith in themselves, "faith in the power of truth, faith in work, and faith in the influence of manly character." 47

Haltimore Sun, September 7, 1891, Frederick Douglass, Introduction to The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition (pamphlet, Chicago, 1892), in Foner, Life and writings, IV, 477. Speaking on the subject of the teaching profession at the Manassas, Virginia Industrial School in 1894, Douglass asserted his belief that "neither politics nor religion present to us a calling higher than this primary business of unfolding and strengthening the powers of the human soul." Speech at Manassas, Virginia, September 3, 1894, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

EPILOGUE

When will men learn that "mercy" is above "sacrifice;" that true Christianity is not to be advanced by...shutting up meeting houses against reform, and turning a deaf ear to the cries of God's poor?

--Frederick Douglass August 19, 1849

If Frederick Douglass could not stop battling the wrongs which plagued the Negro during the post-war years, he did manage to sign a treaty of sorts with his old adversaries, the Garrisonians. The Civil war tended to push past differences into the background and to make all groups of abolitionists more willing to work together for the overthrow of slavery. As the black abolitionist noted in 1862, "We form a common league against slavery, and whatever political or personal differences, which have in other days [divided] and distracted us, a common object and a common emergency makes us for the time at least, forget those differences, and strike at the common foe." Nevertheless, the war which again cemented the Union left Douglass and Garrison apart.

During the post-war decades, Douglass' public comments on the character of the Boston editor were not harshly critical. Even

Foner, Frederick Douglass, pp. 199-200; Douglass' Monthly, March, 1862; Quarles, "Breach," p. 154. See also Douglass' Monthly, June, 1861, February, 1862. In 1862 Douglass wrote that "no class of men are doing more according to their numbers, to conduct this great war to the Emancipation of the slaves than Mr. Garrison and the American anti-slavery society." Douglass' Monthly, March, 1862.

their differences over the advisability of disbanding the American Anti-Slavery Society did not bring out the worst in the black abolitionist's temper. Douglass continued to dissent from the assertion that Garrison originated the antislavery movement. He still could not "pretend to forget" the differences which had caused so much trouble between himself and the Garrisonians. But, as he told Oliver Johnson in 1885, he believed that he had grown less partisan over the years. He now found it easy to "make little of mere personal differences as to methods and even as to estimates of character growing out of such differences." These he considered to be merely "the dust and smoke" of the fierce battle which the abolitionists had waged against slavery.

Douglass' most extensive analysis of his former mentor's character came in the eulogy which he delivered at the Garrison memorial meeting in Washington's 15th Street Presbyterian Church on June 2, 1879. In the death of William Lloyd Garrison the nation beheld a great life ended, a great purpose achieved, and "a great example of heroic endeavor nobly established." Firm and fearless, clear-sighted and strong, his zeal was like fire and his courage like steel. Driven from the doors of the Church that he loved, Garrison was

In April, 1870 Douglass said of Garrison: "While the midnight darkness of slavery lasted, none more clearly than he saw the true course, or more steadily pursued it; but the first streak of daylight confused his vision, and he halted; while at halt, a part of the hosts he had led moved on." Speech at Albany, New York, April 22, 1870, in New Era, May 5, 1870. See also Douglass, Life, pp. 377-379.

Speech at Washington, D. C., April 16, 1883, in Foner, Life and Writings, IV, 362; Douglass to Oliver Johnson, 1885, in Foner, Life and Writings, IV, 426-427. In 1872, Douglass noted: "One of the most valuable lessons left us by the abolition movement is faith in man and in truth." Speech on the antislavery conflict, 1872, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

ridiculed, denounced, and misrepresented, yet he had continued to stand tall, without bitterness or hate--without violence in speech or act, in thought or wish. Born to poverty, to labor and to hard-ship, he owed nothing to his early surroundings. He stood among the learned and great of his day by his own exertion, rising not by the power of the Church or the State, but in bold, inflexible, and defiant opposition to the mighty power of both. Here was a man who had truly possessed "faith in the simple truth and faith in himself."

Admitting that he had sometimes considered his fellow abolitionist to be uncharitable toward those who differed with him,

Douglass said that this trait of Garrison's only proved him to be human. Honest himself, Garrison could not always see how men could differ with him and still be honest. "[W]hen he erred here," Douglass noted, "he erred in the interest of truth." He revolted at half-heartedness, abhorred compromise, and demanded that men "should be either hot or cold." Although he sometimes carried the practice to excess, he tried all men, parties, and sects by one simple principle: "They that were not for him were against him."

In his last letter to Frederic May Holland, Douglass wrote that he did not believe that the leader of the Massachusetts abolitionists "went to his grave, thinking there was any 'roguery' in me." If he did, the ex-slave did not consider himself to be alone "in this bad opinion of his." No man who ever removed himself from the "Garrisonian denomination" was permitted to leave without a doubt being cast upon his honesty. This was one of Garrison's weapons of war--a weapon which surely "never rusted for want of using." In any

Speech at Washington, D. C., June 2, 1879, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

case, concluded Douglass, "There are spots on the sun; but it shines for all that; and Garrison with all his harshness of judgment is Garrison still, and one of the best men of mothers borne." 5

Douglass was not alone in eulogizing the Boston reformer. As is often the case with the passing of famous men, the death of William Lloyd Garrison on May 24, 1879 served as an occasion for friends, former associates, and casual acquaintances to pass judgment on the life of the departed. While the majority of the commentators were largely or wholly concerned with formulating an estimation of Garrison as an abolitionist, there were those who sought to voice their opinion of Garrison as a Christian. To one close friend there seemed to be as little truth in the assertion that the former Newburyport choirboy was an infidel as there was in the charge that Jesus was a blasphemer. A second individual considered Garrison to be the "ripest fruit" which the Church had produced in recent times --"the best, almost the only evidence of her essential Christianity and value." Nevertheless, another generally sympathetic acquaintance admitted that during the antislavery conflict Garrison made certain controversial statements which, perhaps, "he ought not to have said."

Holland, "Frederick Douglass," p. 4415. In 1891, Holland wrote Douglass, "I am particularly glad to find you satisfied with what I say about Garrison. If I were re-writing this book, [Frederick Douglass: The Colored Orator] I should make my estimate of him even less favorable." Frederic May Holland to Frederick Douglass, April 20, 1891, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

Johnson, "Garrison as a Christian," p. 506; Wendell Phillips, "Garrison," North American Review, CCLXXIII (August, 1879), 152; Josiah Copley, "William Lloyd Garrison," United Presbyterian, (June 5, 1879), 362. See also William Dorling, "William Lloyd Garrison," Modern Review, I (March, 1880), 365-366; Child, "Garrison," p. 236; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Two Antislavery Leaders," International Review, IX (August, 1880), 144.

Comments encompassing a similar range of opinion appeared in the press following the death of Frederick Douglass in February, 1895. Some acquaintances were defensive of his "infidelity" while others saw nothing in his religious life which required such a defense. While some estimations of his religious character were highly laudatory, others hinted at a disapproval of his theological beliefs. 7

What is one to make of these comments? Surely, it was not the place of the eulogist to examine the religious evolution of these men in minute detail. But even those who penned their evaluations for church-related publications seemed to be more interested in righting old wrongs and justifying past deeds than in dispassionately examining the religious views of the two reformers. In order to do justice to such a subject, they would have had to detach themselves from the emotional aura which surrounded Garrison and Douglass even after death--and this was something which the various writers and eulogists were unable to accomplish. The crusade against slavery had generated too much controversy to be easily forgotten. Abolitionist and slaveholder. Garrisonian and clergyman, bondsman and master, still remembered the roles which they had played during the ante-bellum era and were not about to pass from the earth without registering a final testimony against their opponents of yesteryear. In like manner, those who had been too young to play a major role in the moral battles of the past were eager to express their opinion on the question of whether a Garrison or a Douglass was the chosen of

⁷See Rankin, Memorial Words, pp. 11-12; Douglass, In Memorian, pp. 26-28, 192-193, 202-203, 234, 243, 325; Theodore Tilton, Sonnets to the Memory of Frederick Douglass (Paris: Brentano's, 1895), p. 7; Parker, "Reminiscences," p. 553; Washington Evening Star, February 21, 1895, February 22, 1895, February 25, 1895; Independent, February 28, 1895.

Christ or the spawn of Satan.

The preceding pages have traced the religious evolution of these two key nineteenth-century figures in order to show that their personal involvement in the fight against slavery led them to modify religious views to which they had been deeply attached in earlier years. Raised in an atmosphere of Christian love and piety, Garrison was taught to eschew sin in all of its manifestations. He was supported by fellow believers in denouncing tippling, smoking, immorality, and "religious infidelity" and thus expected to have the aid of these same Christians in his fight against the sin of slavery. Unfortunately, many of the New Englanders who were closest to Garrison in a theological sense were not willing to place themselves in the vanguard of the antislavery enterprise. Judging their stand to be both uncharitable and un-Christian, the young reformer compensated for the religionists' lack of interest in the bondsmen by devoting an ever-increasing proportion of his time to antislavery endeavor. As his gradualism changed to immediatism and his fulminations against slaveholders and their "northern allies," including churchmen, became more heated, the breach between Garrison and the clergy widened.

The indifference and hostility with which a large segment of the American religious establishment met his pleas for immediate and unconditional emancipation not only caused Garrison to become alienated from the clergy, but also served to convince him that he needed to reconsider many of the religious views which he had held since

See Greener, "Reminiscences," p. 294; Johnson, "Garrison as a Christian," p. 506; Phillips, "Garrison," p. 143; Johnson, Garrison and His Times, pp. 70-71, 78-80, 363-366, 368, 371; Daniel Dorchester, "The Relations of the Churches and Mr. Garrison to the American Antislavery Movement," Methodist Quarterly Review, XXXIII (April-July, 1881), pp. 270-286, 474-500.

the days of his youth. Separated from his religious roots, he found it increasingly easy to reject those elements of his evangelical heritage which seemed to do little for man and nothing for the suffering slave. Consequently, religious "forms and ceremonies," sabbatarianism, and "temple worship" became targets of his critical pen. When combined with his immediatist doctrines, these attacks on widely held religious beliefs and practices increased even further the distance between himself and the more orthodox evangelicals.

Into this breach stepped several of the nation's most liberal religionists. Not an original thinker in matters of theology, Garrison was greatly influenced in his theological views by those individuals, such as Henry C. Wright, Lucretia Mott, and Theodore Parker, who were able to give abundant evidence of "practical righteousness" through their support of the antislavery crusade. To join with Garrison in the abolitionist cause not only showed that a person was spiritually liberated from the "corrupt and wrongheaded" notions forwarded by the nation's "time-serving" clergymen, but it also gave one access to Garrison's mind. Convinced that antislavery was "of God," the Boston editor refused to receive religious instruction from those who believed it to be "of the devil." He would, instead, fellowship with those who agreed with him that the object of Christianity, as taught by its founder, was to undo the heavy burdens of suffering humanity, not to increase those burdens.

Having planted his abolitionist standard in the camp of the religious liberals, Garrison further modified his beliefs. Not only "forms and ceremonies," but religious revivals, the divinely inspired Bible, and the doctrine of the atonement were discredited. Championing a type of freedom of conscience which his own devotion to the

tenets of Garrisonian abolitionism seemed at times to violate, the Boston editor defended those individuals who, like himself, had been "despised and rejected of men" because of their willingness to forward unpopular sentiments. To Garrison's mind, it was indeed "a good thing to be a heretic" if the only alternative to heresy was an unthinking adherence to a heartless orthodoxy.

Despite his markedly different background and experiences, Frederick Douglass followed a somewhat similar path to religious liberalism. Indeed he went even further than his antislavery mentor by rejecting the power of the Christians' God. Like Garrison, the ex-slave was disappointed with the Christians' response to the moral challenge of slavery. Treated shabbily by slaveholders who claimed to be eminently pious, Douglass hoped that northern churchmen, unlike those of the South, would treat him as a brother in Christ. Unfortunately, he found only proscription, prejudice, and indifference in the sanctuaries of the northern churches. Believing that a "genuine Christianity" would evidence love both to God and man, Douglass sought a "higher faith" in the company of the Garrisonian abolitionists. Attracted to Garrison in spite of his "heretical" views, the ex-slave was influenced greatly by his contact with the Boston reformer. As a Garrisonian, he became an enthusiastic critic of organized religion, political parties, and the American Union with slaveholders.

During the 1850's, when he found that he was both alienated from the Church of his youth and estranged from the radical abolitionists, Douglass placed an ever-increasing emphasis upon man's power in the shaping of human events. Eventually his love of God was transformed into a veneration of man and his works while the doctrine of

"genuine Christianity" was changed into a personalized social gospel. Unlike Garrison, the black abolitionist refused to give God a
major portion of the credit for the success of the abolitionist crusade.

The causal factors involved in religious change are both multitudinous and infinitely complex. No attempt has been made in this study to forward the idea that a single, overriding factor or event can explain all of the changes which were effected in the religious views of the two abolitionists. It has, however, been suggested that for an individual to feel that his deepest convictions and concerns, his reputation, and his manhood have been assailed and ultimately treated as unworthy of respect by the very sources of authority which he has been taught to honor can become a major determinant of that person's future belief and behavior. In the case of Garrison and Douglass, to be "rejected of men" closed off certain avenues of belief and opened up others which may never have been seriously considered had the rejection experience not occurred.

Those seeking to effect reform in the religious institutions of the twentieth century have often complained of the same exclusiveness and unwillingness of the Church to "strike a blow for freedom" which so greatly disheartened Douglass and Garrison. In doing so they have claimed for themselves an allegiance to a higher form of religious faith than that prevailing in the nation's churches. It is certainly not beyond the realm of possibility that modern-day activists, finding their deepest convictions to be ridiculed or treated as unimportant by the Church, will follow in the steps of the two nineteenth-century abolitionists—abandoning the beliefs of their youth as they attempt to find support and acceptance for their deeply

held religious and social concerns. If today's churchmen deem it important that such activists be kept "in the fold"--if they would prefer not to be stigmatized as "hypocrites" and "Pharisees," then it is imperative that they examine the possible consequences of their refusal to consider the proposals of the modern-day reformers with an open mind and, to some degree, a sense of history. To be "rejected of men" tends to make an individual consider the possibility of breaking old ties and of abandoning long-accepted beliefs. Unless future generations of men differ radically from those of the past and the present, it is entirely possible that such rejection will always lead to this type of theological reappraisal.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

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WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON

Archival Materials

The most valuable and wide-ranging collection of manuscripts useful to the study of William Lloyd Garrison's changing religious views are those housed in the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library. In addition to its Garrison holdings, the Samuel May, Jr. Papers, the Amos Phelps Papers, the Weston Family Papers, and the Edmund Quincy-Richard D. Webb Correspondence are also useful. Houghton Library's collection of Garrison material is likewise extensive. Most valuable are the letters penned by Garrison to his fiancée, Helen Benson, and those written to his daughter, Fanny Garrison Villard. Many of the Boston reformer's letters to William Lloyd, Jr., are in the Garrison Family Papers, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts. Included in the Sophia Smith Collection are several important letters from Garrison's mother and sister urging him to "seek Jesus."

Despite the concentration of Garrison material in the Boston area, many manuscripts remain scattered in repositories located in other parts of the country. Professors Walter M. Merrill and Louis Ruchames are attempting to remove this "bottleneck" to scholarly research by collecting and publishing all letters written by the Boston abolitionist between 1822 and 1879. Two of the projected six volumes have already appeared. Merrill's I Will Be Heard!, 1822-1835, Vol. I

of The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison (Cambridge, 1971) and Ruchames' A House Dividing Against Itself, 1836-1840, Vol. II of The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison (Cambridge, 1971) are models of editorial craftsmanship. The two books contain 471 documents drawn from the major collections already mentioned, as well as from the New York Public Library, the Garrison Collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Merrill Collection at Wichita State University, and the Lewis Tappan Papers in The Library of Congress. Other Garrison papers are housed in the libraries of the Essex Institute, the American Antiquarian Society, the Maine Historical Society, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Swarthmore College, Haverford College, and Yale University.

Newspapers

Garrison's changing religious views can be traced in the columns of the newspapers with which he was connected during his long editorial career. The Newburyport Herald (Newburyport, Massachusetts, 1822-1825), the Newburyport Free Press (Newburyport, Massachusetts, 1826), the National Philanthropist (Boston, 1828), the Journal of the Times (Bennington, Vermont, 1828-1829), the Genius of Universal Emancipation (Baltimore, 1829-1830), The Liberator (Boston, 1831-1865), and The Independent (New York, 1868-1876) yield varying amounts of pertinent information. Most valuable as a research tool is Garrison's Liberator. It is conceivable that a fairly complete study of the abolitionist's life between 1831 and 1865 could be made using only this paper as an information source. Second in importance is the religious journal, The Independent, for which Garrison wrote over 100 articles. Both weeklies are available on microfilm.

Ready access to the other Garrison newspapers is somewhat more difficult. Indeed, the files of the <u>Journal of the Times</u> once held by the Bennington Museum have completely disappeared over the years.

Contemporary Accounts

In addition to his newspaper articles, Garrison also authored a number of antislavery tracts. The most useful to the study of his religious views are <u>Thoughts on African Colonization</u> (Boston, 1832) and <u>The "Infidelity" of Abolitionism</u> (New York, 1860). Also of some value is <u>Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd</u> Garrison (Boston, 1852).

Many of Garrison's writings are included in his sons' massive William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children (4 vols., New York, 1885-1889). Although Francis Jackson Garrison and Wendell Phillips Garrison seemed at times to be more interested in preserving their father's correspondence than in formulating an interpretive portrait of him, they nevertheless concluded that "the name of gentleman, like that of Christian, is sadly abused; but if...father did not deserve to bear both the one and the other, there is no reason why the world should cherish either." (IV, p. 324.)

Also highly laudatory is Oliver Johnson's <u>William Lloyd</u>

Garrison and <u>His Times</u> (Boston, 1880). Containing an abundance of material concerning "the times"—including Johnson's view of the abolitionist—ministerial conflict—<u>Garrison and His Times</u> pictures the Boston editor as the founder and moral leader of the abolition movement. According to Johnson, Garrison possessed a trust in God and a faith in the "sacredness and power of moral principles" more "absolute" and "immovable" than that "exhibited by any other man."

(p. 52). Similar statements are made in Johnson's "Mr. Garrison as a Christian," <u>Christian Union</u>, XIX (June 4, 1879), 506; "The Hour and the Man," <u>Independent</u>, June 12, 1879; and "Garrison's Piety," Christian Register, January 30, 1890.

Other associates in reform also penned complimentary accounts of "Garrison the Christian." In Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict (Boston, 1869), Samuel J. May asserted that the "religion of Jesus Christ" was "dearer to Mr. Garrison than his own life." Only the "hollow-hearted pretenders to piety" were made the targets of his censure and rebuke (p. 34). Wendell Phillips echoed May's sentiments in the eulogy which he delivered at Garrison's funeral, an oration reprinted in Old South Leaflets, Vol. IV, No. 79 (Boston, n.d.). Phillips expanded his remarks in "Garrison," North American Review, CCLXXIII (August, 1879), 141-152. Noting that Garrison "had not the profoundness of Emerson, the brilliancy of Phillips, or Whittier's visions of truth draped in poetic beauty. He simply had strong, practical good sense; but this was combined with intense moral earnestness, and the hammer and the fire together molded the hardest materials into the shape he willed," Lydia Maria Child penned a somewhat more objective portrait of the abolitionist in "William Lloyd Garrison," Atlantic Monthly, XLIV (August, 1879), 234-238.

Several additional writers of the day gave their opinion of Garrison's religious character. Among the most important of these are: Mary Howitt, "Memoir of William Lloyd Garrison," People's Journal, II (September-October, 1846), pp. 141-145, 166-168, 179-180, 185-187; William Dorling, "William Lloyd Garrison," Modern Review, I (March, 1880), 355-374; and Daniel Dorchester, "The Relations of

the Churches and Mr. Garrison to the American Antislavery Movement,"

Methodist Quarterly Review, XXXIII (April-July, 1881), pp. 270-286,

474-500--the latter being a spirited defense of the role played by
the Church in the antislavery struggle.

Other accounts of Garrison's life include: Archibald H.

Grimké's William Lloyd Garrison: The Abolitionist (New York, 1891)

and "Biographical Oration," Alexander's Magazine, I (January, 1906),

17-22; Goldwin Smith, The Moral Crusader, William Lloyd Garrison:

A Biographical Essay Founded on "The Story of Garrison's Life Told

by His Children" (New York, 1892); William Denton, Garrison in Heaven: A Dream (Wellesley, Massachusetts, n.d.); Josiah Copley,

"William Lloyd Garrison," United Presbyterian, (June 5, 1879), 362;

and John W. Chadwick, "The Garrison Memoir," Unitarian Review, XXXII

(December, 1889), 506-519.

Modern Accounts

Garrison biographies have proliferated during the twentieth century, but none has examined thoroughly the abolitionist's changing religious views. In <u>William Lloyd Garrison</u> (Philadelphia, 1911), Lindsay Swift devoted a number of pages to the Boston editor's theological evolution, but was overly disposed to philosophize and to psychologically analyze his subject. John Jay Chapman's <u>William Lloyd Garrison</u> (Boston, 1913) is even more impressionistic. Believing that "the history of the United States between 1800 and 1860 will some day be rewritten with this man as its central figure," (p. x), Chapman portrayed Garrison as God's agent in the eternal contest of good against evil. Fanny Garrison Villard's <u>William Lloyd Garrison</u> on Non-Resistance (New York, 1924) is no less complimentary.

The 1950's witnessed a new upsurge of scholarly interest in Garrison. Ralph Korngold's Two Friends of Man, The Story of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips and Their Relationship with Abraham Lincoln (Boston, 1950) criticizes the Boston editor's postwar position on reform, but says little about his religious views. In William Lloyd Garrison and the Humanitarian Reformers (Boston, 1955), Russel B. Nye grappled with the complexities of the reformer's religious character, although space limitations dictated that this be done in a less than complete and detailed manner.

Two major Garrison studies appeared in 1963. A third significant work was published in 1969. More than any other recent writer, John L. Thomas, in The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison (Boston, 1963) stressed the formative effects of religion on the abolitionist's life. Due to the length of his book (over 500 pages) and the focus of his scholarly interests (American intellectual history), Thomas was able to deal with many long-neglected aspects of Garrison's religious character. Walter M. Merrill's Against Wind and Tide: A Biography of Wm. Lloyd Garrison (Cambridge, 1963) is a more concise work than The Liberator and relies to a greater extent on primary source material. In attempting to present the Boston reformer "in the context of his family and his closest associates -- a side of Garrison neglected by other biographers," (p. xv), Merrill illuminated aspects of his subject's character which even the lengthy Thomas work slights. Merrill's "Prologue to Reform--Garrison's Early Career, "Essex Institute Historical Collections, XCII (April, 1956), 153-170 and "A Passionate Attachment: William Lloyd Garrison's Courtship of Helen Eliza Benson," New England Quarterly, XXIX (June,

1956), 182-203 are also valuable. Aileen S. Kraditor's Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850 does not deal specifically with Garrison's religious views, but nevertheless contains a number of incisive statements on the abolitionist's antisabbatarianism, come-outerism, and perfectionism.

David Alan Williams' "William Lloyd Garrison, the Historians, and the Abolitionist Movement," Essex Institute Historical Collections, XCVIII (April, 1962), 84-99 and Jean Wentworth's "'Not Without Honor': William Lloyd Garrison," Maryland Historical Magazine, LXII (September, 1967), 318-335 are useful historiographical essays on Garrisonian scholarship.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Archival Materials

The manuscripts most important to the study of the black abolitionist's religious views are those found in the Frederick Douglass Papers now in The Library of Congress. Following their removal from the Douglass home, "Cedar Hill," in January, 1972, the Papers were reorganized and definitively arranged to better facilitate future research. While stored at "Cedar Hill," Anacostia, the manuscript materials were microfilmed and a Calendar of the Writings of Frederick Douglass (Washington, D. C., 1940) was compiled. The twenty reels of positive microfilm contain important letters and speeches as well as various newspaper clippings, legal documents, and the Douglass Diary. The Calendar, containing a foreword by Carter G. Woodson, is incomplete and outdated, but useful.

Many of the manuscripts now housed in The Library of Congress are reprinted in Philip S. Foner's The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass (4 vols., New York, 1950-1955). Beginning in 1944, Foner made a nationwide search to uncover little known Douglass material and thereby to remedy the "deplorable situation in American historiography" which denied the black reformer his rightful place among major nineteenth-century figures. The four volumes contain 21 items from the Douglass Home, 46 from the Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University, and 9 from the Charles Sumner Papers, Harvard University. Other manuscript collections represented include the Antislavery Collection of the Boston Public Library (7 letters), University of Rochester Collection (3 letters), and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania Collection (2 letters). Documents representative of those included in the larger work may be found in Foner's Frederick Douglass: Selections From His Writings (New York, 1945).

Newspapers

Douglass' four newspapers contain a vast amount of information vital to the study of the black editor's theological development. For many years it was widely believed that the invaluable research tool, The North Star, had been lost forever in the fire which destroyed the Douglass home in 1872. Nevertheless, due to the efforts of Foner and others, researchers now have access to many issues of both the Star (Rochester, 1827-1851) and Frederick Douglass' Paper (Rochester, 1851-1860). Foner's Life and Writings contains 42 excerpts from The North Star and 33 from Douglass' Paper. Microfilmed copies of the papers are also available. Douglass' Monthly (Rochester, 1859-1863) and The New National Era (Washington, D. C., 1870-

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1874) are represented in Foner's collection by 101 and 36 excerpts, respectively. These two papers are also available on microfilm.

Other papers which contain useful information are Garrison's Liberator and The National Anti-Slavery Standard, organ of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

Contemporary Accounts

The most valuable insight into Douglass' changing religious beliefs can be gained by reading the black abolitionist's autobiography. The first version of this work appeared under the title, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (Boston, 1845). This relatively short volume contained a preface written by Garrison and an appendix dealing with "The Christianity of America." Ten years later, an expanded version, My Bondage and My Freedom (New York, 1855), was published. This version contained an important section on the ex-slave's religious life in New Bedford which was later deleted from the otherwise more complete Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (1881, 1892).

Other useful published Douglass writings are his "Folly of Our Opponents," in <u>The Liberty Bell</u> (Boston: Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Fair, 1845), pp. 166-172; "Bibles for the Slaves," in <u>The Liberty Bell</u> (Boston: Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Bazaar, 1848), pp. 253-255; "The Condition of the Freedmen," <u>Harper's Weekly</u>, XXVII (December 8, 1883), 782-783; and "Reminiscences," <u>Cosmopolitan</u>, VII (August, 1889), 376-382.

Second only to the abolitionist's own work in importance is Frederic May Holland's avowedly partisan account, <u>Frederick Douglass</u>:

The Colored Orator (New York, 1891). In writing this biography,

Holland was able to use unpublished materials and rare manuscripts loaned to him by Douglass. He also interviewed the ex-slave at "Cedar Hill" and was given permission to use Frederick Douglass, Jr.'s collection of memorabilia. Consequently, The Colored Orator contains many bits of information about Douglass' religious life which are recorded in no other published work.

Several other contemporaries either described Douglass' actions or gave their opinions of his religious character. The best of these writings are: Theodore Stanton, "Frederick Douglass in Paris," Open Court, I (April 28, 1887), 151-153; Richard T. Greener, "Reminiscences of Frederick Douglass," Champion Magazine, I (February, 1917), 291-295; and Helen Pitts Douglass, ed., In Memoriam: Frederick Douglass (Philadelphia, 1897)--the latter being a compilation of reminiscences and funeral oratory.

Modern Accounts

The two finest twentieth-century biographies of Douglass are Benjamin Quarles' Frederick Douglass (Washington, D. C., 1948) and Philip Foner's Frederick Douglass (New York, 1964). Unfortunately, these works give the reader relatively little insight into the complexities of the black abolitionist's religious development. Both historians are, however, more adept in untangling the charges and counter-charges of the Garrison-Douglass feud. Quarles' "The Breach Between Douglass and Garrison," Journal of Negro History, XXIII (April, 1938), 144-154 is also extremely valuable in this respect.

Other biographers have been even less interested in Douglass' religious beliefs. Neither Charles W. Chesnutt's <u>Frederick Douglass</u> (Boston, 1899), or Booker T. Washington's <u>Frederick Douglass</u> (Phila-

delphia, 1906) devote much space to the ex-slave's theological views. Indeed, Washington even wrote that Douglass "never formulated any definite religious creed." (p. 351) Shirley Graham's There Was Once a Slave: The Heroic Story of Frederick Douglass (New York, 1947) and Arna Bontemps' Free at Last: The Life of Frederick Douglass (New York, 1971) offer the student of religious change little new information.

Of greater value are the shorter and more narrowly focused studies of the black abolitionist's life. Chief among these are:

Amy Hanmer-Croughton's "Anti-Slavery Days in Rochester" in Rochester

Historical Society Fublication Fund Series, Vol. XIV (Rochester, 1936),

pp. 113-155; George Shepperson's "Frederick Douglass and Scotland,"

Journal of Negro History, XXXVIII (July, 1953), 307-321; Herbert

Aptheker's "An Unpublished Frederick Douglass Letter," Journal of

Negro History, XLIV (July, 1959), 277-281; and J. W. Cooke's "Freedom

in the Thoughts of Frederick Douglass, 1845-1860," Negro History

Bulletin, XXXII (February, 1969), 6-10.

