

FREDERICK DOUGLASS: CHRISTIANITY OF SLAVEHOLDERS VS CHRISTIANITY OF CHRIST

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Abstraksi

Hak beragama telah dipertalikan dengan setiap orang sejak lahir, entah dia orang merdeka atau budak, kulit hitam atau putih, lelaki ataupun perempuan. Manifestasi iman tersebut terungkap secara hebat di dalam komunitas jemaat warga kulit hitam selama Masa Kebangkitan Kedua (Second Awakening) di abad ke-18 tatkala banyak orang Afrika masuk kekristenan dalam berbagai denominasi. Di tengah-tengah masa kebangkitan itulah Frederick Douglass lahir di Desa Talbot pada tahun 1818, dari seorang ibu budak warga kulit hitam dan seorang ayah yang diduga majikan warga kulit putih. Kelahiran Douglass ke dalam sistem perbudakan ini memberinya sebuah perspektif kritis atas iman dan efeknya terhadap setiap persoalan sosial, khususnya menyangkut perbudakan. Lebih penting lagi, Douglass mampu secara tajam mengemukakan interpretasi-interpretasi dan ideologi-ideologi kontradiktif mengenai agama/iman sampai ke tingkat yang menempatkan dia pada sebuah jalan dari status budak ke penghapusan perbudakan (abolisionis). Harus dicatat bahwa kendatipun Douglass menganggap urusan iman/agama sebagai urusan yang sangat pribadi, namun keyakinan-keyakinannya dibentuk, dituntun, dan dapat didengar dalam pidato-pidato dan tulisan-tulisannya. Penting untuk menggali kehidupan Douglass sebagai seorang budak dan memeriksa apa pengaruh dari Gereja kulit hitam dan agama terhadap tindakan-tindakannya. Kehidupan Douglass sebagai seorang pejuang penghapusan perbudakan akan ditelusuri seraya memberikan perhatian yang intens/mendalam terhadap peranan agama dan Gereja kulit hitam terhadap kematangannya.

Kata-kata kunci: Kekristenan, perbudakan, kebebasan, Gereja hitam, agama, cinta Allah

Journey to Comparative Freedom

Most of what is known of Douglass during his childhood/slavery years is primarily assimilated from his own autobiographies. His writings however give valued insight into the mind of a young man who helped architect the abolishment of slavery and clarity to the driving motivation that ordered his steps in that process. Douglass once spoke:

I have seen dark hours in my life, and I have seen the darkness gradually disappearing, and the light gradually increasing. One by one, I have seen obstacles removed, errors corrected, prejudices softened, proscriptions relinquished, and my people advancing in all the elements that make up the sum of general welfare. I remember that God reigns in eternity, and that, whatever delays, disappointments and discouragements may come, truth, justice, liberty and humanity will prevail. ¹

Douglass alludes that due to the reign of an eternal God, he was blessed to see change. More importantly, he understood that in the midst of “progress’ delay” God is able, and he remained hopeful. How are these, the thoughts of an ex-slave? It is apparent that his faith had given Douglass something that every slave master and overseer tried desperately to prevent every slave from having. But the shape of those words was born of painful, yet exhilarating life experiences. Douglass’ biographical reach into his past points out many of the critical events that took place in his life, which allows the reader a full look into not only his faith, but how it influenced him. There are three aspects of exploration in Douglass’ life that should be examined, effects of family, the conversion of Douglass, and his conflicts with white slave master’s interpretation of the biblical text.

Waldo Martin, the writer of *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, states that “The trauma of Fredrick’s separation from his grandmother was pivotal to his comprehension of his enslavement, his increasing desire to be free, and his eventual decision to run to freedom.”² It is important to point out that Douglass’ trauma also deprived him of family or the notion of family.

1 Waldo E. Martin, Jr, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), XIII.

2 *Ibid.*, 6.

In his early slave years Douglass understood the concept of families and relatives but his inner emotions were aloof to the people to whom those titles applied. Douglass writes “There is not, beneath the sky, an enemy to filial affection so destructive as slavery. It had made my brothers and sisters strangers to me; it converted the mother that bore me, into a myth; it shrouded my father in mystery, and left me without an intelligible beginning in the world.”³ When a human being is left without a beginning their spirit seeks to fill that void.

During the 1800s the Second Awakening was infiltrating the slave community. God’s call to Douglass was to fill that void, first through the context of education. Douglass began to identify with his mother, whom he knew little of, once he discovered that she could read. Douglass as a child needed a connection and pride in knowing that the woman whom had given him birth was one of a handful of literate slaves, presented him with his first connection of lost family. Equipped with some biblical ideology Douglass as a child still struggled with the absence of and denial by his father. Douglas understood the Bible was a means for him to gain that education as his mistress Sophia Auld would be “the inch by which he would take an ell.”⁴ Religion was at the center of Douglass’ determination to end his feeling of insecurity and loneliness. Douglass admits that he needed a ‘father’ figure and tried to find this in the Church. Although initially he approached the White Methodist Church, its white collaborators did not completely live up to Douglass’ expectations thus leading him to identify with his slave heritage. Ultimately, Douglass built a relationship with Lawson, a religious man to whom Douglass identified as his spiritual Father. Douglass’ internal need for family led him to learn and ultimately to learn Scripture. Douglass’ psyche found the protection and pride he longed for when he joined with his spiritual father.

Douglass’ conversion at 13 years old was the culmination of the emotional toll of slavery on his young life. Witness to beatings, injustices to slaves, and the utter disdain and ill regard for all things of African origin

3 Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative of Life, My Bondage and My Freedom, Life and Times* (New York: The Library of America, 1994), 157.

4 *Ibid.*, 217.

gave Douglass a disposition of inferiority and self-hate. Douglass discloses that he at times desired to end his life. However, in the process of his conversion, Douglass found hope not just in the rumor of abolitionism, but he found it in God. Before his conversion Douglass pondered the idea of freedom but fear kept him a slave. After the true conversion of Douglass he found the courage to pursue that freedom. Uncle Lawson presented Douglass with something that not many slaves had, which was purpose. Lawson presented Douglass with a purpose to do a great work, a purpose to preach the Gospel. Although, his gospel was going to be in the end the gospel of abolitionism, for Douglass it was still of divine purpose. Douglass was on a mission from God above and he was armored with the Word of God. He was a young man waiting to attack the system of slavery for the purposes of freedom and of God above. In retrospect, Douglass was to face some of the darkest times in his life as a slave but the one thing that his conversion gave him was hope. "Thus assured, and cheered on, under the inspiration of hope, I worked and prayed with a light heart, believing that my life was under the guidance of a wisdom higher than my own. With all other blessings sought at the mercy seat, I always prayed that God would, of His great mercy, and in His own good time, deliver me from my bondage."⁵ Douglass demonstrates that if a person is to survive the dark times and places of their life then they must be willing to hold on to hope and not just any hope but a divine hope that is in and from a wiser and higher authority than the evil system of slavery that had plagued his young life. This hope in Douglass' divine purpose led to his aggressive move to teach slaves not only the Gospel but also to educate them to read. It also moved him to eventually go beyond the idea of escaping slavery and finding the courage to act on escaping slavery.

Inspired by what Douglass believed to be the truth of the Gospel he was also enraged by the hypocritical attitudes and actions of the religious slave owners and overseers. More so, Douglass was critical of their use of scripture in the justification of slavery and the mistreatment of the slave. Douglas stated:

5 *Ibid.*, 233.

For all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have found them, almost invariably, the vilest, meanest and basest of their class. Exceptions there may be, but this is true of religious slaveholders, as a class. It is not for me to explain the fact. Others may do that; I simply state it as a fact, and leave the theological, and psychological inquiry, which it raises, to be decided by others more competent than myself. Religious slaveholders, like religious persecutors, are ever extreme in their malice and violence.⁶

Douglass' disdain for his "religious" masters fueled a passion for freedom as his own interpretation of scripture fueled his hope for freedom. The contradictory views of God and religion by his white counterparts drove Douglass to desire to be away from the system of slavery. But interestingly, Douglass understood that the hate that he felt was more towards the system than the people of the system of slavery. This gave him a great advantage in his later years as an abolitionist. However, Douglass does admit that the darkness of the system of slavery had almost consumed him. Douglass admits his stealing was justified by survival and hunger, states that his passion to learn was weakened, and tells how the system transformed him from human to brute. But after Douglass' plight for salvation from Covey was rejected by Captain Auld the frustration, pain, rejection, hope, delusion, dreams, anger all came to a climatic confrontation for Douglass and Covey, his overseer and Negro breaker.⁷ Douglass built up in himself the courage to resist and protect himself. He released himself from all moral chains. Entrenched in a fight with Covey Douglass found the unexpected a spiritual freedom.

After resisting him, I felt as I had never felt before. It was a resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery, to the heaven of comparative freedom. I was no longer a servile coward, trembling under the frown of a brother worm of the dust, but, my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of manly independence. I had reached the point, at which I was not afraid to die.⁸

6 *Ibid.*, 293.

7 *Ibid.*, 287.

8 *Ibid.*, 286.

Douglass was a new kind of slave, the worst kind of slave, a spiritually free slave. The system of slavery knew that to teach a slave was to spoil that slave. The system of slavery knew that a slave should not have a will but the will of his master. The system of slavery knew that to teach the slave the Bible was to give the slave hope for freedom. The system of slavery understood that “if you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell.”⁹

Christianity of Slaveholders vs Christianity of Christ

Frederick Douglass is a hero because he was able to bridge the gap between life as a slave and life as a freeman. His mental capacity to see himself free made him a self made figure to admire. Although he was not remembered as a religious figure religion does play an important role in his fight for freedom. When Douglass jumped into a moving train with a sailor’s style clothing he started his journey to freedom. He crossed the Susquehanna River by ferry at Havre de Grace, then continued by train to Wilmington, Delaware. From there he went by steamboat to Philadelphia and continued to the safe house of abolitionist David Ruggles in New York; the whole journey took less than 24 hours.¹⁰ Frederick Douglass began his life as a freeman on September 1838.¹¹ At first he lived in New York but then moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts with his family. In New Bedford he started to read the *Liberator*, a paper edited by William Lloyd Garrison, a white abolitionist. Soon after he started reading the *Liberator* he got the opportunity to hear Garrison deliver a lecture at the Liberty Hall in New Bedford.¹² This was a life changing experience for Douglass because it marked a new stage in his life where he became a moral suasionist. Douglass claimed Garrison as the messenger from God who came to deliver colored people from the bondage of slavery. Garrison himself relied on the Scripture and his interpretation of it in order to build his argument. Therefore, Douglass’ encounter with Garrison added a new side to the development of his thinking of abolitionism in America.

9 *Ibid.*, 217.

10 *Ibid.*, 642-646.

11 *Ibid.*, 647.

12 *Ibid.*, 658.

Douglass was convinced that morally persuasive arguments combined with non-violent protest were enough to stop a system as damaging as slavery. Only six years after his first encounter with Garrison, Douglass published his first autobiography *Narrative of the Life*.

In this first autobiography, Douglass' perspective on abolition was based on the Garrisonian argument that slavery was evil and humans, who want to be moral, would stop its practice the minute they were persuaded it was a moral blight. At the end of *Narrative of the Life*, Douglass explained his perspective on Christianity where he divided the Christianity of the slaveholder from the Christianity of Christ.¹³ He criticized the Christianity of the slaveholder as bad, corrupt, and wicked. Douglass compared the attitude of American slaveholders toward slaves with the teaching in the Scripture. He wrote "The man who robs me of my earnings at the end of each week meets me as a class-leader on Sunday morning, to show me the way of life, and the path of salvation."¹⁴ By contrasting two different realities of the life of the slaveholder, Douglass was eager to show the inconsistency between the slaveholders' Christian belief and their actions. In the appendix of his *Narrative of the Life* he writes:

We have men sold to build churches, women sold to support the Gospel, and babes sold to purchase Bibles for the poor heathen! All for the glory of God and the good of souls! The slave's auctioneer's bell and the church-going bell chime in with each other, and the bitter cries of the heart-broken slave are drowned in the religious shouts of his pious master.¹⁵

This statement made it clear that Douglass, by using his understanding of Christian teaching, challenged the injustice of the slavery and showed the misleading deeds of a Church that was proslavery. A church in union with slaveholders was standing against Christ because "slavery is a crime against God."¹⁶ Douglass' close interpretation of the Scripture proved his compatibility as the follower of the Garrisonian movement. His eloquent

13 *Ibid.*, 97.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, 98.

16 *Ibid.*, 379.

contrasting of slaveholder and Christianity made him a favorite in the Garrisonian movement. Here, Douglass' faith became a foundation for his criticism of the hypocrisy of the proslavery Christianity.

Although Douglass was critical of the role of the church, he never gave up on his religious faith. In New Bedford at the age of 20 he joined the Elm Street Methodist Church with the hope to enjoy the congregational life.¹⁷ What he found there was disappointment because he was treated unequally because of his skin color. The Elm Street Church justified racism by locating the colored people as the second class members of the church. He tried another church called the New Bedford Zion Methodist Church, a congregation of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church where he became a preacher.¹⁸ He did not stay long with this church because, even though its members were largely free Blacks, he "found that it consented to the same spirit which held my brethren in chains."¹⁹ Based on these two experiences it appears that his relationship to religion was not closely tied to either slaveholder churches or slave churches. To the white churches he held a strong critique on the paradox between the teaching and the action of people who called themselves Christian. To the black churches he felt their inadequacy in fighting for freedom from slavery. Based on his life experience with Edward Covey, the cruel overseer, Douglass knew that the only way to be free was to fight for it. He did not see enough effort from the black churches to help the slave understand the importance of uplifting one's self as part of the fight for abolition of slavery.

Another specific event in Douglass' life that shows how strongly Douglass felt about churches being in union with the slaveholders took place during his travel in Great Britain. In his journey, he encountered the Free Church of Scotland where the Scottish people asked "What have we to do with slavery?"²⁰ Douglass regretted that the answer to this question was not obvious for them. Accepting the contributions from American slaveholders meant receiving the money from the victimization of slaves.

17 *Ibid.*, 360.

18 *Ibid.*, 361.

19 *Ibid.*, 362.

20 *Ibid.*, 381.

It was with the slave's immolation that churches were built and ministers were paid.²¹

As a moral suasionist, Douglass also spoke about what he thought Christianity should look like in America. In his reception speech on May 1846 he stated:

I love that religion that comes from above, in the Wisdom of God ... I love that religion that sends its votaries to bind up the wounds of him that has fallen among thieves. I love that religion that makes it the duty of its disciples to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction. I love that religion that is based upon the glorious principle of love to God and love to man.²²

This was what Douglass pictured of how Christianity should look. This showed Douglass' Christian beliefs. Douglass, by using his knowledge of scripture, wanted to show that it is easy for the true followers of Christ to see that slavery and Christianity were not compatible. Christianity should be a religion that brought hope, peace and love. Christianity should have been a religion that was good, pure and holy. It was this model of Christianity that would be able to bring equality for all God's creatures, especially for slaves who were under the oppression of slaveholders. Douglass almost always referenced Christian scriptures and interpretation to elaborate his passion for bringing freedom for slaves. He was a "democratic as well as Christian idealist"²³ according to Martin. Abolitionism was an integral part of Douglass' vision and Christianity was the basis he used to expand this vision.

Later in his career Douglass repeatedly stated in his autobiographies that God created human beings equal in God's image.²⁴ Not only the slaveholder was created in the image of God but all human beings were created in God's image. This statement evoked the need to not just sit and wait for God to bring freedom for the unfreed but to act and fight for God would only help those who helped themselves. Martin writes "God's

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*, 407.

23 Martin, 49.

24 Douglass, 194.

will and actions could only be realized, he believed, through human intermediaries. He rejected the immobilizing idea of waiting for God to end slavery ... Neither the slaves nor the abolitionists could afford to wait for liberty.”²⁵ Douglass was confident that there would be no miracle of liberation if the slaves did not fight for it. Douglass’ argument on uplifting the oppressed also demonstrated his Christian understanding of grace. Grace always comes first. It is because of God’s grace that we were created equal in God’s image. When this equality is not granted because of a system such as slavery then it is a Christian’s duty to win it back. When we choose to be what God created us to be, it will be counted as an achievement in God’s eye. For Douglass, to be free and to bring freedom for others were his Christian duties.

Douglass: A Prophetic Voice for All Humanity

Douglass was a man with a voice that foretold the changes that would occur within American society, although those changes would take over 100 years to come to full fruition. In the mid-1800’s his voice began in bondage, similar to the plight of the Israelites in ancient Egypt. His voice became stronger after he broke away from the grips of the inhumane system of slavery. People found his story captivating, and then found that the truths of his story revealed a way of life that was far crueler than what most people were willing to believe. Eventually, slavery was abolished. However, this was not the culmination of Douglass’ prophecies. His voice also called for equality for all humans. These were rights that required a much slower change, extending over decades with copious amounts of work by many people. Douglass’ voice was the leading cry as he prepared the way, and others continued the chant, until great strides for freedom had occurred, culminating in 21st century voices calling out, “We shall overcome ... free, free at last.”

David Blight, the writer of *Frederick Douglass’ Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee*, remarked that Douglass was “not a strong adherent of organized religion and [was] openly contemptuous of the clergy though much of

25 Martin, 177.

his life.”²⁶ Blight also comments that for Douglass, “God was a God of action”²⁷ who would intercede in the life of humans in God’s own time. Yet, this brought hope to an oppressed people. Many people thought that Douglass lived the last third of his life glorifying the Civil War times, possibly, because “Douglass saw in the Civil War an apocalyptic power that forever changed the relationship of blacks to America.”²⁸ Douglass dreamed dreams, much like those of Martin Luther King, Jr. Both men were visionaries. They could see into the land of Canaan; comprehend the struggles; and rationalize a holy life in which human equality was the overarching manifesto.

Blight built up the image of Douglass as a self-made man who barely gave religion any thought, yet the Epilogue of his book, with a subtitle of *Keeping Faith in Jubilee* points towards a man of deep faith. Blight’s apparent contradictions in the central sections of his book are bracketed with an ending in which he lauds Douglass’ visionary prowess and an opening that leads the reader into the hearts and minds of those black leaders following the Christian faith.

Without a spiritual anchor to rely upon, without a God of justice to overrule a society that promised only injustice, without the simple but powerful theory that history is a process where things somehow get better, and without a fierce commitment to agitation, black leaders could not realistically have continued to exhort their people to remain hopeful of a life of opportunity and opportunity in the face of oppression. These were the challenges facing the black church of the 19th century. Douglass became their anchor, their hope, especially as a segment of the Northern white population began to listen and act upon Douglass’ words and visions for a humanitarian way of life for everyone, regardless of race, gender, or income level. The promise of a better life, especially for blacks (and also women, regardless of their race) provided a voice shining through the wilderness for the downtrodden, enslaved, and counted-as-less-than-

26 David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass’ Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 106.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*, 240.

human people. Douglass' prophetic word gave them hope.

The outcome of the battle with Covey was a resurrection experience for Douglass. In many ways, it mirrored the conversion experience of the Epistle writer Paul. In their younger years, both men were zealous and actively learned their faith. Both men required a lengthy sabbatical period shortly after their conversion experiences. For Douglass, this immersion into a greater understanding of God's vision of unity, or human equality, came when he toured Europe. This engagement in a society in which he lived and breathed as a free man enveloped him in a reality that he would never have been able to experience in 19th century America. His ideals were welcomed and his visions would come to fruition through the channels of compassion, and financial backing. For both men, their zeal led them to advocate violence: Paul in the killing of the Christians who were polluting the Hebrew faith and traditions; and Douglass, who eventually succumbed to the call to purge the South of the evil holders of slavery- slave owners, overseers, and Southern whites who propagated the system of slavery by their law-making or "closed-eyes" to the abhorrent nature of slavery.

Many of the overarching life occurrences were similar for Paul and Douglass, although there were slight differences in the placement of these events on the timelines of their lives. Paul participated in the hunt for and killing of Christians prior to his conversion experience. Yet, Scripture records that Paul was forgiven by Christ and called into ministry. Douglass' promotion of violence followed his resurrection/conversion experience. It was an inevitable turn in the path to freedom. In order to move humanity from the depths of their depravity. Paul reminds us of the vices of humanity:

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. (Rom 1:28 NIV)

Although Douglass fell to the necessity of violence following his conversion experience, parallels to Jesus' own anger in the Temple due to the unfair money exchange practices that abused the marginalized people of those days, reminds us that action is sometimes necessary to affect change. Were the violence and the killing appropriate? Could another avenue have secured freedom? In Douglass' time, that did not seem possible. May God forgive those who killed other humans in the name of justice and freedom. "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." (Romans 12:9-12, NIV). Luke Timothy Johnson described Paul's writing in Romans 12:9-21 as "a Christian virtue list that responds to the vice list that Paul used ... in 1:28-31 ... The list's function as a whole is to provide a certain kind of moral impression."²⁹ Both in Paul's day, and in the 19th century, these words were countercultural. Johnson reminds his readers that "lowly-mindedness" was not a virtue for the Greek philosophers: it was thought to be slave-minded. This virtue of humility was distinctively a Christian characteristic, one that encompassed a sense of otherness. Judaism and first century Christians, in contrast to the Greek and Roman mindset, followed a traditional moral instruction which included compassion for the stranger, for the others in one's midst. Douglass also faced these types of challenges. Enlightenment thinkers held fast to that which could be reasoned: faith was subjugated to the level of superstition or blind obedience. However, it was the free, open thinking of this Age of Reason that helped to broaden the human condition. The goals were human autonomy, freedom, truth, and progress. However, Douglass lived into his faith: "Living with a mind renewed according to the mind of Christ means being in solidarity with others."³⁰ He lived into Paul's good words from Romans 12:9-21, especially in overcoming evil with good.

29 Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Smyth & Helwys, Pub.: Macon, Georgia, 2001), 194.

30 *Ibid.*, 195.

Douglass lived his faith. Like Paul, Douglass' message was not always an easy one for some people to hear, and yet, it brought immense liberatory hope to others. For Douglass, his actions and his speeches were like the weft and warp of an intricately woven piece of cloth, which was the fabric of life. Douglass expertly wove his Christian dogma into many of his speeches, using Biblical language in many of his descriptors. He advocated for peaceful mechanisms for change, although understood the necessity of violence to overcome the evil of slavery. He sought justice, did all things with kindness, and walked humbly with God and all of God's creation.

Finally, Frederick Douglass was a man whose understanding of God began in the depths of human love- while he lived with his grandmother, yet also in the depth of human misery- as human chattel. His awakening to the miserable state of slavery occurred at such an early age, that it was a lifelong indelible memory. His battle against slavery began long before his ability to flee the oppressive system. Although a slave, Frederick was blessed to be the houseboy of the Auld's. Sophia's nurturing and education, albeit limited, was a great gift. This impressionable young man, who was eager to please the woman who showed him a mother's loving touch, was a gifted learner.

Frederick's ability to read was foundational to his love of God and for his ability to find God's good message for him within the scriptures. Even as a youth, Douglass heard the calling to love and care for one another, understanding it as human equality. Mr. Lawson was a religious mentor, who opened great vistas. Rarely, as mentors, do we know the amazing, positive affect that we have upon others. Surely, Lawson was a God given gift to Frederick, and also to the rest of humanity: Lawson stoked the burning desire for equality of all people (in God's eyes) within Frederick.

Douglass, a free man, spent many years within the walls of the black church, although as he aged he removed himself physically from religious institutions. Yet, his vocabulary and illusions continued to be a window into the soul of a man who never rejected God. Douglass, although not remembered so much for his Christianity as his political abolitionist ways,

was a man we might today describe as one in which still waters run deep. His God was holy. "The Christian story informed his understanding of his own life, his estimates of human good and evil, and his verdicts regarding slavery and quality. Christianity was an inheritance he received and interpreted, a faith system that shaped him, and that he shaped."³¹ Douglass was given the voice of a prophet, and like the Old Testament prophets, the reality of his prophecy was long in coming. However, Douglass instilled hope into the people of his time. Hope, that they, too, could be freed. Hope, that they, too, would be seen as equals among men. Hope, that they, too, would have all of the inalienable rights conferred upon every citizen of the United States of America, and as a citizen of the world.

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31 Scott Williamson, Dissertation of Frederick Douglass, 10.

