

4-2013

A Theodicy of Redemptive Suffering in African American Involvement Led by Absalom Jones and Richard Allen in the Philadelphia Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793

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Recommended Citation

Boone, Kyle, "A Theodicy of Redemptive Suffering in African American Involvement Led by Absalom Jones and Richard Allen in the Philadelphia Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793" (2013). *Undergraduate Student Scholarship – History*. Paper 2.
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OLIVET NAZARENE UNIVERSITY

A THEODICY OF REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING IN AFRICAN AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT
LED BY ABSALOM JONES AND RICHARD ALLEN IN THE PHILADELPHIA YELLOW
FEVER EPIDEMIC OF 1793.

SENIOR THESIS FOR SENIOR SEMINAR FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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SENIOR SEMINAR

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4/13/13

“A plague is not a matter of science, a calculus of life and death. It is a matter of the soul.”¹ This is what the historian J.H. Powell, the first historian to create a work on the Yellow Fever Plague with primary sources, penned in the preface of his famous book *Bring Out Your Dead*. As historians investigate the events from the past with the modern tools of science and psychology it becomes more apparent that historical events cannot be oversimplified nor can they be deemed from singular causality. It seems there are undercurrents that drive history beyond the early modern explanations of simple scientific causality. None of which is more apparent than in the involvement of African Americans in the Yellow Fever Plague of Philadelphia in 1793. As Phillip Otter put it, “Color became prominent”, and the color was not only the yellow of the skin and eyes or the deep purple of the hemorrhages, but the skin colors of white and black.² Why people who were racially oppressed would risk their lives helping their oppressors baffles reason itself. Nevertheless, historians, theologians, and contemporary witnesses have made their best assumptions to the reasons of the involvement. Financial gain, charisma of their leaders, social advancement, societal pressure due to superior immunity, religious conviction, and genuine compassion for humanity have all been suggested causes; and all probably hold a bit of truth.

However, the goal of this work is to place emphasis on one particular cause, namely religious conviction. Africa American involvement in serving the white community of Philadelphia during the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic was due primarily to the theodicy of redemptive suffering as evident in their leaders Absalom Jones and Richard Allen; which in turn led to the African American people climbing a rung on the social ladder of the United States.

¹ J.H. Powell, *The Great Plague of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia in 1793* (New York: Time Incorporated, 1965), xxii.

² Samuel Otter, *Philadelphia Stories: America's Literature of Race and Freedom* (New York: Oxford Press, 2010), 28.

This religious conviction known as *moral redemptive theodicy*³ is heavily rooted in African American religion, particularly Christian religion. Moral redemptive theodicy is the idea that a good God allows suffering in order to produce character and prove worthy the testimony of His followers. While this religious view has come under heavy skepticism due to the push of humanism, especially that of Anthony Pinn, it will be the task of this paper to show how moral redemptive theodicy was instrumental and beneficial in benefiting the African American plight in America and leading to the betterment of the race in American society.

The outline of this work will take shape as follows. Following this brief introduction will be an overview and background of the events which transpired in Philadelphia during 1793 which led up to and surrounded the involvement of the African Americans in the Free African Society (FAS). Next, will be a brief discussion of the disease of the realities of Yellow Fever. The necessity for such a discussion stems from the commonly held belief at the time that blacks were immune to such a disease as announced by Dr. John Lining. Not only this, an understanding of the disease itself has proved fruitful in understanding the complete terror by which the citizens lived, because they themselves had no cure from the disease and they knew not what caused it. After a discussion of the disease, the research will return to the involvement of the FAS their duties as black nurses, as well as the hardships of the plague that soon struck the African American community. This will lead into the conclusion of the event which climaxes into two articles. The first by Irishman Mathew Carey and his publication *A Short Account...* and the second by FAS leaders Absalom Jones and Richard Allen's *Narrative of the Proceedings...* in response to Carey's first and second edition which tainted the black

³ This concept and definition is laid out in detail in the work: Anthony Pinn, *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002). It traces the development throughout African American works in history.

community's involvement in the plague. Following this will be an overview of the impact of the event and historians and scholars' interpretation on what it meant for the African American community. In the final two sections of this work, the case will be made primarily for the evidence of moral redemptive theodicy at work in African American culture and in particular the events of 1793. Secondly, a case will be made for how this theodicy was and is constructive in bringing about social change.

THE YELLOW FEVER EPIDEMIC OF 1793 IN PHILADELPHIA

The events of the Yellow Fever Epidemic are claimed to begin in August of 1793; however, the preparation for the great fever had been taking place all year long. A long held belief based on observation of weather patterns knew that the disease was to be particularly high according to Hippocrates, "when the winter has been too mild, or too cold, when the spring or summer, and the following autumn have been dry, we must fear cruel disease."⁴ Such seemed to be the case in analysis of the weather by those contemporary to the disease in 1793 and then again in 1798 and 1799.⁵ The particular problem arose due to a mild winter that was not successful in killing all disease and insects, as well as those insects coming out of hibernation early. Then in May, it was particularly rainy allowing for the build-up of water, followed by a particularly hot, dry June. "Where a stream two or three feet deep had been, men could walk dry-shod in the hot sun amid the buzzing of mosquitos."⁶ However, the connection between the

⁴ Powell, 2.

⁵ Thomas and Richard Folwell, *"History of the Pestilence Commonly called Yellow Fever, which almost desolated Philadelphia in the months of August, September, and October, 1798"* (Philadelphia: R. Folwell, prtr., 1799).

William Currie, *"A Sketch of the rise and Progress of the Yellow Fever, and of the Proceedings of the Board of Health, in Philadelphia, in the year 1799; to which are added, a collection of facts and observations respecting the origin of the Yellow Fever in this Country and a Review of Different Methods of Treating it"* (Philadelphia, Budd & Bastram, 1800).

⁶ Powell,1.

mosquitos, weather, and disease was not to be made till many years later. To the old housewives, this type of autumn fever was known as “summer complaint” and many disregarded the early signs as merely seasonal. Then in August it began. On August 3rd, a young French Sailor who previously had been in Santo Domingo grew terribly ill with fever in Richard Denny’s Boarding House on North Water Street and would die a few days later.⁷ Many French refugees had been coming to Philadelphia due to the violence of the slave rebellion in Santo Domingo. In the following days more and more would come down with fever. The exact date cannot be identified; but community leader, doctor, and co-signer of the constitution Benjamin Rush wrote to his wife on August 21, 1793 that “a malignant fever has broken out in Water Street.”⁸ The death of Peter Aston on August 19th, Mrs. Lemaigre on the 20th, and Thomas Miller on the 25th were said “to spread universal terror” among the citizens of Philadelphia according to journalist Mathew Carey.⁹ In a few short days, fear and terror of this yellow fever would grip the citizens of Philadelphia. On August 25th-26th, the city of Philadelphia called for the medical leaders of the city to come and discuss this disease. Sixteen out of the twenty-six doctors in the city gathered. Most importantly the doctors included those of William Currie and Benjamin Rush¹⁰ whose influence on the disease would be monumental in their care, writings, and reflections after the disease had passed. However, the dilemma to solve the disease was not reached. In fact, the two leading doctors of Currie and Rush not only disagreed, but found themselves with opposing views in treatment causing further confusion. Rush wrote, “the fever has assumed a most alarming appearance. It not only mocks in most instances the power of

⁷ Jim Murphy, *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793* (New York: Clairon Books), 7.

⁸ Benjamin Rush, ed. L.H. Butterfield, *Letters of Benjamin Rush, Volume II: 1793-1813* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 637.

⁹ Mathew Carey, *Short Account of the Malignant Fever, lately prevelant in Philadelphia, 4th ed.* (Philadelphia, 1793).

¹⁰ Benjamin Rush, *Account of the Bilious Remitting Yellow Fever* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1793).

medicine, but it has spread through several parts of the city remote from where it originated.”¹¹ The College of Physicians published a decree which encouraged citizens to smoke cigars, burn gunpowder in the streets, bathe in vinegar, clean the house, and remove the filth of their houses and the city. Many of the doctors felt the impurity of the city air was one of the chief causes. Despite the college’s instructions, there was a lack of doubt of how effective it would be. Rush wrote his wife Julia, “Tomorrow the directions of the College of Physicians will be published. I hope they will do good, but I fear no efforts will totally subdue the fever before the heavy rains or frosts of October.”¹²

While the doctors and officials debated the disease, it raged on throughout the city. Citizens lived in constant fear, and no longer engaged in the friendly conversations that often took place on the streets of Philadelphia. People would walk in the middle of the streets and avoid funerals, doctors, and ministers as they even avoided “acquaintances and friends and only signified their regard by a cold nod.”¹³ Philadelphian citizen Elizabeth Drinker wrote of the tragedy in her diary on August 28th, 1793, “There is a man next door but one to us, who Dr. Kuhn says will quickly die of this terrible disorder. Caty Prusia, over against us is very ill, and a man at ye Shoemakers next door to Neighr Waln’s; some sick in our Alley.”¹⁴ Death seemed to permeate every aspect of life. The church bell in the town was a constant reminder that upon another toll, another one of Philadelphia’s citizens had died. Children even smoked cigars, as instructed by their parents to help purify the air around them from disease!¹⁵

¹¹ Rush, *Letters*, 640.

¹² *Ibid*, 642.

¹³ Carey, *Short Account* .

¹⁴ Elizabeth Drinker, *Diaries* (Philadelphia, 1793), Wednesday, August 28, 1793.

¹⁵ Carey.

Many people began to flee the city. Already President Washington had fled the city which had caused the federal government to shut down; this was due to congress declaring it unconstitutional to meet outside the capital in order to avoid the promotion of sectional tendencies and support. Governor Millfin had also fled, which gave Mayor Clarkson an extraordinary amount of authority. The mayor of Philadelphia, under normal circumstances, virtually had no power coexisting in the same town as the governor of Pennsylvania and the President of the United States. However, when everyone fled Mayor Clarkson became the primary head of authority, even if unconstitutionally, and conducted much of the business of the city by “twelve men” as he would later write.¹⁶ Other citizens noted this great exodus from the city. Elizabeth Drinker wrote, “Isaac Wharton and family are moved out of Town, P. Hatshorne’s family, and Neighr Waln also out; the inhabitants are leaving the city in great numbers.”¹⁷ Dr. Rush wrote to his wife Julia, “After this detail of the state of the fever, I need hardly to request you to remain for a while with all the children where you are. Many people are flying from the city, and some by my advice.”¹⁸ Philadelphia was the home of many newspapers, but soon Philadelphia would be limited to only one paper that would print on a daily basis- the *Federal Gazette* by Andrew Brown.¹⁹ Many prominent leaders were leaving behind the city of Philadelphia. To the sick it seemed there was little hope. As Andrew Brown would write in his poem *Pestilence*, “Nature’s poisons here collected, water, earth, and air infected- o, what a pity, such a city, was in such a place erected.”²⁰

¹⁶ Murphy, 68.

¹⁷ Drinker, Wednesday, August 28, 1793.

¹⁸ Rush, *Letters*, 641.

¹⁹ Murphy, 87.

²⁰ Andrew Brown, *Federal Gazette* (September 1793)

“A SPECIAL RESISTANCE TO THE DISEASE”

As the doctors and nurses grew very limited in their ability to handle all the patients, it became a necessity to seek help by any means available. Dr. Rush alone claimed on September 11 to have received upwards of over 100 patients.²¹ This overwhelming amount of patients called for the involvement of citizens, but with citizens themselves getting sick, who would volunteer?

The answer to such a question came in the form of the African American community. There were a couple of events that prepared the community to be adequately prepared to meet the task at hand.

To begin with, they had formed an organization known as the Free African Society on April 12, 1778. The founders of the Society were Absalom Jones and Richard Allen. Jones and Allen were both former slaves. Allen was able to buy his freedom after his slave owner was convicted in church by Reverend Freeborn Gatterson in 1775, and Jones worked extra to first buy the freedom of his wife and then his own freedom in 1784. The purpose of the Free African Society as stated by the preamble was to form a society “without regard to religious tenets, provided, the person lived an orderly and sober life, in order to support one another in sickness, and for the benefit of their widows and fatherless children.”²² This became the first African American public social organization and the leaders of this organization would go on to become the first African American ministers in their respective denominations.

²¹ Rush, 659.

²² Rev. Douglass WM ed., *Annals of the First African Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: King & Baird Printers, 1862), 15.

Another reason of African American availability was due to their slavery and poverty. The citizens who could afford to leave Philadelphia did. However, the cost of leaving Philadelphia left the African American community intact and the Free African Society available; as well as some African Americans still being held as slaves in the city.

The justification for addressing the group came from Dr. Lining. Dr. Lining was a general practitioner in South Carolina. He was the first American doctor to publish information about Yellow Fever, and did so in his letter “A Description of the American Yellow Fever” to Dr. Robert Whytt at Edinburgh in 1753. In this letter he suggested that African Americans were actually immune to the disease of Yellow Fever. This publication would become influential in white support of African American involvement in the epidemic of 1793. Dr. Rush published this view on September 3, 1793 in the *American Daily Advertiser*. It is from this article where Mathew Carey took the famous phrase for his book *Short Account*, “there is something very singular in the constitution of the negroes... which renders them not liable to this fever.” It is from this belief that many whites in Philadelphia were under the assumption that blacks simply could not get the fever and therefore “God had seen fit to grant a special resistance to the special disease.”²³

THE REALITIES OF YELLOW FEVER

While many claimed that African Americans could not be affected by the Yellow Fever, this could not be further from the truth. As a matter of fact, the Yellow Fever of Philadelphia claimed the lives of many of African Americans. Jones and Allen write of their experience, “Early in September, a solicitation appeared in the public papers, to the people of colour to come

²³ Murpy, 47.

forward and alift the distressed, perishing, and neglected sick; with a kind of assurance, that people of our colour were not liable to take the infection.”²⁴ However, Jones and Allen would write later of this grossly inaccurate belief. After the plague they would write, “It is even to this day a generally received opinion in this city, that our colour was not so liable to the sickness as the whites. We hope our friends will pardon us for setting this matter in its true state.”²⁵ Jones and Allen went on to talk about the complete devastation of 1793 as opposed to 1792 by citing Matthew Whitehead, John Ormorod, and Joseph Dolby to “convince any reasonable man that will examine it, that as many coloured people died in proportion to others. In 1792 were 67 of colour buried, and in 1793 it amounted to 305; thus the burials among us have increased more than fourfold, was not this in a great degree the effects of the services of the unjustly vilified black people?”²⁶

Therefore, it is important to realize the general public belief was not only wrong, but also deadly and naïve resulting in the death of many African Americans. However, there must be some slack given to the Philadelphian community. For many, including Rush, were abolitionists and sincerely believed that the African Americans could face this disease unscathed. As the disease progressed, many Philadelphians began to realize how susceptible the African American community was. Isaac Heston wrote in a letter to his brother, ‘I don’t know what the people would do if it was not for the Negroes, as they are Principal nurses.’²⁷ Rush also wrote, “if the disorder should continue to spread among them then will the measure of suffering be full.”²⁸ Rush also wrote, “It was not [much] longer after these worthy Africans undertook the execution

²⁴ Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People...* (Philadelphia: 1793), 3.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 15.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 16.

²⁷ Murphy, 55.

²⁸ *Ibid*.

of their humane offer of services to the sick, before I was convinced I had been mistaken. They took the disease, in common with the white people, and many of them died with it... A large number of them were my patients.”²⁹

The reason for so much confusion regarding the Yellow Fever Epidemic was that no one understood what caused the disease in the first place or what the disease was. Many tried different attempts in solving the issue.

Dr. Rush, the leading doctor in Philadelphia was a believer in a common practice called bloodletting. Bloodletting was an ancient practice that had been common for over 2,500 years. It involved allowing the patient to bleed, because it was believed that by doing so a patient’s blood could move around more freely. By the blood moving around more freely a patient would then be able to be healed faster. Eventually Rush even used a practice known as the “Ten-and-Ten” where a patient was to swallow ten grains of calomel and ten grains of jalap, which were highly toxic.³⁰ It was a hope that the toxins would kill the disease present in the body. Rush would use both of these practices to then purge the body. This caused his patients to lose a drastic amount of blood and lower recover rates. A cause for this was that doctors at the time believed that the human body contained twenty five pounds of blood when in reality blood makes up on average 7% of the human body. Dr. Deveze wrote of Rush, “He is a scourge more fatal to the human kind than the plague itself would be.”³¹

Other doctors such as the ones at Bush Hill practiced a much more simple form of treatment. This treatment involved rest, fluid, and nutrition and allowing the body to fight off

²⁹ Rush, *An account of the bilious remitting fever, as it appeared in Philadelphia in the summer and autumn of the year 1793* (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1794), 97.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 61.

³¹ *Ibid*, 62.

the symptoms. This was a common French philosophy of medicine at the time opposed to Rush and the American treatment. Regardless, neither side understood Yellow Fever, and as both parties claimed success, more people died each day. The African Americans practiced Dr. Rush's techniques; mainly because it was Rush who had called upon them to help the community.

The reality of the disease was that in fact it was caused by a mosquito. More particularly, a female *Aedes aegypti*, as the males do not bite³². It seems that humanity at this time was well aware that there was something about the heavy rain followed by drought and heat that brought about disease, yet little did they know it was because of the shallow stagnant pools which produced a breeding place for mosquitos. The Romans often believed that there were invisible animals that would come out and cause plague, however they did not suspect these "invisible animals" were insects carrying viruses.³³

There are three main forms of transmission when it comes to Yellow Fever.³⁴ There is Jungle Transmission which occurs when a mosquito bites a primate and then spreads the disease into that primate. Then another mosquito comes along biting that primate, picking up the virus, and spreading it to the next primate it bites. Urban Transmission functions in a similar way as Jungle Transmission except with human vectors. The main difference however, is that humans are much more mobile than other primate populations. If a human is bit in one city and then travels to another city, the mosquito population need only to bite the human carrying the Yellow Fever disease in order to spread the epidemic and affect another population. The final

³² Powell, xix.

³³ Ibid, xx.

³⁴ Holly Cefrey, *Epidemics: Deadly Diseases throughout History: Yellow Fever* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group Inc, 2002), 14-15.

transmission is known as Intermediate transmission which functions in a hybrid way between primates and humans. Cities close to the tropics are in danger of such a plague, as their population is close to possibly infected primate populations.

In the case of the Yellow Fever plague in Philadelphia it likely some form of Intermediate transmission was at work. In support of this, are some inferences that can be made which would have serious implications regarding the spread of the disease. To begin with, the weather conditions would have brought about favorable mosquito breeding grounds.³⁵ More impressively, author A.B. contributor of *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* in 1793 wrote, "As the late rains will produce a great increase of mosquitoes in the city, distressing to the sick, and troublesome to those who are well, I imagine it will be agreeable to the citizens to know that the increase of those poisonous insects may be diminished by a very simple and cheap mode, which accident discovered. Whoever will take the trouble to examine them, will find millions of the mosquitoes fishing about the water with great agility in a state not quite prepared to emerge and fly off, take up a wine glass full of water, and it will exhibit them very distinctly. Into this glass pour half a teaspoon full, or less, of any common oil, which will quickly diffuse over the surface, and by excluding the air, will destroy the whole brood."³⁶ This suggests the heavy population of mosquitos that seemed to be coexisting during the late summer and fall of 1793. The question remains whether the mosquitos were already dormant with the disease. It seems unlikely since, they did not suffer the plague during the early and midsummer months. It however, seems more likely the growing mosquito population thrived under the warm weather

³⁵ Isaac Cathrall, *A Medical Sketch of the Synochus Maligna, or Malignant Contagious Fever, as It Lately Appeared in the City of Philadlephia* (Philadelphia: T. Dobson, 1794).

Thomas Condie and Richard Folwell, *History of the Pestilence...* (Philadelphia: R. Folwell, 1799).

Many other medical accounts also showed this example.

³⁶ A.B., *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, August 29, 1793.

and a vector carrying the disease brought it into town; thus allowing the indigenous mosquito population to get infected, an example of Urban Transmission.

The vector carrying this disease has an obvious explanation. As mentioned earlier, due to problems in the Dominican Republic many sailors and refugees from Santo Domingo came and settled in Philadelphia. This warm, tropical climate no doubt would have been subject to Intermediate Transmission and allowing for the disease to infect the local populations in the Dominican Republic. Those then who had contracted the virus in the Caribbean brought the virus to Philadelphia, allowing for the mosquito population to carry the disease to the rest of the citizens. This seems to explain why the disease died out as late November and December approached, because the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito can survive the mild winters of the southern United States (and the previous winter in 1792 in Philadelphia), but not the colder winter of 1793.³⁷

The Yellow Fever disease itself is a ravaging disease to the human body. It is most famous for its ability to cause liver and kidney failure. The reason the disease goes by the name Yellow Fever is due to the jaundicing of the skin when the liver fails.³⁸ The liver's job is to maintain and purify the blood, and is also vital in causing blood to clot. When the liver fails it leads to hemorrhaging, which is the discharging of blood in large amounts; another reason, why Dr. Rush's "blood-letting techniques" were deadly. The hemorrhaging led to bleeding anywhere there was a cut. This often caused blood to collect in the stomach as cuts would occur in the stomach and esophagus. As this blood gathered it would mix with the stomach acid and turn black. Those victims who caught Yellow Fever then would not only have the yellowing of skin

³⁷ Cefrey, 55.

³⁸ Ibid, 17.

and eyes, but would vomit black. Severe cases of Yellow Fever result in death usually around ten to fourteen days after infection.³⁹

“YET, THROUGH MERCY, WE WERE ABLE TO GO ON”

It is upon this scene and magnitude of disease, that the African American community were called upon to work. After the Free African Society discussed what their involvement would be in the plague they decided “we found a freedom to go forth, confiding in Him who can preserve in the midst of a burning fiery furnace, sensible that it was our duty to do all the good we could to our suffering fellow mortals.”⁴⁰ On their first day Jones and Allen recount scenes of woe where they visited over twenty families stricken by the disease. “We set out to see where we could be useful. The first we visited was a man in Emsley’s alley, who was dying, and his wife lay dead at the time in the house, there were none to assist but two poor helpless children.”⁴¹ They would also write, “When the morality came to its greatest stage, it was impossible to procure sufficient assistance, therefore many whose friends, and relations had left them, died unseen, and unassisted. We have found them in various situations, some laying on the floor, as bloody as if they had been dipped in it, without any appearance of their having had, even a drink of water for their relief; others laying on a bed with their clothes on, as if they had come in fatigued, and lain down to rest; some appeared, as if they had fallen dead on the floor, from the position we found them in.”⁴²

The African American community proceeded to get advice from Mayor Clarkson, who remained one of the few heads of authority in the community. The Free African Society was

³⁹ Ibid, 18.

⁴⁰ Jones & Allen, 3.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 17.

asked first to attend to the sick, and then to help remove the dead corpses from the city because “few [whites] were willing to do it, [even] when offered great rewards. The black people were looked to.”⁴³

Absalom Jones and Richard Allen recount the services of some of the great African American heroes who served. “A poor black man, named Sampson, went constantly from house to house where distress was, and no assistance without fee or reward; he was smote with the disorder, and died, after his death his family were neglected by those he had served.”⁴⁴ “Caesar Crachal, a black man, offered his services to attend the sick, and said, I will not take your money, I will not sell my life for money. It is said he died with the flux.”⁴⁵

“A young black woman, was requested to attend one night upon a white man and his wife, who were very ill, no other person could be had; great wages were offered her- she replied, I will not go for money, if I go for money God will see it, and maybe make me take the disorder and die, but if I go, and take no money, he may spare my life. She went about nine o’ clock, and found them both on the floor; she could procure no candle or other light, but staid with them about two hours, and left them. They both died that night. She was afterward very ill with the fever- her life was spared.”⁴⁶

Many more of these types of scenes are given. African Americans would enter bedsides of those yellow in the eyes and vomiting black upon themselves, yet they sought little reward. John Edgar Wideman wrote, “people who would have never dream of having a black person enter their front door, let alone their bedroom, were now dependent on a black person who was

⁴³ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

wielding a knife and who entered the bedroom and opened a vein.”⁴⁷ The theme of Shadrach, Meshach, or Abednego appeared to be the most apparent Biblical encouragement to those in trial. Even Dr. Rush wrote to Julia, “Hereafter my name should be Shadrach, Meshach, or Abednego, for I am sure the preservation of those men from death by fire was not a greater miracle than my preservation from the infection of the prevailing disorder.”⁴⁸ Even the optimistic Rush who assured the sick at their bedside “they have only but Yellow Fever” grew grave. He opened one letter to Julia, “The distress of our city increases, and the shafts of death fly closer and closer to us every day.”⁴⁹

Despite the help of the African Americans, there was nothing that could truly stop the disorder except the elimination of the mosquitos. This would not begin to happen until late October when Bush Hill famously raised a white flag announcing there was “no more sick persons here.”⁵⁰ However, this date was not conclusive, as in early November, Bush Hill would have to take down their prideful flag as they were once again filled with disease. It was not until late November that the plague was truly over. A full four months went by where disease ravaged the bodies of the inhabitants of our nation’s capital.

“BLACKER THAN WE ARE”

Concluding the events of 1793, there was not a survivor who was not deeply impacted. Many of the prominent citizens would go on to write of the events of the Yellow Fever and their experience with it. Among these was the Irish journalist Mathew Carey. Matthew Carey wrote a best-selling book of the event *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever, Lately Prevalent in*

⁴⁷ Otter, 33.

⁴⁸ Rush, *Letters*, 657.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 672.

⁵⁰ Powell, 279.

Philadelphia: With a Statement of the Proceedings That Took Place on the Subject, in Different Parts of the United States, To Which Are Added, Accounts of the Plague in London and Marseilles; and List of the Dead from August 1, to the Middle of December, 1793. There were several editions of this publication some of them under the same title and others took the title of *A Desultory Account* and *A Brief History*. The most prominent was the 3rd edition, which first contained the “List of the Dead” where pages and pages of those who were known to be dead were listed. This is one of the leading reasons why Carey’s book became a best-seller as many desired to see if their friends or family had their lives claimed by the disease.

However popular this book was of recapping the events of the plague, it was not without its critics. The largest critics were the heroes of the African Americans involved, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen. They were so outraged by the publication of *Short Account*, that they wrote their own response and account known as *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793: and a Refutation of Some Censures, Thrown upon Them in Some Late Publications*. The battle between the accounts of *Short Account* and *Narrative* give great insight to early American literature and historiography. Modern historians such as Phillip Lapsansky, Julia Stern, Philip Gould, and Joanna Brooks have recognized the importance of this debate and its effect on the development of national literature.⁵¹ There is a debate whether Carey had a balanced view and Jones and Allen were overreacting, or whether in fact Carey was short-sighted in his interpretation. It seems as history and science has progressed Carey is short in his scope. First, he is short due to a bad scientific understanding of Yellow Fever and believing that African Americans were resistant to the disease. Secondly, he had a misinformed understanding of the nature of capitalism and supply

⁵¹ Otter, 28.

and demand. Third, he also suffers from a blind spot to the atrocities committed by whites during the plague. The following will provide an outline of these two documents and will highlight the short comings in Carey's work as well as evaluate the critiques of Jones and Allen.

The first major point of contention was the commonly held belief propagated by Dr. Lining arguing that African Americans were immune to the Yellow Fever. Mathew Carey writes, "the number seized with it [Yellow Fever] was not great; and, as I am informed by an eminent doctor, 'it yielded to the power of medicine in them more readily than in the whites.'"⁵² This of course was a faulty conclusion, and undoubtedly drew a sharp critique from Jones and Allen who were mourning their own members of the Free African society whose number of deceased were over 300 in 1793.⁵³ There are several stories in *Narrative* that account for blacks who died in their service to the fellow citizens of Philadelphia. Further, Richard Allen, a leader of the Free African Society and co-author of *Narrative*, contracted the Yellow Fever disease. In Carey defense as previously mentioned, most modern medical historians believe there was a bit of truth in terms of percentage that less African Americans died from the disease.⁵⁴ The most common explanation is the blacks of Philadelphia emigrated from the southern United States, the West Indies, or Africa and "had previously been exposed and had developed some resistance."

Therefore, even with a little bit of resistance to the plague, it is no surprise that under such severe conditions that whites were willing to push this truth into immunity. There was such a need for aid that whites were willing to cling to this half-truth. This is even more evident in that following the plague of 1793, the belief of African American immunity continued. Despite the overwhelming evidence, it gave American white society a reason to cling to such a belief that

⁵² Carey, 78.

⁵³ Jones & Allen, 16.

⁵⁴ Otter, 31.

blacks could not contract the disease. Dr. Rush realizing the foolishness of such a belief after his experiences in Philadelphia wrote a treatise in 1799, which satirically jabbed the viewpoint of medical advantage due to skin color.⁵⁵

The second major critique of Mathew Carey's work by Absalom Jones and Richard Allen has to do with a paragraph found in the first and second editions. The paragraph claims that African Americans were taking advantage of whites who were sick. "The great demand for nurses offered an opportunity for imposition, which was eagerly seized by some of the vilest of the blacks. They exhorted two, three, four, and even five dollars a night for attendance, which would have been well paid by a single dollar. Some of them were even detected in plundering the house of the sick."⁵⁶ This infuriated Jones, Allen, and the black community. Even more infuriating is that Mathew Carey did not see this as a problem for he would later pen, "But it is wrong to cast a censure on the whole for this sort of conduct, as many people have done. The services of Jones, Allen, and Gray, and others of their color, have been very great, and demand public gratitude." This writing style made Carey appear as sympathetic to the African American plight yet, realistic about "their nature".

This upset Jones and Allen for they saw their fellow African Americans working in houses and knew of their deeds. In *Narratives* they critiqued Carey's understanding of wages. Carey believed that African Americans were monopolizing on the nursing industry and therefore were able to overcharge to their own profit. To be fair, this was merely a demonstration of capitalism and supply and demand. With the limited amount of nurses, many of those with loved ones who were sick were willing to pay through the roof for a nurse to serve their family. It was

⁵⁵ Ibid, 32.

⁵⁶ Carey, 76.

then up to the black nurses to choose whom to serve. It is hard to blame a former slave for taking a job worth more money than another, even in light of a crisis, especially concerning that most blacks did not know how to make a business proposal and would have followed the seemingly most logical transaction (i.e. the one that pays the best)⁵⁷. The African American response was, “it was natural for people in low circumstances to accept a voluntary, bounteous reward; especially under the loathsomeness of many of the sick, when nurture shuddered at the thoughts of the infection.”⁵⁸ Absalom Jones and Richard Allen write, “At first we made no charge, but left it to those we served in removing their dead to give what they thought fit- we set no price, until the reward was fixed by those we had served.”⁵⁹

Jones and Allen were not content to have the African American community attacked in such a way, especially by those who did not walk the streets and homes of those that smelled of death and were covered in the vile black vomit and dried blood of those who had been treated by blood-letting. “We feel ourselves sensibly aggrieved by the censorious epithets of many, who did not render the least assistance in the time of necessity, yet are liberal of their censure of us, for the prices paid for our services.”⁶⁰ It seemed the most outrageous to Jones and Allen that these attacks were coming from the very people who had fled the city in its time of need. Jones and Allen also make this attack against Mathew Carey, however it is important to note that while Carey did flee the city he also came back. Carey writes in his April 1794 “Address to the Public” that the reason for him leaving for two weeks near the end of September was due to business that he had to take care of and that he returned in the beginning of October.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Jones & Allen, 5.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 8.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 6.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 5.

⁶¹ Otter, 36.

Regardless of whether Carey was in Philadelphia during the plague, many critiques came from those who had fled the city and those who had not been with the African Americans in their service to the citizens of Philadelphia. Dr. Rush wrote of the black importance during the plague, “if the disorder should continue to spread among them then will the measure of our suffering be full.”⁶²

Also, it did not suffice Jones and Allen to leave the public with the idea that the African Americans benefited from serving during the Yellow Fever plague. “After paying the people we had to assist us, our compensation is much less than many will believe.”⁶³ While capitalism and supply and demand favored their services, it was not even sufficient enough to help them pay for the medicine, wages, and expenses of supplies that they used to pour back into the community. In *Narratives*, a spread sheet is contained describing the expenses used by the Free African Society. The total amount of Cash Received by the Free African society for the burying of the dead was 233.10 pounds. The amount of money the Free African Society used to paid for coffins and hiring men was 411.00 pounds. This left the Free African Society 177.90 pounds out of pocket.⁶⁴ Notice the Cash Paid only included wages and coffins, this did not include the other special expenses that came out of pocket by African Americans. Jones and Allen write, “But, if the other expenses, which we have actually paid, are added to that sum, how much then may we not say we have suffered! We leave the public to judge.”⁶⁵

The third main critique in *Narratives of Short Account* is that while *Short Account* is critical of vile behavior of African Americans during the plague, it turns a blind eye to the white

⁶² Murphy, 55.

⁶³ Jones & Allen, 6.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 7.

communities' atrocities. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen are however quick to point them out in light of the attacks against the African American community. "We with not to offend, but when an unprovoked attempt is made, to make us blacker than we are, it becomes less necessary to be over cautious on that account; therefore we shall take liberty to tell of the conduct of some of the whites."⁶⁶ *Narratives* is then filled with stories of whites who charged forty dollars apiece to put a woman in a coffin and bring it down the stairs, drunk white nurses caught with stealing possessions of the sick, and neglect of the poor and oppressed.⁶⁷ This is followed by accounts of black nurses who gave charity to all, even at their own expense. It is important to note that although there may have been some blacks who committed travesties during this time, it was far over played due to racism. Carey's *Short Account* provides a general statement concerning the vileness of blacks from a second hand perspective, while *Narrative* gives exact accounts of both blacks and whites from first-hand accounts. Jones and Allen put it best in the statement, "We can with certainty assure the public that we have seen more humanity, more real sensibility from the poor blacks, than from the poor whites."⁶⁸

In closing remarks concerning *Narratives* and *Short Account*, is to highlight their implication. In a sense, *Narratives* failed in its impact; largely, because *Short Account* became popular as a best-seller due to its list of the dead and promptness of printing proceeding the event. However, *Narrative* also has had the last word so to speak. The words of *Narrative* became the foundation to pave the way as the first real public critique by African Americans and led to the rise of the African American voice in the 19th century by writers such as Frederick

⁶⁶ Ibid, 9.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid,10.

Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Frank.J. Webb.⁶⁹ It is also worth noting the impact *Narratives* made on Carey, who would later revisit his work *Short Account* and make several revisions, most importantly a statement qualifying his attacks against the blacks, “*but many of them did their duty to the sick, with a degree of patience and tenderness that did them great credit.*”⁷⁰

REDEMPTIVE THEODICY

After dealing with the horrors of the Yellow Fever and the scenes of melancholy upon which the black nurses would come across, it has made historians ask the question, “what motivated them to help?” As Jones and Allen recalled in *Narratives* many African Americans died, the Free African Society came out negative, they were treated with contempt, and ultimately society did not appreciate their efforts except for a few.

The easy answer is that found in *Narrative*. It is a two-fold answer that African Americans “found a freedom” to go forth due to a trust in God who can help them “persevere in the midst of a burning fiery furnace” and that “it was our duty to do all the good we could to our suffering fellow mortals.” The first part of this answer does not seem to pose much of a problem. Following one’s heart due to a belief in the protection of God leads to a logical progression to be involved with such morbid affairs. However, it is interesting that an oppressed community can feel their duty is to help “suffering fellow mortals”, who held many of them as slaves, and who would attack the nature of blacks, as Carey did, after the events of the Yellow Fever in 1793.

If a people group believes in God, such as late 18th century African Americans, and they believe God is a good God; and if they also believe God is all-powerful and in control, they must

⁶⁹ Otter, 40.

⁷⁰Ibid, 36.

come to terms with why their people group is so oppressed. The term most commonly associated with this is theodicy; the problem of evil if there is a good God. African American church scholar Anthony Pinn lists several of the options that a people group can face with suffering.⁷¹ There are three main options. The first is that God is not all-powerful and that evil or an evil figure (the devil) has the ability to cause problems that God cannot prevent. The second is that God plays favorites. This makes God a racist and He favors some nations over others, although this could also be based on a nation's good work. The third and final option is that God is allowing suffering in order to produce character. It appears that this is the clear option for African Americans wrestling with theodicy. The first option is not attractive, because it goes against the Christian teaching of an all-powerful God. The second option is problematic, because no black person is going to worship a "racist God". Not only this, but if God's wrath is based on works it would seem that the white oppressors should be suffering and those obeying God should be blessed. Therefore, the logical conclusion is that God is allowing this suffering to produce character. This sort of theodicy is called Redemptive Theodicy or Redemptive Suffering, because there is a positive quality that is "redemptive" from suffering.

Anthony Pinn writes extensively of Redemptive Theodicy in his works, and outlines the traces of this thought throughout African American history. Redemptive Theodicy is found particularly in the songs, poetry, and sermons of African Americans.⁷² One of the most common places Redemptive Theodicy can be found is in African American spirituals. In the spiritual "Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel" it ends with the phrase, "can't you see it's coming." This is speaking of the deliverance of the African American people. Just as God had delivered Daniel, Jonah, and others before; their deliverance was only a matter of time. This theme is reiterated in

⁷¹ Anthony Pinn, *Why Lord?: Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

⁷² Marcus Wood, ed., *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology 1764-1865* (New York: Oxford, 2003).

“Blow Your Trumpet O Gabriel”, which is a plea for the trumpet to sound and for the temporary suffering to fade and for African Americans to be caught up into the New Jerusalem. Another popular spiritual “Oh Freedom” claims that “before I’d be a slave, I’ll be buried in my grave, and go home to my Lord and be free.”

It is obvious that this theodicy and belief is present in African American religious thought. Pinn lists the main components of a spiritual claiming to have African American theology: full reality of the oppressed, conception of God and Jesus Christ, conception of heaven, and an appeal to scripture.⁷³ These elements can most clearly be in the spirituals. The idea of God as the true judge who will grant eternal rewards and peace someday has allowed for African American communities to continue in their faith throughout turbulent times. This is also why many of the themes include: “a just God, just principles, a son of God who lived and died to see to it that justice would come to all people, including the poor and the untouchable and those who made mistakes and those who had little to offer besides their mere small selves.”⁷⁴ Where this connects with the Yellow Fever plague of 1793 is that it was the main cause of their involvement.

Besides the largest piece of evidence being found in the generally held belief of African Americans, it can specifically be pointed to Absalom Jones. Anthony Pinn argues in his book *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering* that Absalom Jones’ sermon “*A Thanksgiving Day Sermon*” is one of the chief documents supporting the belief.

The sermon, “*A Thanksgiving Day Sermon*”, was delivered January 1, 1808 in St. Thomas African Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. This sermon was a direct response to

⁷³ Pinn, *Why Lord?*, 27.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 29.

Congress' decision to abolish the Slave Trade from Africa, as declared by Absalom Jones in the sermon⁷⁵. The sermon was preached from Exodus 3:7-8 where God is speaking to Moses and says, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up from that land to a land that is both good and spacious." Absalom then begins to describe God as unchangeable and that even in their day God saw their great affliction. "They [the Israelites] were not forgotten by the God of their fathers, and the Father of the human race."⁷⁶ Interestingly, Jones highlights that God did wait to redeem them from slavery for a time, a characteristic of Redemptive Theodicy, "though, for wise reasons, he delayed to appear in their behalf for several hundred years; yet he was not indifferent to their sufferings."

Another main proponent of this theodicy is outlined in the statement, "His [God's] eye and his ear were constantly open to their complaint: every tear they shed, was preserved, and every groan they uttered, was recorded; in order to testify, at a future day, against the authors of their oppressions." This further underlines the notion that African Americans rights will one day be made right before God's throne as suggested in many of their spirituals. Redemptive Theodicy does not paint God as blind to their plight, but rather as using the current plight to produce character and at the end of time there will be a final judgment of rewards and punishments which will render all things with absolute justice. God is aware of the plight of African Americans and will deliver them after a time, as indicated by the abolition of the slave trade.

⁷⁵ Absalom Jones, *A Thanksgiving Day Sermon* (Philadelphia: Jan. 1, 1808).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The sermon also outlines the benefits of the current suffering. While suffering is overall viewed as terrible, there are benefits and a purpose to it. Jones writes, “It has always been a mystery, why the impartial Father of the human race should have permitted the transportation of so many millions of our fellow creatures to this country, to endure all the miseries of slavery. Perhaps his design was that a knowledge of the gospel might be acquired by some of their descendants, in order that they might become qualified to be the messengers of it, to the land of their fathers.”⁷⁷ The idea of this being that African Americans have been introduced to the gospel and now have the opportunity to return with it to Africa. Jones also writes that the slaves have learned English and other valuable tools from being slaves in America that they can now use to further their lives. It is the idea of identifying with Joseph who endured slavery and imprisonment, but God used it for the good of mankind (Gen. 45:5).

Therefore, with all this in mind; it seems quite probable that Redemptive Suffering as a theodicy was the primary factor in causing African American involvement in the Philadelphia Yellow Fever of 1793; especially since Absalom Jones himself was such a proponent of the theodicy in his works. African Americans saw their plight as an opportunity to grow through their current suffering and used it in the midst of a Yellow Fever plague to glorify God and work for the good of mankind.

FINAL ANALYSIS OF REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING UNDER MODERN CRITIQUE

Although Redemptive Theodicy seemed to persuade African Americans to be involved as nurses to help their fellow countrymen against the Yellow Fever plague; there are theologians, sociologists, and historians who believe moral redemptive suffering is bad and at worst enslaving.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

The reason for their hostility towards Redemptive Suffering can be explained for a number of reasons.

To begin with, the rise of humanism has led to a focus on the efforts of man. Particularly this humanism in ecclesiastical thought is known as humanocentric theism, due to its tendency to include God in the work. The argument is that humans must fight against injustice and oppression for their rights, because it is God's will that none be oppressed and that all men are equal. They attack men such as Absalom Jones in his "Thanksgiving Day Sermon" for seeing a positive nature in suffering.⁷⁸ If someone finds value in suffering, Pinn argues that they will never be liberated. "These arguments [for Redemptive Suffering] are unacceptable because they counteract efforts at liberation by finding something of value in black suffering. Redemptive suffering and liberation are diametrically opposed ideas; they suggest ways of being in the world that, in effect, nullify each other. One cannot embrace suffering as redemptive and effectively speak of liberation."⁷⁹ The attacks go so far as to even include Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Delores Williams writes that "Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others who assume to appeal to the moral conscience of their white oppressors"⁸⁰ teach this enslaving doctrine of redemptive suffering.

Also, there has been an attack within Christianity at the cross of Jesus Christ. More and more, there is a negative opinion of the cross of suffering⁸¹. This is due to a shift in the view that Jesus did not have to die on the cross; the cross was actually a result of "evil people" killing someone who was good. Delores Williams write of how the mistreatment of African American

⁷⁸ Anthony Pinn, *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering*, 37.

⁷⁹ Pinn, *Why Lord?*, 17-8.

⁸⁰ Pinn, *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering*, 13.

⁸¹ Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).
Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York:HarperCollins, 2011)

women is justified through “the traditional doctrines of atonement and standard Christologies” and that “there is nothing good in this shedding of blood.”⁸² Jesus’ teachings than becomes the primary focus of good over evil. However, this absolving of the atonement and the cross is not consistent with Christianity’s holy text the Bible. Jesus Himself claims the cross was the will of His Father who sent Him in Mark’s gospel (14:36). In addition, the gospel of Luke portrays Jesus setting His face towards Jerusalem in order to fulfill his purpose of dying on the cross (9:51). It seems the most logical reason to overlook such an apparent theme in the Bible, is the unpopular notion of substitutionary atonement; the idea that God needed a payment for sins, and Jesus’ sinless blood served to cover these sins. The reason for this unpopularity is due to the rise in secular humanism and post-modernism to declare people inherently good or morality to be completely relative. There is a disregard for the doctrine of sin and everlasting rewards and punishments. When one disregards sin and everlasting rewards and punishments, the cross of Jesus becomes highly unnecessary as well as Redemptive Theodicy. This is of course the action that humanists and post-modern theologians such as Anthony Pinn, Delores Williams, William R. Jones, Brian McLaren, and Rob Bell embrace. Anthony Pinn concludes that “black suffering is so massive and Black “theodicy” so detrimental that all possible alternatives need exploring...Such an expansion of thought is vital to Black theology’s self-critical stance and communal relevance.”⁸³

Therefore, since we have concluded that Redemptive Suffering Theodicy was at work in the African American involvement of the Yellow Fever, was this limiting and detrimental to liberty for the African American community? This must be answered with a resounding “No!” It is interesting that those arguing in favor of humanism must label the works of Martin Luther

⁸²Pinn, *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering*, 13.

⁸³ Pinn, *Why Lord?*, 20.

King, Jr., Frederick Douglass, and Absalom Jones as detrimental. Is it not individuals such as these that have made the greatest impact in the world? As a matter of fact, when considering the most influential world leaders who have fought for justice it is through their suffering that justice was achieved. Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Dr. King, and Jesus of Nazareth all serve as primary examples of individuals who have made an impact yet have dealt with suffering. Why is this? It is because suffering inevitably changes and impacts the oppressor. Benjamin Rush and Mayor Clarkson were moved by the African American's involvement in the fever and fought for their justice. Not only this, historians, clergymen, and all people who encounter the heroic deeds of the African American community are moved by compassion of their perseverance and service through suffering. In the civil rights era, it was Malcolm X who suggested a "violent" version of humanism in the Black Panthers. However, this was only successful at breeding hatred, not causing a revolution.

It interesting that in Pinn's writing he mentions how Redemptive Suffering Theodicy has been the "dominant perspective" of blacks who have dealt with suffering.⁸⁴ He then argues, it is imperative to rid African American communities of this vice. Yet, it seems Pinn has not considered that perhaps the reasons for this idea's dominance are found its truthfulness and its impact it has made on society. Dwight Hopkins offers this rebuttal in his critique of *Why Lord?* by declaring, "if belief in fruitful suffering motivates people of theistic faith to fight for a better earthly social reconfiguration, then redemptive suffering is beneficial."⁸⁵ There has been no observable evidence to the contrary, while there has been observable evidence such as Dr. King's impact, as well as smaller stories such as Absalom Jones and Richard Allen's impact on society.

⁸⁴ Pinn, *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering*, 19.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 17.

The history books have yet to write favorably on a person who claimed their own rights and did not find suffering redemptive.

As a final note in how this theodicy works it is important to revisit Absalom Jones and Richard Allen's work *Narratives*. The purpose of *Narratives* was to address a "partial representation of the conduct of the people" on behalf of those involved in the event. Jones and Allen do not write for their own glory, because they in fact had received glory in Carey's *Short Account*. Instead, they "step forwarded and declared facts as they were" in order to set the record straight on behalf of those blacks who were socially worse off than themselves due to the medias attack. This is the heart of the matter. Redemptive Suffering is beneficial because it calls for a voice from those who are in a position of authority to speak on the behalf of the oppressed. The model for this is found in the biblical example Esther who being elected to the courts of the Persian empire is called upon to speak on the behalf of the oppressed Jewish nation for "who knows if she has not come to the kingdom such a time as this (Es. 4:14)?" The biblical account is constantly calling for those to remember the oppressed, widow, and sojourner (Is. 1:17, Jm 1:27). The Israelite nation who were former slaves to the Egyptians are called to treat other sojourners with a high standard, because they themselves were once strangers in a strange land (Ex. 22:21). The idea of Redemptive Suffering based on a theistic model is for those who are in positions of power to stand up for those who are oppressed. The suffering serves to produce character in those undergoing it, and to cause others in power to save their own souls by answering the call. Jones and Allen perfectly demonstrate this call to not fight for their own rights, but for the other black nurses whose efforts were scoffed at and belittled.

It is from this basis in which one must inevitably evaluate Redemptive Suffering and how it couples with the African American involvement in the Yellow Fever Plague of 1793 in

Philadelphia. The emergence of information and books upon this event, as well as accounts of Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, serves as testimony to the positive impact in their involvement that was motivated by Redemptive Suffering. Redemptive Suffering promotes a positive way of social change that stands in stark contrast with the humanism of today. The great problem of humanism lies in the fight for one's own rights becoming overlapped with pride and selfishness. If Absalom Jones and Richard Allen embraced this philosophy would they have been compelled to help save a city of their oppressors? Or would they have let them die in hopes that a city would learn its lesson about equal rights? Of course, this is speculation but the frightening stroke of selfishness involved in humanism makes such a conclusion seem logical. There is a better way to live and it is the selfless sort of living promoted by African Americans in the late 18th century in Philadelphia. They did not need to seek their own rights, but were gracious even in suffering, and allowed for their present suffering not to deter the progression that would flow from their social changing service. It is as Yale theologian Miroslav Volf suggests, "The practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance."⁸⁶ It is when we fight for our own rights that the "blood of the innocent will soak a sun-scorched land." A belief in end rewards and punishments, allows for non-violence and peace, because one day a Righteous Judge will make all things right.

⁸⁶ Tim Keller, *A Reason for God* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 73.

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