Reading assignment: Noll, Civil War 22-50; Course Reader 46-48 (Curse of Ham)

I. Biblical Context for the Civil War as a Theological Crisis
   A. Views of the Bible by 1860
      1. It promoted republican political theory
      2. It was accessible to every thinking person
      3. It defined liberty
      4. It opposed the tyranny of inherited religious authority
      5. It forecast the providential destiny of the U.S.
      6. It was best interpreted by the common sense of ordinary people (Noll, CW 22)
   
   B. Ideological reasons for conflict over scripture
      2. Republicanism – virtuous character and action linked to political liberty and flourishing of society as well as a view of vice as deriving from corrupt and tyrannical government and collapse of social order (Noll, CW 23)
      3. View of authority and stability as deriving from constitutional principle as demonstrated in the written instruments of the government. As a corollary to this view of the constitution, religious authority was attributed to the Bible (Noll, CW 23)
      4. Change in views of virtue – prior Augustinian view of virtue as the gift of God to the regenerate replaced with view of virtue as the possibility of all people on the basis of natural endowments from God (Noll, CW 24)
      5. American Christians believed they could explain connections between the condition of the state and the virtues and vices that propelled public action based on Enlightenment views of cause and effect and truth (Noll, CW 25)
   
   C. American national identity/culture created by constitution forming the components of a civil society (Noll, CW 25):
      1. Voluntary societies arising from disestablishment
      2. Market economics
      3. Separation of church and state (disestablishment)
      4. Commonsense reasoning in place of rejected intellectual traditions (Noll, CW 26)
      5. Evangelical revivals and religious schisms affected the political life as well as spiritual life of Americans (Noll, CW 27)
D. Crisis over the Bible leading to Civil War:
   1. Doubt all-sufficiency of scripture (Noll, Civil War 31).
   2. Rejection of a priori authority, including Bible.
   3. Look to scientific, legal, literary, business, principles as authority.
   4. Secular, consumer-oriented, religiously pluralistic society after Civil War.

E. Opposing stances of abolitionists & pro-slavery apologists:
   1. Abolitionists like William Garrison – no longer viewed scripture as indisputable truth.
   2. Pro-slavery apologists like Van Dyke accused Garrison of substituting scripture for principles of freedom (Noll, Civil War 32).

F. Methods used in slavery debates:
   1. Moral reasoning
   2. Biblical exegesis
   3. Arguments about the general meaning of the Bible

G. Crisis created by use of Bible in slavery arguments (Noll, Civil War 32):
   1. Discovered Bible wasn't univocal, easy to interpret, or unifying
   2. Fewer people turned to Bible as authoritative source re: race or the transformation of the American economy (Noll, Civil War 33).

II. Biblical Defense of Slavery – based on simplicity of their exegetical process (Noll, Civil War 33)

A. Slavery defenses used by Thomas Thompson (1770s):
   1. Lev. 25:46-46a – interpreted as allowing perpetual slavery for foreigners
   2. Philemon – suggests Bible accepted slavery (Noll Civil War 33).
   3. Genesis 9:25-27 – the Curse of Canaan (Ham) (Noll, Civil War 34)
   4. Genesis 17:12 – God allowed Abraham to possess slaves.
   6. Argument from silence – Jesus didn't prohibit slavery
   7. 1 Cor. 7:21 – slaves shouldn't resist against slavery (Noll, Civil War 35)
   8. Rom 13:1-7 – interpreted as Paul urging submission to the political authority even when it was harsh
10. 1 Tim 6:1-2 – conversion of slaves didn't mean they had to be freed.
B. Historical factors leading to and resulting from changing attitudes towards slavery

1. End of British slave trade in 1807,
2. Banning of slavery in all British territories in 1833
3. View of the inviolability of human personality associated with Romanticism (Noll, Civil War 36)
4. Language calling slavery “a basic evil” by abolitionists frightened moderates who were uncomfortable with rejecting authority of the Bible.
5. Political and economic changes differentiating the South as a distinctive society. By 1840s debates over slavery reached new seriousness.
6. Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) – arose when American Baptist Missionary Union decided in 1844 to not appoint slaveholders as missionaries. (Noll, Civil War 36)

C. Debates over Slavery:

1. Fuller vs. Wayland - proslavery Fuller argued that since Jesus and the apostles didn't command emancipation of slaves, Wayland’s abolitionist stance challenged scripture (and slavery) on the basis of a moral principle (Noll, Civil War 37)

2. Moses Stuart supported Daniel Webster and Henry Clay who engineered the Compromise of 1850 which arranged California’s admission to the union as a free state while establishing strict laws to capture and return escaped slaves (Noll, Civil War 38). Stuart believed Southern Christians should give up slavery voluntarily. Stuart said neither Jesus nor Paul condemned slavery (argument from silence – Are there other apparent evils which the Bible didn’t explicitly prohibit?) Stuart defends the moral legality of slavery (Noll, CW 39)

D. Methods used to attack and defend slavery:

1. Abolitionism – commonsense, moral intuition based on American national ideology, and “self-evident truth” (Noll, CW, 40)
   a) Republican and Christian language including scripture – Ex. 21:16 (against enslavement)
   b) Slavery violated concepts of rationality, equity, the rights of nature and of a civil society (Noll CW, 41).
   c) Abolitionist Jonathan Blanchard advanced most popular biblical antislavery arguments linking scripture & republicanism: Broad principles of equity in Bible were justice and righteousness and reinforced by Declaration of Independence declaring inalienable rights to person, property and pursuit of happiness (Noll CW 41).
d) Harriet Beecher Stowe – *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* suggested scriptural interpretations supporting slavery were driven by interest rather than intellect (Noll CW 42). She has her various characters represent the opposing views of slavery of the time and corrected by scripture (Golden rule, prohibition against manstealing) (Noll CW 44).

e) Henry Ward Beecher – appealed to the general meaning of the Bible as opposed to biblical literalism (Noll CW 44).

f) David Barrow denied that descendants of Canaan were Africans, attempting to negate the use of the curse against Canaan as justification for slavery (Noll CW 46).

g) Abolitionists like Pendleton and Rabbi Raphall argued that American slavery was dissimilar to biblical slavery because it dehumanized the slave (Noll CW 47).

h) Tayler Lewis said Bible did not legitimate racially defined slavery (Noll CW 48).

i) Hardest task was for abolitionists since their arguments required more nuanced thinking whereas the pro-slavery advocates were able to emphasize commonsense, plain reading of scripture (Noll CW 50).

III. The Curse of Ham/Mark of Cain as Theological Justification for slavery

A. Historical & social setting for development of Curse of Ham/Mark of Cain:

1. After Bar Kochba revolt (135 AD) & destruction of Temple (70 AD), rabbis rebuilt Jewish faith around Torah & Talmud. Loss of identity by Jews as temple had always been center of Jewish identity.

2. Rebuilding cultural & religious identity – using rhetoric to recreate the boundaries of normalcy. Creating an “other” which allows the construction of one’s own identity as central. Same strategy used by church fathers by their construction of heresy in 4th c. and other later groups.


4. Early modern revival of the ideas of Curse of Ham/Mark of Cain – Paracelsus in 1520; Bruno 1591; Vanini in 1619, and Peyrere in 1655 (see footnote 10 in Felder, 149).
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B. Theological Views regarding Blacks:

1. Old Hamite view – curse on Canaan in Gen. 9:24-27, also seen as a curse on Ham – Ham and/or Canaan were turned black as result of Noah’s curse (Felder 147)

2. Sexually explicit stereotypes and use of zoological physiognomy to characterize Blacks as inhuman (like beasts).

3. Ham and his descendants (Ethiopians, Egyptians, Phutites, & Canaanites) viewed as blacks (Felder 148).

4. Story of Cain – Gen 4:1-16 – Cain turned black & became ancestor of black people because his sacrifice was unacceptable (smoke from sacrifice blew into his face (Midrash Rabbah Genesis 22:6. Other sources say he was blackened by hail caused by God’s anger.

5. Cain’s blackness is result of curse or a mark placed on him by God.

6. Mormons taught that Cain was ancestor of Blacks.

7. Pre-Adamite view – Blacks not descendants of Adam, but belonged to a Black race created before Adam and was source of Cain’s wife.

For Further Reading:


