Theo 425 Session 13: Civil War as a Theological Crisis, pt. 3 & 4
Rev. Jacquelyn E. Winston, Ph.D.

Reading assignment: pt 3 - Noll, Civil War 51-74; Course Reader 49-50 (Frederick Douglass);
pt 4 - Noll, Civil War 75-86b, 159m-162

A. Theological issues raised by American slavery with regard to African-American anthropology:

1. Church historian Philip Schaff and others argued that slavery was a blessing to the race of Ham (because it brought them the gospel) and Christian philanthropy would end slavery voluntarily (Noll CW, 51).

2. Inability to distinguish Bible’s views on slavery from its views on race led to unchecked systemic racism (CW 52).

3. Views of African-American anthropology created crisis:
   a) View of African Americans and their relationship to whites not founded on Bible or history of Christian moral reflection, but rather on contemporary commonsense principles (CW 52).
   b) The driving economic considerations of America placed monetary concerns above human ones and little biblical analysis was done about the moral implications of the system of slavery (CW 52).
      (1) Southerners rejected the individualistic, profit focus of the U.S. economy that forced them to use slavery to compete with the north.
      (2) Alienation created by U.S. emphasis on capitalism will later be address by holiness movement groups such as Salvation Army in the post bellum period (CW 54).

4. Each side believed scripture supported their view.

5. North – delivering nation and chastening sins of nation by his providence (Noll, Civil War 76, 78)

6. South – chastising the righteous (Noll, CW, 77)

B. Religious division among Baptists, Methodists, & Presbyterians precipitated by Civil War remained (Noll 333).

II. African American Arguments against Slavery

A. Daniel Coker – 7 biblical arguments vs. slavery using general principles from Bible such as Mt. 7:12 (Noll, CW 66) and Lev. 25:42 & 54 prohibiting enslaving fellow Jews (CW 70).

B. Lemuel Haynes – used Jonathan Edwards’ view of virtue. Edwards – virtue meant treating any object in accord with its quality of being (Noll, CW 71). Since humans were made in God’s image, they deserved proportionate love.

III. Reasons Proslavery Arguments were more convincing:
A. Abolitionists’ overstatement saying Bible condemned slavery contradicted view of most Americans and undercut authority of scripture (CW 72).

B. Common reading of Bible seemed to sanction slavery as an economic system (CW 73).

C. Whites didn’t regard African Americans as fully human.

D. Views of African American biblical interpreters ignored.

IV. Elements of the theological crisis posed by the Bible and slavery

A. Failure to examine southern charge that consumer capitalism was a dangerous system.

B. Abolitionists’ move from the authority of scripture.

C. Failure to act on biblical view of full humanity of all people.

D. Confusion between interpretation of Bible and common sense ideas of the culture (CW 74).

V. Merging of Religious and Republican views:

A. South: War is for freedom of conscience to interpret the Bible and worship God according to conscience (CW 79).

B. North: Republican liberty is based on true Christianity and evidenced by God’s providence in the north’s victory.

For Further Reading:
