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A Basis of the Civil War: The Theological Views of Nineteenth Century Christians on the Justification of Slavery

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The University of Southern Mississippi

A Basis of the Civil War: The Theological Views of Nineteenth Century Christians on
the Justification of Slavery

by

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Abstract

Views on the morality of slavery have produced a paradox within the Christian community. Historically, the issue of slavery has been analyzed tremendously by means of economic and cultural factors. The religious analysis of the institution of slavery has been overshadowed by secular motives. This paradox on the morality of slavery causes disunity within the Christian faith. Christianity, as a monotheistic religion, emphasizes the purpose that one God has for His people. Therefore, the multiplicity of views on God's intentions for the treatment of human beings cannot be allowed in the Christian community. The abolitionists' and activist's views must be analyzed thoroughly with biblical teachings as a template to conclude a unified truth for the Christian religion. The religious beliefs on the morality of slavery presented by the two groups named above has been analyzed and the conclusion contains the belief that accurately reflects the spirituality and doctrine of Christianity, thus reinforcing unity within Christian literature and faith.

Key Words: Christianity, Slavery, Religion, Curse Matrix, Abolition, Activists

Dedication

Sheverneek Shray Wells

My Mother and Spiritual Advisor

and

Troy Gibson, Ph.D.

Graduate Director and Associate Professor of Political Science

Thank you so much for imparting your wisdom both secular and spiritual

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Chapter I: Introduction

The foundation of what we now know as the United States of America was based upon a deep reverence to God. Over the course of history, the majority denomination has changed according to the popularity based upon its practices of worship, but the central doctrine of Christianity has hardly wavered for its believers. Christianity is a monotheistic religion which references God's sovereignty over all things. He is credited with the creation of the world and the people thereof. The difference between believers in God and Christians is their acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as the son of God. Those who "confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (*King James Version*, Rom. 10.9). Jesus Christ's life is extremely important to understanding the way in which a Christian's life should be modeled. A life that mirrors purity, selflessness, and servitude is a priority for a Christian. The last word mentioned in the sequence above is what allows for a Christian theological debacle about the admission of slavery in society.

During what we now call the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Era, millions of slaves were transported to America. This transportation of slaves "caused terrible misery and wreaked untold havoc" upon the African culture (Hood 48). The ships were filled not only with Africans but goods from Europe which were to appeal to Americans. At the very least, the Africans aboard were treated as mere cargo and traded for desired goods (Hood 49). The intended purpose of the slaves were to tend to the fields and the daily chores of their owners. They were seen as property and were sold like cattle. These transactions explain the economic advantage of the slave trade. The economic aspect of the Civil War has been elaborated on greatly within American history; however, the

presence of slavery in various parts of the country unsettled many who opposed the institution. The Continental Congress enacted the Land Ordinance of 1787 to prohibit slavery in territory north of the Ohio River, and then Congress passed the Land Ordinance of 1790 that reconfirmed the legal use of slavery south of the Ohio River. The issue over western expansion of slavery seemed to be settled, but the United States obtained the Louisiana Purchase which reopened the question of slavery in the west (Ransom, 1). Missouri which was clearly north of the Ohio River admitted slavery, so a line was drawn that went westward from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. The line was representative of a boundary between future free states and slave states. This method was sufficient until the admission of California, as a free state, prompted a debate which ended in the Fugitive Slave Act. The Fugitive Slave Act made slave laws more severe. These many attempts worsened the slavery issue and unfortunately encouraged more westward expansion. By 1860 there were approximately 3.9 million slaves living within the United States (Ransom, 2). The southern slave states seceded from the Union in protest of threats to eradicate slavery and formed the Confederate States of America while the other states remained faithful. As the issue of slavery became more and more controversial and tensions rose between the North and the South, the Civil War erupted.

The religious culture of the African people was seen as odd and blasphemous to Christianity. The traditional African religion—traditional meaning “foundational” or “primitive”—consists of customs that follow the basic characteristics of any religion (J. O. Awolalu, 1). There is a concept of god, which may be referred to by different names, as well as a belief in divinities or spirits. The peculiarities of the African religion are what

became perceived as befitting admonition for the justification of the serfdom of African people. The African religion is not one that was written and bound in a book as with Christianity. However, this religion was equipped with many loyal followers who could not credit their religion with a particular founder or missionaries who felt the need to endorse the teachings of their religion. Moreover, these followers worshiped differently from Christians. They used tangible objects like shrines to perform rituals. Oddities like this were used to explain the cultural reasoning for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and enslavement of the African race (J. O. Awolalu, 2).

Chattel Slavery

The Slavery Question, a book authored by John Lawrence, provides information concerning the nature of American slavery and its link to Christianity. The American slave code was highly precise in describing the slaves and the institution of slavery. According to this code, a slave was considered to be chattel. The physical body, soul, and spirit of a slave was for all intents and purposes property (Lawrence, 30). Demoting a human being to the status of chattel enforces degradation. As property, an African American could be sold, bought, and used for any purpose his slaveholder could fancy. Chattel or emphasizing the belief of property in a human being was the basis of the American institution of slavery. “All laws, regulations, usages, deprivations, wrongs, sins, sufferings, and miseries which belong to the system are built upon this foundation” (31). The identity of a slave was that of this master, for all things acquired from the work of a slave belonged to his master. Chattel slavery places slaves in a position that is equivalent to animals, inanimate objects, and labor tools. In this form of slavery, slaves are “without choice as to what he will do, what amount of labor he will perform, or for

whom he shall toil”, for a slave cannot “own not own nothing, inherit nothing, will nothing” (40). The slave is completely defenseless against the greed and brutality of his owner. The evidence of this thought rests upon advertisements of “negroes, horses mules and cattle” that were collected from respectable religious papers held by churches whose objective was to “spread scriptural holiness over these lands” (33-34).

Ancient Biblical Slavery or Indentured Servitude

Slavery, as is mentioned in the Bible, can be characterized more so with the system of indentured servitude rather than chattel slavery. Slavery in the first century of the Greco-Roman world was not a direct replica of slavery as practiced in the United States during the eighteenth century. For instance, servants were not shunned from society for their status. Servants were often educated and held high positions. Indentured servitude was for the most part voluntary. Often debt was owed, so persons would enter into the system to reconcile their financial woes. Servants were usually paid the same wage as free laborers, so some were able to acquire enough money to buy themselves out of the system. Also, servants were not bound to servitude for life. The average work span was about 10 years (Keller, n.p.). Slaves in the Bible were not “listed as property but with the household and therefore were not thought of as property” (Barnes, 9). Ultimately, slavery, as depicted in ancient biblical times, mimicked an employer/employee relationship than it did a master/slave relationship. Freedom was in fact an option, and those indentured were treated with a certain level of dignity.

The Brutality of Slavery

The punishment and treatment of slaves was absolutely unfathomable. Slaves were often beaten senseless by their masters. Noncompliance resulted in intense whippings by wooden, paddles, whips, cat-o'-nine-tails, etc. In the book titled *Twelve Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup describes the unfortunate events that caused him to go from the life of a free man to the life of an enslaved man; the years being from 1841 to 1853. After being kidnapped and locked away in a dark room while bound in chains, Northup describes being beaten ruthlessly by an assistant of James H. Burch, a well-known slave dealer, whose name was Ebenezer Radburn. Burch ordered that Northup, who had professed to be a free man, be beaten with a hard-wood board of eighteen to twenty inches long that was equipped with small auger pieces in many places upon the board. Radburn then proceeded to beat Northup continually on his bare flesh while standing upon the chains between his wrists. The beating was in fact so intense that the paddle broke, but due to Northup's bold assertion that he was indeed a free man, the beating continued and intensified. The cat-o'-nine-tails was the next choice for punishing Northup (Northup, ch. 3).

This was far more painful than the other. I struggled with all my power, but it was in vain. I prayed for mercy, but my prayer was only answered with imprecations and with stripes. I thought I must die beneath the lashes of the accursed brute. Even now the flesh crawls upon my bones, as I recall the scene. I was all on fire. My sufferings I can compare to nothing else than the burning agonies of hell! (Northup, ch. 3).

Beatings were used as a coercive tool to force African Americans into a submissive role that would allow their masters to better control their actions. Given the intense brutality of slavery practiced in Nineteenth Century America and the foundational aspect of Christianity flowing through its roots, the question of how Nineteenth Century Christians justified the toxic institution of slavery logically follows from curiosity.

Purpose of Analysis

Reasons that reflected economic and cultural interests were used to defend these uncouth acts, but after all, America was a heavily Christianized society. Nonreligious factors would only hold weight for so long. Biblical justifications were needed to convince such a religious society that torturous domination of another human being was not only appropriate but essential for the order of society. It is essential to note that at first glance, for most, Christian doctrine would not allow for slavery to exist in any way, but a closer look would uncover scriptures that would allow for tainted misconceptions to occur. Activist, those in favor of the institution of slavery, and abolitionist, those in disfavor, mainly used topical religious evidence to enforce their ideas. As long as this method is used, both views will hold an equal amount of weight. In order to offset their balance one must take into account the entire message that the Bible overtly suggests. It is essential to have every aspect of this era looked upon thoroughly. It is clear to understand the advantages of economic revenue and the idea of “American Exceptionalism”, but to uncover the materials used to convince a society to dominate an entire race should be analyzed to validate or invalidate the ideas in order to protect others from further unfounded discrimination. Therefore, the question of what justifications were used by Christians who were abolitionists and those who were activists will be

discussed and analyzed by the themes and scriptures of the Holy Bible to either highlight condoners of slavery or condemners of slavery within its teachings.

The Essence of the Christian Faith

Christianity is a monotheistic religion that derives from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Christians are taught that all things that are done in the spirit of God occur in order to bring all glory to Him (*King James Version*, 1 Cor. 10. 31). Treating others the way in which we would like to be treated (*King James Version*, Luke 6.31), doing the will of God (*King James Version*, John 4.34), and reverencing Him *only* is essentially the synopsis of the Christian religion. What is known and understood by Christians is engulfed in the strength of their faith. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11.1, *King James Version*). The Holy Bible is the sacred book of Christianity. It teaches that love is the most important quality of life (*King James Version*, 1 Cor. 13.13) and that God created the world and everything within it (*King James Version*, Gen. 1). The essence of Christianity is very pure and calls for humbleness, spiritual equality, and forgiveness. Due to the qualities of Christianity any promotion of bondage and slavery conflicts heavily with its teachings. However, American slavery was in fact defended by the use of Christian teachings. Abolitionist used its teachings to defend reasoning as to why slavery was wrong, and activists used its teachings to defend reasoning as to why slavery was right. However, scriptures such as 1 Peter 2:18 that tell “servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward” and mention a relationship between slave and master allow for a discussion as to the use and reference of the aforementioned scripture and those alike.

Chapter II: Methodology

The technique used within this proposed study strictly follow qualitative data guidelines. Previously published information concerning the religious aspects on the institution of slavery were researched and analyzed. Information on the two conflicting views presented by abolitionists and activists were collected and utilized to best answer the question of how the institution of slavery was religiously justified by Nineteenth Century Christians. There are historical events that are most relevant to my area of research. These events are the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the Civil War. Contradictory views on the meaning of Christian doctrine began to surface during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and reached an all-time high during the Civil War. Circumstances concerning each of these events as well as analysis of their religious relevance are included. Views from pertinent figures of each era are included to establish what the overarching beliefs were at the time. The occupations of these figures will range from politicians to ministers. The viewpoints derived from my research fall into either an abolitionist or an activist view. Once the pertinent information had been obtained, analysis upon the basis of each view was formed and compared with the teachings of the Holy Bible. Scriptural text derived from the King James Version of the Holy Bible was used. The text pulled from the Bible are those centered on the existence of slavery during biblical times as well as the teachings on the significance of human life and the treatment of fellowmen. Information from books, articles, and other related informational outlets such as academic databases were acquired. Keywords such as “Christianity and slavery” and “morality and slavery” were entered to find relative information. The purpose of the information obtained was to present the paradox within the Christian community over the

morality of slavery. The paradox was derived from historical events and their religious defenses that are deeply embedded within the foundation of American history. The first expectation was that abolitionist would rely heavily on the teachings of the New Testament to argue for the eradication of slavery than abolitionists. The theory which was crafted prior to research was that activists would rely heavily on Old Testament scripture as a basis for a divisive argument for the racial domination of the African American race due to its reference of bondage and carnal hierarchical power. The analysis and research was conducted with the intention of consolidating the conflicting beliefs of the abolitionist and activist groups and encouraging unity within the Christian religion.

Chapter III: A Religious Basis for the Institution of Slavery

David Whitford's article titled "A Calvinist Heritage to the 'Curse of Ham': Assessing the Accuracy of a Claim about Racial Subordination" explains much of the foundation upon which the discrimination of Africans exists. Early on, justifications for the domination, torture, and/or persecution of the African people were derived from occurrences in the Old Testament of the Bible. In chapter nine of the book of Genesis, Noah becomes inebriated with wine and falls asleep inside his tent. Ham, a son of Noah, saw that his father naked and informed his brothers Shem and Japheth. What Ham had done was seen as an ungodly act. His brothers gathered a blanket walked backward into the tent and covered their father. Due to Ham's ungodly act, his son, Ca'naan, was cursed to be "a servant of servants" unto his Uncles Shem and Japheth (*King James Version*, Gen. 9. 25-27). This biblical passage is known as The Curse of Ham. The Curse of Ham has been used to defend activists' views "for more than fifteen hundred years" (Whitford 26). Christian theologians such as Augustine of Hippo and those alike used Genesis' chapter nine to explain the origin of slavery. During the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, The Curse of Ham became narrowly tailored to explain the capturing and enslavement of a prominent portion of the African race (Whitford 27). All that was needed was a tiny relation between an excuse of slavery and the Christian faith before The Curse of Ham would morph and credit further discrimination.

The Curse Matrix becomes the product of the overly secularized use of The Curse of Ham. The uniqueness about The Curse Matrix is that it not only gave validation for the institution of slavery, but it included a valid stamp of superiority approval for those who owned serfs. The Matrix, as it is also named, consists of three founding principles. The

first principium expresses that “black skin is the result of God’s curse” which signifies the “Africans cursedness to slavery” (Whitford 27). Often the color black is characterized as filth, impurity, and evil. White, however, is seen as purity and practically the opposite of black. Convincing one to believe that black skin is the result of a curse is not a daunting task when the color itself is labeled with such demeaning words.

The second principium of The Matrix is centered upon the perceived nature of the African race. It argues that hyper-sexuality and libidinousness was an embodied effect of the curse. Often times, female African slaves were treated as the begging temptresses who were thought to seduce their male masters. This view of hyper-sexuality was perpetuated mainly by the wives of the slave owners who felt that their husbands could not resist the temptation of their female African slaves. However, these interracial affairs were sometimes forced by the male slave master or considered consensual between the slave and the master. In an article titled “Slavery as a Sexual Atrocity” written by Patricia L. Gay, the sexual trauma endured by African American women slaves through practices related to the institution of slavery was discussed. Gay argues that because their first sexual experience was likely “rape, girls acquired a knowledge of degradation, humiliation, shame, and brutality at an early age” (Gay, 7). While being shipped to America, African American “women were routinely raped... and their bodies were never given the respect afforded white women” (Gay, 6). This particular principle allowed for slave owners to dominate their women slaves in a way that established a deeply rooted inferiority complex.

The last founding principle of The Curse Matrix painted a virtuous picture of slave holders. This principium states that the institution is beneficial to the African race

because they are “uncivilized brutes and heathens” who need the direction of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Whitford 27). Contrarily, the writing of David Walker titled “Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World” shows the intellectual and moral capacity of an African man in a different light. Walker was a free man who lived in North Carolina. In the previously stated writing, Walker encourages African Americans to live up to the image of God and to negate the ideology that whites had placed upon them.

Men of colour, who are also of sense, for you particularly is my appeal designed. Our more ignorant brethren are not liable to penetrate its value. I call upon you therefore to cast your eyes upon the wretchedness of your brethren and to do your utmost to enlighten them—go to work and enlighten your brethren—Let The Lord see you doing what you can to rescue them and yourselves from degradation.

(Walker 585)

He ends his appeal by assuring any concerned whites about their ability to coexist peacefully with the African American race. He iterates that as long as African Americans are treated like uncivilized brutes they will not be friends of the whites. He states that if you “treat us then like men, and we will be your friends” (Walker 588). The last principle of the Curse Matrix gives its believers a heroic feel. It is used to convince the religious slaveholders that their actions are just and useful as a work of God. However, the eloquent writing of Walker conflicts with the claim that a darkened complexion causes a human being to possess the mental and intellectual capacity of a brute who needs the guidance of the paler men in his species in order to flourish in society.

Chapter IV: A Religious Basis for the Eradication for the Institution of Slavery

The notion that dark skin is an effect of the Curse of Ham is a ludicrous statement that only took roots because it was watered with arrogance, racism, and greed that gave a sense of superiority to the white race of American society at that time. *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* is a book written by Mark A. Noll. Noll discusses ideas of activists and abolitionist in order to describe the theological debate of slavery. He elaborates on the views of John G. Fee, a very independent minded minister who was a forceful opponent to slavery. When taking into consideration the multiplicity of skin tones, one must draw a rational conclusion that with the absence of racism a dark skin tone would and could be applied to those of many different races. Fee asserts that if superiority was placed upon those with fair skin, a human being with the fairest complexion could have the right to enslave all human beings (Noll, 55). This simple assertion uncovers the absurdity of the skin complexion argument of slavery activists. Song of Solomon holds a verse that stresses that “I *am* black, but comely” (*King James Version*, Song. 1.5). It seems that this particular verse was conveniently over-looked by activists who push for dark skin as being verification for enslavement. The Song of Solomon is a book filled with romantic conversation between a man and a woman. Love is the central theme of this book. Although Solomon had dark skin, he was able to exude characteristics of purity rather than impurity.

The accusations that Africans were hyper-sexual creatures were perpetuated so that they became a truth for slave holders and their wives. Often slave masters would have affairs with their owned African women. The term affair is used loosely as to not imply that all of these encounters were consensual. Customarily, slave masters would

rape these women. Conveniently, the actions of these men could be justified in at least two ways. Firstly, the hyper-sexuality myth of African women was convincing for the wives of slave holders. They were sure that “black women” were “able to overpower” a white man’s ability to resist their sexual advancement. Secondly, the rape and sexual assaults of these women were justified with the reasoning that procreation would create more laborers for the plantation (Mgadmi, 1).

The culture of African Americans was seen as uncivilized and inferior to that of whites in American culture. The institution of slavery was seen as a solution to this perceive problem. John C. Calhoun was a senator in Washington D.C. On February 6, 1837 he delivered an oration titled “Speech in the Senate on Antislavery Petitions”. Activist such as John C. Calhoun held the reasoning that “never before has the black race of Central America, from the dawn of history to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually” (Calhoun, 296-297). He reflects the feeling of superiority that many activists held by stating that the black race “came among us in a low, degraded, and savage condition, and in the course of a few generations it has grown up under the fostering and care of our institutions...to its present comparative civilized condition” (Calhoun, 297). Slavery was not seen as a sin but as a duty which benefitted American society. African Americans were in bondage. The Egyptians were described as making the Israelites “lives bitter with hard bondage... in all manner of service in the field” (*King James Version*, Exod. 1.14.). This book goes on to pronounce the mercy of God. “God heard their groaning” and “looked upon the children of Israel...and had respect unto them” (*King James Version*, Exod. 2. 24.25). Had The Lord assumed that the bondage of the Israelites was just He would not have sent

Moses to emancipate His people. Hebrews declares that The Lord is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (*King James Version*, Heb.13. 8). Therefore, the assumption that He would over-look the bondage in America is inferring that The Lord has respect of persons which contradicts scripture. These founding principles have generated different justifications of slavery based upon biblical context. These principles, however, were not enough to convince abolitionists that slavery was a justifiable institution.

Chapter V: Abolitionists and the Institution of Slavery

Henry Highland Garnet, an African American abolitionist and Christian minister, delivered an oration in Buffalo, N.Y. on August 21, 1843 titled “Address to the Slaves of the United States”. He describes the encounter that slaves had “with men calling themselves Christians” (Garnet, 315). The actions of these Christians can be termed corrupt and cruel. He also blames the church due to the fact that “slavery had stretched its dark wings of death over the land” and the “Church stood silently by” (Garnet, 315). Christianity provides us with the right to liberty given that the image of God was used to create each and every one of us. Due to this belief, slavery is seen as a sin to Garnet. “In every man’s mind the good seeds of liberty are planted, and he who brings his fellow man down so low, as to make him contented with a condition of slavery, commits the highest crime against God and man” (Garnet, 315). There is no justification for the involuntary enslavement of the African American race biblically given the condemnation of oppression in the bible. The term “fellow men” is the prominent term in the statement made above. Activists often use the defense that the presence of slavery in the Bible justifies the method as one ordained or condoned by God. This particular ideology places the activists and slaveholders at the same divine status of a God. The sovereignty of God allows Him to orchestrate trials and tribulations of His people in order to ultimately establish glory of Himself through His own people. The idea that activists and slaveholders hold this authority in some way grants them sovereignty over other individuals and their freedom. It also reflects the deranged beliefs that they in some way are doing a glorious deed. For them to take it upon themselves to better a specific group of God’s people is an arrogant and self-righteous power to reserve for one’s self.

Genesis 1:27 states that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (*King James Version*, Gen. 1.27.). Abolitionist believed that because man was created in God’s image they are therefore equal to their fellowman. However, activists were not so easily convinced. Alexander Stephens, the vice president of the Confederate States during the Civil War, felt that slavery “as it exists amongst us” is the “proper *status* of the negro in our form of civilization” (Stephens, 721). Stephens rests on the belief that “the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural and normal condition” (722). The religious reasoning for Stephens’s belief rests within the Curse of Ham. White men no matter their position or economic status are equal in law, but the African man either by “nature, or by the curse against Canaan, is fitted for that condition which he occupies in our system” (723). The ideology that African Americans are fit for the condition of slavery is not unique to Stephens. Justification for slavery is saturated in the idea that slavery is not only a natural institution but an institution tailored for the African race. The intensity of the belief in the statement above directly mirrors the belief that there *is* no justification of slavery that can be based upon any circumstances. The idea of race based slavery which directly stems from the teachings of the Curse Matrix was also argued against by biblical reasoning. John G. Fee used the presence of the enslavement of those from Germany, Gaul, Spain, Greece, and Egypt by Rome to reason that if the Bible condoned slavery, it was condoning white slavery as well. For, those enslaved by Rome were “as white or whiter than the Romans themselves” (Noll, 55). The inability of activists to develop a biblical scheme that would encompass all races reveals racial motivations behind their biblical defense of slavery (56).

Angelina Grimké Weld was a white abolitionist Quaker who left the South in order to fight against slavery. Weld was raised in a family who owned slaves. She witnessed the tragedies of slavery first-hand. In a speech titled “Antislavery Speech at Pennsylvania Hall” in which she testified against slavery, Weld declares that the activists that come to the South are treated with hospitality and entertained in the parlors which are provided through the fruits of labor by slaves. During their visits, “they never enter the huts of the slaves”, and evidently “return home with praises on their lips of the generous character of those which whom they tarried” (Weld, 308). The personal account of Weld is extremely important because she is able to testify that she has “*never* seen a happy slave” (309). James Henry Hammond, a protégé of the aforementioned John C. Calhoun, was a member of both houses of Congress who wrote several texts that were integral to the development of racist ideology of activist’s arguments during the 1850s. Hammond gave his famous “Mud Sill” speech on the Senate floor in 1858. In this speech Hammond declares that those in slavery “are happy, content, unaspiring, and uttering incapable, from intellectual weakness, ever to give us any trouble by their aspirations” (Hammond, 649). Hammond’s ideology is in total opposition to that of Weld. He uses this statement coupled with his religious justification that the white race has actually elevated the African race “from the condition in which God first created them, by being made our slaves” to support his theory that there must be an inferior class that would act as a mud-sill for the superior race that would allow for its progression, “civilization, and refinement” (Hammond, 649). The characteristics of slavery will always exist according to Hammond because God informed us that “the poor ye always have with you” (648).

This particular verse is used by Hammond to explain the existence of horrible institutions like slavery. However, it captures the points made by Frederick Douglass nicely.

Frederick Douglass was a slave turned orator born in February of 1818. At the age of twenty in September of 1838, Douglass managed to escape from slavery by impersonating a sailor. “What to the Slave is the 4th?” is the title given to an oration given by Douglass on the 5th of July in 1852. He boldly declares that the church was not only unsympathetic to the injustice of slavery, but “it actually takes sides with the oppressors” (Douglass, 544).

Many of its most eloquent Divines, who stand as the very lights of the church, have shamelessly given the sanction of religion and the Bible to the whole slave system. They have taught that man may, properly, be a slave; that the relation of master and slave is ordained by God... this horrible blasphemy is palmed off upon the world for Christianity. (Douglass, 544)

The descriptions of slavery within the Bible are all the justification needed for some to see it as ordained. The Old Testament has accounts that detail the enslavement of the Israelites, also known as God’s chosen people. Exodus describes the captivity of the Israelites by the Egyptians. After the rule of Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, there rose to power a man whom they called Pharaoh. Fearful of the multitude of Israelites, he decided to “set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens” (Exodus 1. 11, *King James Version*). This account of the induction of slavery into the Egyptian society was based upon fear, not love or compassion. The passage, mentioned above, describes the intense labor that the Israelites suffered. Words that would indicate happiness of the Israelites are absent. Slavery is not seen as a pleasant institution that betters those subject

to it. No, it was specifically designed to cause oppression to those seen as a threat and/or inferior group of people. The problem with using Christianity in this way is that it makes God a respecter of persons. He is not. “For there is no respect of persons with God” (Romans 2.11, *King James Version*). Therefore, there can be no superior race or inferior race. Dominion was given over “the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air” (Genesis 1.28, *King James Version*)

Chapter VI: Activists and the Institution of Slavery

James Henley Thornwell, a respected theologian, clergyman, and former president of South Carolina College from 1851 to 1854, defended the institution of slavery with Calvinistic concepts. For instance, Erik Grayson, author of “James Henley Thornwell and the Biblical Defense of Slavery”, discusses how Thornwell focuses on the belief that the relationship between humanity and God has fallen and is “no longer in the perfect Adamic state” (Grayson, 3). This Calvinistic concept is known as total depravity (3). Grayson explains that Thornwell holds the belief that the existence of slavery within a society represents “an established and properly ordered society” (6). Thornwell insists that slavery should be maintained throughout society due to the reference to slavery several times within scripture and the lack of condemnation of it located within the Bible. According to Grayson, Biblical accounts of slavery within the Bible are considered authoritative to Thornwell because he sees the Bible to be infallible. Therefore, the letter written to Paul requesting that Philemon release the enslaved Onesimus “for the sake of his fellowship” is argued to not condone or condemn the institution of slavery by Paul. Therefore, Thornwell is assured that the “enterprise must be acceptable” (7). Charles Summer, a Christian abolitionist and U.S. Senator, elaborates on the written letter to Paul concerning Onesimus in a lecture given in 1855 and reported in the *New York Tribune*. Summer begins by highlighting the ambiguity of Onesimus’ status under Philemon. The letter describes Onesimus as a servant, but it does not definitively state whether he was a chattel slave or an indentured servant. The letter also includes words of endearment that suggest the need for ultimate respect between Onesimus and Philemon. Paul encourages Philemon to receive Onesimus “not now a servant, but above a servant, a brother

beloved;” (Summer, 13). Paul urges Philemon to respect Onesimus as he would if Onesimus was in fact Paul himself. Summer asserts based on his analysis of the passage that “there can be no justification for a conspiracy...beginning with the treachery of Iscariot... to hurl a fellow-man back into the lash-resounding den of American Slavery” (Summer, 13). In other words, Paul’s main objective, as it reasons to Summer, are not to send Onesimus into chattel slavery. Rather, his main objective is to promote reconciliation between two brothers in Christ.

For activists in the 19th Century, the thought of a slave as a human being was a laughable observation. Slaves were viewed as property. The major motion film *12 Years a Slave* which was based upon the accounts of Solomon Northup, an African American free man who had been sold into slavery and left in servitude for 12 years, depicts a scene in which Solomon’s owner, Peter Tanner, warns his slaves that a “nigger that don’t take care—that’s his master—d’ye see?—that ‘ere nigger shall be beaten with many stripes” (Northup, ch. 9). This particular verse seems like an appropriate and a legitimate scripture to utilize if the goal is to convince others that the severe punitive tactics used on African Americans were in fact godly. However, this particular scripture would have to be taken completely out of context to achieve the goal stated above. Luke recollects the teachings of Jesus Christ who at the particular time was describing the fate of those who know what The Lord requires of them but do not make efforts to do so. The actual verse, Luke 12:47, in which the above quote references includes the word “servant” which refers to those who have fully accepted The Lord but has not adhered fully to His teachings and commandments (*King James Version*, Luke. 12.47.) The word “lord” refers to the only wise God, the Father. It is He who is able to judge the acts of His people and then enact

the exact punishment that He sees fit, according to biblical content. During private slave auctions, buyers would bid on slaves and the highest bidder would become the owner of that slave. “Physical and sexual privacy were not respected”; hence, “the groping and examining of the naked body on the auction block to determine fitness for tortuous work and breeding” (Gay, 6). The slaves were inspected as if they were animals. Often their teeth and bodies were inspected for disabilities. They were bought based on health and physique which would insure their ability to work at the highest level possible. Jim Crow laws were enforced through popular demand, mainly in the South. Jim Crow referred to a systematic discriminatory set of rules used to perpetuate the inferiority and degradation of the African American race. African Americans were portrayed as simple-minded brutes that enjoyed the simple pleasures provided to them by the institution of slavery enforced by white men.

Often the conversation would switch from why African Americans were tailor made for slavery to if the institution of slavery was actually a sin at all. Geoffrey Turner’s “The Christian Life as Slavery” analyzes the intention of Paul’s writings that refer to slavery. Paul warns “servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ” (*King James Version*, Eph. 6.5). This particular scripture captures a figurative and literal meaning. Figuratively, it encapsulates the essence of spiritual servitude. We are to serve The Lord diligently and at all times with severe respect. Christ is our master. This scripture can also be taken literally to address the existence of slavery during the biblical times of Paul. Evidently slavery was in fact a part of society. Submission to authority, even those in man-made conditions, coalesces with the need to stay humble and allow The Lord to

receive the glory. Paul also states in Romans 12:19 that “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”, so therefore we should “avenge not yourselves” (*King James Version*, Rom. 12.19). The use of instructions addressed to those under authority does not include a condoner for the institution of slavery. It simply informs Christians on how to deal with oppression in a way that is pleasing to The Lord.

The roots of ideology based on slavery can be traced to influential people of the late antiquity period. Aristotle, the infamous Greek philosopher, “implied that slavery is natural and nature allows for certain humans to rule and for others to be ruled” (de Wet, 27). However, many Christian authors emphatically disagree with his notion of a natural human slave. Basil the Great was a Greek bishop and one of the Four Fathers of the Greek Church circa 330-370. He was converted to religious life by his sister and wrote works in defense of the Catholic system (Columbia University Press, 2014). Basil the Great confidently proclaims:

Among humans no one is a slave by nature. For people are either brought under a yoke of slavery by conquest, as when prisoners are taken in war; or they are enslaved on account of poverty, as the Egyptians were oppressed by Pharaoh. (de Wet, 28)

Reverencing Genesis 1:26, Augustine explains that dominion over man by another man conflicts with the order of God, for the scripture gives man dominion over the “fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (*King James Version*, Gen 1.26). God gave human beings only a morsel of power, but that power did not include innate control over human beings as it did with the creatures of the earth. Jude, a Christian and brother of

James, expresses to us that God be all the “glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever [a]men” (*King James Version*, Jude 1.25).

Chapter VII: Results

Ultimately, activists were no more likely to rely upon the Old Testament for their reasoning about the institution of slavery than the abolitionists. Similarly, the abolitionists were no more likely to use the New Testament to rely upon as reasoning for their arguments against the institution of slavery. Nineteenth century Christians justified the institution of slavery through the use of topical scripture selection meaning that scriptures that aligned within their own interests were highlighted with detail to prove their respective positions. The analysis of context and themes within the Holy Bible has provided a stronger correlation with the reasoning that the institution of slavery as it was practiced in America during the Nineteenth Century was in fact immoral and contradictory of the Christian faith. Sovereignty is the ultimate idea made by the many books of the Old Testament. Therefore, it can logically follow that sovereignty is not given to humans, so the basis of the Old Testament's inclusion and description of slavery does not give human beings the power to exercise ultimate power in the form of slavery over other human beings. The inclusion of slavery within the Bible simply references the sinful nature of people and the harm it can cause.

Chapter VIII: Conclusion

The presence of slavery in the Bible appears to be extremely unsettling for some people. Often those who assume that this presence is evidence of a condoner may have not fully examined the content of scripture. Reverend Joseph Steele, pastor of Woodland Presbyterian Church, educated his congregation about the “Laws of Freedom” on February 2, 2014. His message came from Exodus 21: 1-11. In the chapter and verses aforementioned, God gives regulations to the children of Israel on how they should treat servants under their care. The word servant is being used here instead of slave because the institution of servitude that is described in Exodus is completely opposite of the institution of slavery that surrounded the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Firstly, the institution of servitude of the Biblical Age was a voluntary system. The understanding of this institution could be better understood by the definition of indentured servitude or by the idea of a bondservant. Often one became a servant to relinquish debt that had been acquired. This institution was utilized for survival for those with unfortunate financial problems. During a time when Medicare and welfare programs were not available, servitude was a way to provide for oneself. Like most welfare programs, indentured servitude was meant to be a beneficial temporary system. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade consisted of the encampment and selling of Africans to American bidders. “And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death” (*King James Version*, Exodus 21.16). The verse above strictly forbids the very starting act of the slave trade. Activists were more concerned with explaining why it was that they were capturing *Africans* than they were about explaining how it was that their actions were legitimate. Secondly, freedom was an option after six years of service had

been fulfilled. The seventh year represented a “year of jubilee” in which all debts and servitude would be eradicated (*King James Version*, Exod. 21.2.). The biblical regulations on slavery stated that if a male servant came in single he was to leave single unless he wed while in servitude. He could choose to either to stay with his family in servitude until his wife’s debt was repaid or serve his master for life. A life time of slavery was voluntary not mandatory. “And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free” (*King James Version*, Exodus 21. 5). The slave must make the choice to live as a servant. Slavery in America was for a lifetime due to the belief of those in power that African Americans were only able to function as slaves not citizens of equal status to white men. Slave owners often chastised their slaves by tying them to wood posts and whipping them senseless. Exodus instructs that this act “shall be surely punished” (*King James Version*, 21.20). Condoning is not accompanied with the act of punishment. The failure of activists to acknowledge the scripture aforementioned is an act of mocking God, and scripture states “be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (*King James Version*, Gal. 6.7). During his sermon, Reverend Steele asks the hypothetical question “Does God Condone Slavery?” (“Laws of Freedom”, 2014). He responds definitively by stating “no, God provides regulations on things like divorce but does not condone it, as well as murder” (“Laws of Freedom”, 2014). He continues by answering the question of why God does not simply abolish slavery by stating that “there is something in the wisdom of God that thought it necessary to provide instructions, but his thoughts are not our thoughts—faith must be needed here” (“Laws of Freedom”, 2014).

The Old Testament's Overarching Theme

The Old Testament is filled with descriptive accounts on how The Lord taught and led His people into a deeper longsuffering connection with Him. Genesis describes the creation account of Adam and Eve. Once Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Good and Evil, God banished them from the Garden of Eden so that He could teach them the way in which they should serve Him after having obtained knowledge of their flesh's desires. In Exodus, the Israelites were enslaved for years in Egypt, set free through God's utilization of Moses, and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years so that The Lord could renew the faith of His chosen people. The overarching theme in the Old Testament relies upon the principle that God is Lord. He is wrathful, jealous, yet merciful and graceful. He had to do what needed to be done to benefit His people. Miracles and signs of wonder were used to convince His chosen and those connected to them that He loves and cares for them during all of life's trials and tribulations. Sovereignty is the ultimate idea made by the many books of the Old Testament. He forever made provisions to protect His people through chastising times. The inclusion of slavery regulations found in the book of Exodus is an example of said provisions. The Old Testament is here to remind the Christian community of the everlasting love and mercy that The Lord has for His people. God has the authority to direct His people into any direction He sees fit because He is sovereign. To allow humans who are of the same caliber to assume a position higher than that of another human being of the same caliber is allowing oneself to assume the status of a supreme being. However, God has acquired that status and the fact that human beings are made in His image would prohibit them from possessing their maker's status. The ending of

Ecclesiastes sums the manner and teachings of God nicely. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man [f]or God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (*King James Version*, Ecc. 12.13-14).

The New Testament’s Overarching Theme

The New Testament begins with the book of Matthew which includes the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus was sent by God to “save his people from their sins”, for God had once again materialized His love and promise to His people by sending a savior (*King James Version*, Matthew 2. 21). Jubilee has come in the form of restoration. Jesus fulfills the law and directs The Lord’s people with teachings that he received from His Father. The emphasis on adherence to Ceremonial Law, which refers to the external practices and rituals that were practiced by Christian believers to cleanse themselves of impurities, was demoted and law concerning love, compassion, and submission was promoted. For Jesus came not “to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (*King James Version*, Matthew. 5.17). The New Testament contains the word “new”, but it was not “new” during the time of the slave trade, so why was the theme of love, compassion, and submission overlooked? The answer is fairly simple: it was easier to take an extremely revered and holy book, paraphrase the context within it, and use said paraphrases as propaganda for a horrid and cruel industry for the selfish desires of the corrupt nature of man. The New Testament teaches us to “bear ye one another’s burdens” and warns us that “if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself” (*King James Version*, Galatians 6.2-3). Does not the latter verse warn us of the idea of white supremacy or the idea of inferiority in general? For activists to

have promoted the idea of inferiority of African Americans and systematic oppression would be the act of debunking their entire Christian belief by pulling out the foundational lining of a religion founded upon love, grace, and mercy.

There is absolutely no scripture or theme within the Holy Bible that could justify the institution of slavery that was designed and practiced within the American borders during the slave era. Genesis states that we were all created in the image of God (*King James Version*, Gen. 1.27.). Therefore, we are all intrinsically equal in nature. Ideas of a curse that was placed upon a specific race of human beings that subjected them to an inferior status of an existing superior race would debunk many teachings of the New Testament in particular. Belief in the overall concept of the Bible is essential for Christians to portray an accurate image of the Christian faith. Using isolated verses to coincide with sadistic agendas is a ridiculous notion, but it is exactly what activists were doing during this time period. Slavery was depicted in the Bible to show the ways in which God chastised His people and led them back to a path of righteousness, for “blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law” (*King James Version*, Psalms 94.12) . The sovereignty of God allows Him to do whatever necessary with His creation. We can rest assure “that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (*King James Version*, Romans 8.28). Our carnal minds will never begin to truly understand the purpose of God’s actions. We may see them as odd or strenuous, but Isaiah warns us that “my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith The Lord”, for “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (*King James Version*, Isaiah 55. 8-9). One should not wish

to participate in the unrighteous acts of the ungodly because they too will be punished by the wrath of God. Solomon teaches us that we are to “be not wise in thine own eyes: fear The Lord, and depart from evil” (*King James Version*, Proverbs 3.7). Unity within the Christian community is extremely important because the Bible is in itself a non-conflicting teaching manual of God’s divine purpose for humanity. Therefore, followers of Jesus Christ need to “go ye therefore, and teach all nations”—the message sent from God with certainty and consistency. The analysis of context and themes within the Holy Bible has provided a stronger correlation with the reasoning that the institution of slavery as it was practiced in America during the nineteenth century was in fact immoral and contradictory to Christian faith.

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