

The Use of the New Testament in the American Slave Controversy: A Case History in the Hermeneutical Tension between Biblical Criticism and Christian Moral Debate

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The study of nineteenth-century U.S. biblical exegesis on the slavery question illuminates a fundamental paradox in American religious culture. The relationship between the moral imperative of anti-slavery and the evolution of biblical criticism resulted in a major paradigm shift away from literalism.¹ This moral imperative fostered an interpretive approach that found conscience to be a more reliable guide to Christian morality than biblical authority. Yet, the political imperative of proslavery nourished a biblicism that long antedated the proslavery argumentation and remains prevalent in American moral preaching. The nineteenth-century desire to resolve this paradox led to important innovations in American interpretations of the Bible.

A variety of cultural forces shaped the nineteenth-century intellectual environment that produced professional biblical studies in American higher education. Deists had already introduced European sources for historical-critical methods that exposed what they took to be Scripture's textual errancy; to them, the Bible was internally inconsistent as well as intrinsically unbelievable in places.² The Unitarians of New England were developing a technique of studying the Bible that included careful comparison of all texts relevant to a particular doctrine, linguistic analysis of obscure words in their original Hebrew or Greek, and the elucidation of unclear passages by paraphrases.³ The natural sciences raised questions about biblical literalism: geologist Charles Lyell's controversial *Principles of Geology* (1830–1833) attacked biblicists as incompetent on the age of the earth; organic chemistry appeared to degrade the biblically affirmed spiritual dignity of life into mere chemicals; and zoologists took renewed interest in polygenism, the ethnographic theory that the white and black human

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ances sprang from distinct geographical origins and thereby constituted separate species, this in direct contradiction to the creation account of Adam and Eve in Genesis.⁴ In addition, American literary studies, undergoing professionalization, was moving toward a critical hermeneutics (influential on biblical studies) that not only aimed at recovery of the author's intended meaning as a norm for validating conflicting readings of a text but also aimed to complete and develop what the author had only sketched and suggested—a task that inevitably carried the critic beyond the author's intention into a hermeneutics of moral intuition.⁵

Scholars have neglected, however, another significant ingredient in this cultural mix. The antislavery and abolitionist interpretations of the New Testament during the American slave controversy also pushed biblical exegetes toward a critical hermeneutics, preparing the way for the eventual reception in this country of German higher criticism. When biblical studies emerged as a professional academic discipline in U.S. colleges, seminaries, and divinity schools, it thus had more than one precedent.⁶ Educated Americans were already accustomed to a more sophisticated kind of biblical criticism if they had followed the literature of antislavery and abolitionism.

Antislavery/Abolitionist Theology and Exegesis

Antislavery and abolitionist crusaders ransacked Scripture for texts condemning slavery, but the New Testament proved a particularly thorny place for them to look. Two primary problems demanded detailed exegetical solution: first, the disturbing silence of Jesus Christ on slavery; and second, the perhaps more disturbing outspokenness of the Apostle Paul. To be sure, abolitionists themselves frankly admitted, Christ never once denounced slavery as a sin in so many words, not even in his most important ethical speech, the Sermon on the Mount. But this silence proved nothing, in their view, since Christ also never condemned sodomy, polygamy, infanticide, idolatry, or blasphemy, each of which was clearly a sin.⁷ Christ, therefore it was reasoned, did not have to repeat prohibitions which the abolitionists saw outlawed in other passages of Scripture.

A second solution to the problematic silence of Christ was historical and semantic. Making use of a golden-age historiography, antislavery and abolitionist writers claimed that Christ never spoke of slaves because his land, ancient Palestine, contained none. Only after the ministry of Jesus did pagan slaves, brought by the Romans, arrive in Palestine. The Jews of Jesus' era, presumably the only inhabitants of Roman Judea, did not own slaves because they obeyed the Mosaic

laws against Hebrews owning Hebrews as permanent chattels (Exodus 21:2–6; Deuteronomy 15:12–18; Leviticus 25:39–54) and especially the prohibition of kidnapping (Exodus 21:16). Yet, the New Testament records Jesus meeting so-called slaves, so interpreters advanced a semantic thesis to reinforce their historical one. The “slaves” (Greek *douloi*) mentioned in the Gospels were, in fact, nothing more than voluntary hired servants, young apprentices, or employees. The moderate antislavery Presbyterian minister Albert Barnes tried to make just such a case from biblical criticism,⁸ but his revivalist efforts to reach the intelligentsia appealed only to a limited audience and to standards of authority alien to traditional churches.⁹

Most clergy favored an anti-intellectual argument, straightforward and simple, which insisted on a hermeneutics of “plain sense.” The “learned and pious” translators of the King James Version “never once, in the whole Bible,” gave the word *doulos* the meaning “slave,” but “servant.” “If they were slaves, the translators of our Bible would have called them so.”¹⁰ This literalism about, and semantic subterfuge of, the biblical text in English came from an orthodox attempt to protect antislavery and abolitionism from infidelity charges. It was also a response, albeit weak, as anti-intellectual arguments generally are, to the critical research of America’s leading biblical scholars, such as Moses Stuart (1780–1852) of Andover Theological Seminary,¹¹ who tried to debunk this “servant” theory as absurd. The antislavery and abolitionist preachers, however, questioned the wisdom of taking “a solemn practical question at first into Greek and Hebrew lexicons, grammars, critics, and commentators, one half of whose ideas are baked stiff in the oven of German hermeneutics.”¹² The best explanation for the silence of Christ concerning slavery was found in the “plain sense” of the King James term *servant*: Jesus encountered only free servants.

If Jesus Christ talked too little (or not at all) about slavery, Paul talked too much. The hermeneutics of plain sense used to excuse the silence of Christ also helped to neutralize the harsh sayings of Paul. Authors in this intellectual camp used philological subterfuge of the original Greek to exculpate Paul from positions dangerous and hostile to their own. The main target was Paul’s letter to Philemon, which refers to a “servant” named Onesimus whom Paul returns to a householder named Philemon, presumably the master; proslavery authors called this letter the Pauline Mandate for federal slave law, and so it commanded large attention. Antislavery and abolitionist authors tried to force exegetical control over this letter because it was potentially the most dangerous book in the entire Bible. The danger of defeat from damning proslavery exegesis outweighed the danger

of infidelity from philology and the German biblical criticism. Anti-slavery and abolitionist intellectuals argued that the Onesimus mentioned in the letter was not a slave but a free apprentice, employee, or even actual brother of Philemon.¹³ Because Albert Barnes championed this idea that Onesimus was not a slave,¹⁴ proslavery exegetes later dubbed it the Barnes Hypothesis.¹⁵ The Barnes Hypothesis used semantic subterfuge to assert the golden-age approach to history. With the congressional passage of the Fugitive Slave Law (a provision of the Compromise of 1850), which required local and state authorities to comply with federal extradition procedures for returning runaway slaves to their owners, the need for such subterfuge became acute. It helped dispute the claims of proslavery that Philemon mandated federal slave law.¹⁶

Racism also helped. Denouncing the proslavery work of John Henry Hopkins, Episcopal bishop of Vermont, the Philadelphia clergyman Daniel Goodwin pointed out an unexamined conclusion of its curious logic. If Jesus Christ and his apostles condoned any form of slavery at all, the form would be *white* slavery. He writes:

If the New Testament approved and sanctioned slavery, as a legalized system, it approved and sanctioned Roman slavery. Hebrew slavery no longer existed to be either sanctioned or abrogated. Now the system of Roman slavery was perhaps the most outrageously cruel and inhuman that ever existed. More over, it was slavery of *whites*. Can a Christian believe that Christ and his apostles approved and sanctioned such slavery as that?¹⁷

This *reductio ad absurdum* disproof with rhetorical questioning—if you say that Jesus approved slavery, then aren't you forced to abandon its racial justification?—reveals the racism present in some abolitionist arguments: surely Jesus Christ agreed with American beliefs that white people should not be enslaved. The ideology reinforced golden-age history and semantic subterfuge that Jesus had never met slaves.

Even with racist ideology legitimating the hypothesis that Judea contained no slaves, clergy as early as the mid-1840's began to find the golden-age view of history problematic. The more the anti-slavery and abolitionist preachers enlisted German historical criticism in the service of their theology, the more unpersuasive their exegesis appeared even to their fellow antislavery and abolitionist clergymen. "The evidence that there were both slaves and masters in the churches founded and directed by the apostles," pleads the moderate Congregationalist Leonard Bacon, "cannot be gotten rid of without resorting to methods of interpretation which will get rid of anything."¹⁸

National crises of the 1840's and 1850's influenced this transformation in abolitionist biblical interpretation: the 1840 schism in the original national abolitionist organization, the American Anti-Slavery Society, after the failure of the opponents of Garrisonianism to capture its control; the sectional schisms in the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches in the 1840's and 1850's; and the clerical outrage over federal proslavery actions like the Fugitive Slave Law and the Kansas-Nebraska Act. In response to the clerical outrage, Moses Stuart, the most famous biblical scholar in America at the time, published his *Conscience and the Constitution* (1850), an exhortation to the nation to obey the Fugitive Slave Law, which exposed previous abolitionist exegesis as uneducated in biblical criticism.¹⁹ In the face of such a seemingly unimpeachable academic authority as Stuart, the Barnes Hypothesis gave way for some as being untenable. Jesus Christ, many abolitionists began to concede, *did* come into contact with slavery but *did not* expressly condemn it. With the loss of semantic subterfuge and golden-age history, the silence of Christ was problematic once again.

To solve this problem, a new generation of abolitionists adopted a different hermeneutical strategy, the search for immutable principles in the New Testament. The exact opposite of the earlier plain-sense approach, the hermeneutics of immutable principles claims that biblical interpretation must look beyond the flat reading of the text. It aims to discern in Protestant fashion the kernel of universal truth lying beneath the superficial meaning of individual passages. This hermeneutics disfavors interpretation of isolated texts and subordinates all reading to the discernment of that kernel of immutable principles, the core teaching of Jesus.

A crucial turning point in the antislavery argument was the move away from literalism in the 1840's and 1850's. Antislavery Christianity was forced away from close readings of the text into a less literal reading of the Bible by the moral imperative of the struggle against slavery. The first step in this move was to find a kernel in the gospel and to make that kernel control biblical interpretation. That kernel was found to be Jesus' so-called Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31). This egalitarian reciprocity ethic became the interpretive key to unlock the meaning of Jesus' silence on slavery. As we shall see, harmonization to this core Jesus teaching could then neutralize harsh sayings by Paul in his household duty codes. Otherwise, New Testament ethics would appear to have multiple and conflicting rules, an unthinkable proposition in nineteenth-century America.²⁰ Charismatic abolitionist ministers such as George Cheever (who, with his younger

brother Henry, helped organize the new, interdenominational Church Anti-Slavery Society in 1859), Theodore Dwight Weld, and William Hosmer argued that Jesus planted this kernel of egalitarianism knowing its slow, covert growth would eventually destroy slavery.²¹

The hermeneutics of an immutable principle, therefore, was combined with another interpretative approach, the hermeneutics of the seed growing secretly.²² This second approach believed that Jesus and the apostles planted the original seed of the gospel in the New Testament, expecting it to grow in secret throughout church history until its flowering in the present, nineteenth-century abolitionist Christianity. The hermeneutics of the seed growing secretly viewed history as moving toward universal human progress, the exact opposite of the golden-age approach. Its combination with the immutable kernel theory brought, even coerced, the desired unity onto Scripture. Jesus' love ethic annulled the previous Old Testament slave laws, neutralizing their power as texts proving the moral legitimacy of slavery. The seed growing secretly theory interpreted slavery, like polygamy and divorce, to have been part of the previous Hebrew "dispensation" whose divine sanction ended with the advent of Jesus and the Christian "dispensation." Important to this theology were beliefs in the periodization of biblical revelation, the evolution of doctrine, and universal human progress—in essence, Whig history (the forward march of progress), a major strand of nineteenth-century thought.²³ As the Methodist abolitionist William Hosmer writes, "The Old Testament is not, in all respects, a standard of morals for the present day. The New Testament has revised the ethical code of the Old, and several things, once allowed, are now prohibited. . . . Hence, it does not by any means follow, as a necessary consequence, that the recognition of slavery, by Moses, gives it a place among the institutions of Christianity." This kind of biblical periodization reinforced the seed growing secretly theory: "The New Testament was not given, like the Mosaic law, to one people, but to the whole race; not for one period, but for all time."²⁴ Old Testament slave laws, which contradicted the Golden Rule of Christ, were neutralized as antiquarian and so irrelevant to the contemporary debate over the moral legitimacy of slavery.

The hermeneutics of the seed growing secretly provided ready explanations for not only the Old Testament slave laws but also the proslavery character of Christianity before the modern era. In typical Protestant fashion, this hermeneutics averred Christian abolitionism, although a recent development, to be superior to proslavery religions because it displays the full-bloomed fruits of a divine kernel that Jesus Christ had planted in the primitive church. History is understood to move forward, toward universal human progress and

perfectibility, not backward in decline and moral decay as the golden-age view of history had claimed. Jesus, the hermeneutics discovered, in fact was not silent about slavery. Although he met literal masters and literal slaves, Christ did not intend to perpetuate the institution but worked secretly toward its gradual destruction. True Christianity, through "fair application" of the Golden Rule and related immutable principles such as charity and love of neighbor, is a Christianity against slavery.²⁵ So even if *servant* did in fact mean *slave*, a concession clergy schooled in historical criticism had to make, then the New Testament and the Bible generally could still be read as an antislavery document.

While the hermeneutical combination of (1) immutable kernel and (2) seed growing secretly allowed for contradiction between the Old and New Testaments as part of God's plan of gradual human progress, it nonetheless could not accept any contradiction within the New Testament as such, between Jesus' teachings and Paul's ethics. The apparently harsh slave rules in Paul's household duty codes must be found somehow to cohere with the Golden Rule, but Pauline commands like "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling" (Ephesians 6:5) proved such coherence difficult on a flat reading. Since the defect cannot lie in Paul, the holy Apostle of Jesus Christ, it must be in the interpreter who reads flatly. The lack of coherence itself must be a sign against the flat reading of the New Testament. The incongruity signals the need for the hermeneutics of the seed growing secretly, argued preachers like Cheever, Weld, Hosmer, and other evangelical abolitionists. The slave who obeys his master cannot be Christian because slavery denies Christian duties of marriage (Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 11:3), of fatherhood (Ephesians 6:4), of children (Ephesians 6:1-2; Colossians 3:20), and of believers generally to worship God.²⁶ A flat reading of these texts finds contradiction in two ways: (1) against the immutable principles of egalitarianism, the kernel of the gospel; and (2) against Paul's own principle of evangelism, bringing new converts to the Christian faith. Because he established a slave code impossible for a baptized slave to obey, Paul must be signaling that he was secretly against slavery. A slaveholder could not be Christian either, since the enforcement of the household duty codes would remove Christianity from the slave, making the master an anti-evangelist. With the hermeneutics of the seed growing secretly, the Pauline slave codes were found to neutralize themselves.

Abolitionists in this camp had great interest in Colossians 4:1. It reads, in part, "Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal." The key terms, *just* and *equal*, revealed that Paul under-

stood slaves to have natural rights. Since chattel slavery means absolute denial of rights and justice, Paul implicitly condemned the institution. By this verse, it was argued, Paul sowed the secret seeds that later bloomed as the Enlightenment philosophy championing inalienable human rights, a cornerstone of antislavery and abolitionist theology.²⁷ A nineteenth-century inaccurate historical belief reinforced the seed growing secretly hermeneutics. The belief was that the immutable freedom principles of Christianity (and Roman Stoicism, in lesser degree) had caused the decline and fall of slavery in the ancient world. Although recent research has proven this belief erroneous—slavery never declined in the ancient period and, in fact, continued into the medieval—belief in this theory was unquestioned not only among American intellectual clergy but also in the European academic circles, which pressed for the end of slavery in French and British colonies.²⁸ Because Colossians 4:1 cohered with the Golden Rule, it must be the privileged text that exercises hermeneutical control over the interpretation of other, more difficult, Pauline passages. Paul's voice was made to harmonize with that of Jesus, and the New Testament was thus found to be without contradiction. When abolitionists looked at Paul via the two hermeneutical lenses of (1) immutable principles and (2) the seed growing secretly, they saw a reflection of themselves.

This solution, however, only begs the larger question of why Paul (or Jesus, for that matter) did not condemn slavery *openly*. Why did he and Jesus sow a *secret* seed? Early antislavery found expediency to be the best explanation. According to this view, Paul did not openly condemn slavery because he feared that such open condemnation would incite slave rebellion and a subsequent Roman military crackdown (or "servile war") that would threaten the public safety of Christians. As a Roman citizen, the Apostle realized that to denounce slavery was tantamount to denouncing the entire Roman Empire itself. Such a confrontation, it was believed, would have led Rome to march against nascent Christianity for inciting slave rebellion, a war on the order of that against the famous gladiator rebel Spartacus. In this hypothetical servile war, Rome would have killed Christianity before its flowering. To avoid bloodshed, Paul chose the wisdom of expediency, urging believers to obey governmental powers (Romans 13). The leading spokesman for this view was William Ellery Channing (1780–1842), Professor of Theology at Harvard Divinity School and Unitarian Christian.²⁹

Later abolitionist writers, however, found this antislavery solution unacceptable and rejected the hermeneutics of the seed growing secretly.³⁰ They claimed that the seed grew *openly*: Paul was not

afraid to condemn slavery and does so in two overlooked passages, 1 Corinthians 7:21 and 1 Timothy 1:10. First Corinthians 7:21 was and is a puzzle that begins on a grammatical level.³¹ It reads in the King James Version, "Art thou called *being* a servant? Care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use *it* rather."³² The antecedent of *it* is ambiguous, leaving the reader to ask, Use *what*? Did Paul mean to use *being a servant*? Or did he mean the opposite, *becoming free*? For the abolitionist, the solution was clear: Paul urged slaves to seek freedom; "That is to say, If you are a slave and the cars of the underground railroad come along, jump on and get your freedom if you can."³³ By conflating manumission with escape, abolitionists made Paul condemn slavery. They made even stronger claim of 1 Timothy 1:10: "A more tremendous passage against slavery does not exist than this."³⁴ The sentence in the King James Version reads: "For the Whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound teaching." Key was the term "menstealers." The abolitionist George Cheever declared, "Let the Gospel be preached according to Paul's instructions, let the churches apply the discipline of Christ according to sinners in this category, and slavery would be abolished from our land."³⁵ Cheever made his case from philology, using the new *Greek-English Lexicon* by H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott (first edition, 1843). Paul was found to condemn slavery by calling it the sin of "manstealing."

Despite such attempts, the New Testament—especially Paul—remained a thorn in the flesh of abolitionism. Discouraged by the ineffectiveness of their exegesis, some abolitionists began to suspect that they were wrong about the New Testament and so sought a new hermeneutical strategy. This move is the next crucial step in the turn away from literalism and toward arguments from conscience.

The new strategy was the hermeneutics of moral intuition. With the hermeneutics of moral intuition, even *if* the abolitionists were wrong about the biblical text, they could *still* maintain their cause to be morally right and in accord with the Word of God. To support this claim, they made an emphatic shift away from literalism. This shift was, in part, due to the rationalist, German hermeneutics of the higher criticism that American universities, seminaries, and divinity schools were beginning to teach at the same time as American society was torn over its slavery controversy. The moral norms of the Bible were conditioned by the social arrangements and cultural assumptions of a particular age and people, as the emerging field of critical biblical studies was beginning to show. The biblical authors composed rules and admonitions whose defect lay in their historical

conditionedness. It would be "a serious theological mistake to identify as the eternal word of God those elements in their teachings that were simply the common coin of the cultural realm." The better source of inspiration was found to be moral intuition, also known as conscience or "common" sense discernment of "self-evident" moral truths.³⁶

The hermeneutics of moral intuition developed from the convergence of two major cultural forces in nineteenth-century America: the new wave of revivalism and evangelicalism (sometimes called the Second Great Awakening), with its emphasis on individual emotions and experiential religious truth, and the moral philosophy of Common Sense Realism, with its notion of conscience. Common Sense Realism was an intellectual legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment, highly influential in the evolving American academic discipline of moral philosophy. It argued that humans possess an innate "moral sense," known as conscience, which verified the rationality of moral judgments, a theory first proposed as a correction to John Locke's *tabula rasa* epistemology and David Hume's radical skepticism.³⁷ With evangelical religion and moral philosophy combined, the "plain sense" of the Bible became what one's personal experience intuited it to be.

The intuitionist model of biblical interpretation, to be sure, also had the reverse effect of nourishing literalism. The Scottish Enlightenment in America, with its Baconian view of science, advanced a strenuously empiricist approach to all forms of knowledge, a declared desire for objective "fact," and a corresponding distrust of hypotheses, imagination, and even reason itself. Some nineteenth-century clergymen adopted such supreme Baconianism to make a virtual assimilation of laboratory science to orthodox Protestantism in order to protect the literal "plain sense" of the Bible not just from the abolitionist hermeneutics of moral intuition but also from the mounting dangers in geology, organic chemistry, and the ethnology of polygenism.³⁸

An additional danger to proslavery's literalism came from another front: Unitarianism, which espoused an early version of the moral intuition hermeneutics. William Ellery Channing had argued that humans were endowed with a moral sense, this rational conscience being the Word of God written on the human heart. Direct observation of nature, not the verbal inspiration of Scripture, was considered to be the basis of knowledge, conscience the medium of observation. If, as in observation of the evils of slavery, conscience was found to conflict with certain passages in the Bible, conscience took priority as a more secure access to God's higher law. This moral intuition hermeneutics had also been advanced by Francis Wayland

(1796–1865), the president of Brown University. The argument was that individual moral sense, properly cultivated, should control any exegesis of the Bible.³⁹

Although admittedly not a representative group, radical abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879) took this logic to its extreme conclusion. Garrison questioned whether the Bible was even relevant in contemporary debates over abolitionism and other moral issues, such as the Sabbath controversy, the question of woman's suffrage,⁴⁰ and the justness of the recent Mexican War (1846–48). Having broken away from the gradualist and colonization schemes of anti-slavery, Garrison published, from 1831 to 1865, a national newspaper based in Boston, *The Liberator*, declaring, "No Union with Slaveholders" and the immediate, unconditional emancipation of African American slaves without compensation to the masters. Garrison concluded that slavery, like just war and woman's suffrage, "was not a Bible question," since "nothing in regard to controversial matters had ever been settled by the Bible." For example, Garrison was horrified that, during the Mexican War, President Zachary Taylor had used the authority of the Bible and Jesus to justify "giving the Mexicans hell!" Even if there were passages in the Bible that could be interpreted as glorifying war, passages so interpreted were, for Garrison, not the Word of God. As with the biblical justification of war, the biblical justification of slavery was blasphemy. "The God," writes Garrison, "who, in America, is declared to sanction the impious system of slavery—the annihilation of the marriage institution and the sacrifices of all human rights—is my ideal of the devil." In one fell swoop, Garrison rejected the observance of the Sabbath, the authority of clergy, and the inspiration of the Bible. His epigones declared the Bible "a lie and a curse on mankind."⁴¹

Garrison's political action organization, attracting the likes of Wendell Phillips (1811–1884), Theodore Parker (1810–1860), and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1802–1882), pressed the issue pointedly. At the 1850 annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in Boston, the Garrisonian Henry C. Wright offered an infamous resolution condemning the Bible of the institutional church: "Resolved, That if the Bible sanctions slavery, and is thus opposed to the self-evident truth that 'all men are created equal, and have an inalienable right to liberty,' the Bible is a self-evident falsehood, and ought to be, and ere long be, regarded as the enemy of Nature and Nature's God, and the progress of the human race in liberty, justice and goodness." Wright attacked Moses Stuart, denounced his *Conscience and the Constitution*, and, as reported in the southern religious press, called him "the Andover God." The rhetoric confirmed southern stereotypes of aboli-

tionists as madmen who declared, "Prove to me from the Bible that slavery is to be tolerated, and I will trample your Bible under my feet, as I would the vilest reptile in the face of the earth."⁴²

Garrisonian crusaders damned institutional Christianity as collaborating with proslavery. Anticlerical rhetoric soon led to a "come-outer" movement. Radical abolitionists pressed true Christians to "come out" of religious institutions deemed evil rather than risking spiritual contamination by attempting to purify them. A distinction was made between Christianity, the true religion of Jesus and the apostles, and so-called *Churchianity*, the corrupt, proslavery religion.⁴³ While a golden-age history fell out of favor among nineteenth-century Christian intellectuals and scholars, here we see its persistence at the popular level.

The Voices of African Americans

A number of African Americans entered the public argument over slavery. None was more vocal than the abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who was convinced that the Bible, at its core, advanced a gospel of freedom. "I cannot follow," he declared, "the reasonings of those who attempt to defend slavery in the name of divinity, nor in the name of the Bible. But one thing seems to me clear, that if the thing cannot be defended in the name of humanity it is not likely to gain much for its defense in the name of God." Douglass tried to dissuade white abolitionists from the position of Garrisonian radicals to abandon biblical arguments because of the relative success of proslavery exegesis. "It is no evidence," Douglass proclaimed, "that the Bible is a bad book, because those who profess to believe the Bible are bad. The slaveholders of the South, and many of their wicked allies at the North, claim the Bible for slavery; shall we, therefore, fling the Bible away as a pro-slavery book? It would be as reasonable to do so as it would be to fling away the Constitution."⁴⁴

Douglass, along with other black abolitionists, also fought to curtail enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.⁴⁵ He denied the law any biblical or Constitutional basis and prayed for the day when "Doctors of Divinity shall find a better use for the Bible than in using it to prop up slavery, and a better employment for their time and talents than in finding analogies between Paul's Epistle to Philemon and the slave-catching bill of Millard Filmore." Douglass lectured on his analogy between biblical interpretation and Constitutional interpretation to audiences worldwide:

The constitution is pro-slavery, because men have interpreted it to be pro-slavery, and practice upon it as if it were pro-slavery.

The very same thing, sir, might be said of the Bible itself; for in the United States men have interpreted the Bible against liberty. They have declared that Paul's epistle to *Philemon* is a full proof for the enactment of that hell-black Fugitive Slave Bill which has desolated my people for the last ten years in that country. They have declared that the Bible sanctions slavery. What do we do in such a case? What do you do when you are told by the slaveholders of America that the Bible sanctions slavery? Do you go and throw your Bible into the fire? Do you sing out, "No Union with the Bible!"? Do you declare that a thing is bad because it has been misused, abused, and made a bad use of? Do you throw it away on that account? No! You press it to your bosom all the more closely; you read it all the more diligently; and prove from its pages that it is on the side of liberty—and not on the side of slavery.⁴⁶

Frederick Douglass's abolitionist theology grew out of his personal experience with slavery and, specifically, of his former master's demand for slave illiteracy. Master Hugh Auld had prevented young Frederick from learning to read the Bible. Auld had shouted, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world. If he learns to read the Bible it will forever unfit him to be slave." In his autobiography, Douglass called Master Hugh's tirade "the first decidedly anti-slavery lecture to which it had been my lot to listen."⁴⁷ Later, when he eventually learned to read, he found the Golden Rule—understood through egalitarianism and not through love-patriarchalism—to be the hermeneutical key to the Bible's interpretation. Preaching on Jesus' love of neighbor command in Matthew 22:39, Douglass exhorted that, if you claim freedom for yourself, you must grant it to your neighbor. The emancipation of slaves became, for Douglass, *the* moral imperative of nineteenth-century Protestant Christian piety and humanism.⁴⁸ This piety places Douglass in the tradition of white abolitionists who also shunned the Garrisonians and their denial of the authority of Scripture on the slavery question.

Not all African Americans, however, stood in this tradition of accepting the whole Bible as authoritative. Discouraged and frustrated, many blacks searched for an effective response to both the Fugitive Slave Law and the Dred Scott Decision. In Massachusetts, New Bedford African Americans registered their protest at a June 1858 meeting of the Third Christian Church. The assembly unanimously adopted a series of resolutions, submitted by local black leader Lloyd H. Brooks, that included the following: "*Resolved*, That we neither recognize nor respect any laws for slavery, whether from Moses, Paul, or

Taney. We spurn and trample them all under our feet as in violation of the laws of God and the rights of men."⁴⁹

Some African Americans took steps even more defiant. White Presbyterian minister Charles Colcock Jones, a leading advocate of the mission to the slaves and an early historian of their religious instruction, once recalled a religious mutiny by slaves to a sermon he gave before a slave congregation in 1833:

I was preaching to a large congregation on the *Epistle to Philemon*: and when I insisted upon fidelity and obedience as Christian virtues in servants and upon the authority of Paul, condemned the practice of *running away*, one half of my audience deliberately rose up and walked off with themselves, and those that remained looked any thing but satisfied, either with the preacher or his doctrine. After dismissal, there was no small stir among them; some solemnly declared "that there was no such epistle in the Bible"; others, "that they did not care if they ever heard me preach again!" . . . There were some too, who had strong objections against me as a Preacher, because I was a *master*, and said "his people have to work as well as we."⁵⁰

Albert Barnes cited this episode in his larger argument that Onesimus was not a slave—even the simple minds of illiterate slaves could see that obvious fact, he argued.⁵¹ The episode shows that African Americans had their own hermeneutics of suspicion and an oral canon of Christian Scripture that competed with the white folks' Bible. Knowledge of biblical stories came from music, not books. It was in the slave spirituals, above all, that enslaved African Americans conjured the biblical characters, themes, and lessons into figures participating in their own lives. Blacks argued that their experiential Christianity was more authentic than the "Bible Christianity" of their white masters.⁵²

These slaves developed a hermeneutics of typology, strongly displayed in the Moses and Exodus figuration but with New Testament imagery as well. Paul's words in Philippians 2:6–8, of Jesus taking the form of a slave, were transformative for blacks and led to black Christian performances of the imitation of Christ as the archetypal "Suffering Servant." A tombstone (dating sometime after 1812) is illustrative. Erected by the members of the African Baptist church in Savannah, Georgia, the tombstone states that the deceased, Andrew Bryan, the first pastor, had been "imprisoned for the Gospel without ceremony and . . . severely whipped" but told his white tormentors that "he rejoiced not only to be whipped, but . . . was willing to suffer death for the cause of Christ."⁵³

Many slaves found power in the New Testament book of Revelation.⁵⁴ Interpreted through the hermeneutics of typology, slaves

conjured the Lamb of the Apocalypse into an abolitionist warrior Jesus. The apocalyptic language, especially of Revelation 6:15–16 and 19:11–13, invigorated hope for divine wrath and retribution. The Jesus of whom the slaves sang was “King Jesus,” a terrifying figure seated on a milk-white horse with sword and shield in hand. This figuration of Christ in black eschatology would not be the result of social programs, such as political action or legal reform, but through catastrophe. The “black jeremiad” (coined from the biblical term “Jeremiah”) warned of ethnic violence and slave insurrection. Such language prompted some of the bloodiest slave revolts in U.S. history. Denmark Vesey, the leader of a slave revolt in Charleston, South Carolina (1822), read his Bible, found slavery to be wrong, and used scriptural passage to win supporters. His co-conspirator, “Gullah” Jack Pritchard, was a Methodist preacher as well as a “conjure doctor,” a practitioner in African shamanism. The 1831 revolt in Southampton County, Virginia, was led by Nat Turner, who like Vesey before him, was a compelling Bible seer-prophet.⁵⁵ The hermeneutics of typology that “conjured apocalypse” provided a powerful strategy for African Americans to transform the New Testament into a text calling for a holy war against slavery.

Proslavery Theology and Exegesis

While radical abolitionism and slave insurrection, on one side of the moral debate, pressed disunion with slaveholders and the shattering of traditional understandings of biblical and clerical authority, radical proslavery, on the other, denounced both come-outerism and abolitionism as infidelity. Proslavery itself, as a discourse, was relatively new in American culture. During the decades preceding the Revolutionary War, the American colonies saw nearly no white opposition to slavery; what little there was came from a handful of Quaker emancipationists.⁵⁶ Consequently, there was no need for apologetics. The paucity of early American proslavery literature resulted from a lack of need to defend an institution that nearly all European settlers took for granted.⁵⁷ However, with the radicalization of antislavery and abolitionism after 1835 (William Lloyd Garrison’s campaigns), proslavery literature increased dramatically. The proslavery argument from the New Testament arose in response to antislavery and abolitionist claims.

The first claim that proslavery challenged concerned the term *servant*. It meant *slave*. Proslavery writers upheld this simple and straightforward claim by the hermeneutics of “plain sense,” which charged antislavery with semantic obfuscation. By strict inter-

pretation of the literal text, proslavery biblicists made appeal to the flat reading of both the Bible and scriptural authority, reinforced by nineteenth-century American millenarianism, Princeton theology, and Scottish Common Sense theories of knowledge.⁵⁸ "We . . . believe the Bible to be the Word of God, and to mean just what it says." To claim that *servant* means free servant, hired laborer, apprentice, or employee "disregards the plainest principles of language" and denies that the Bible "is the word of God." The Bible must be interpreted "according to its plain and palpable meaning, and as understood by all mankind for three thousand years [*sic*] before [our] time." One justification for the hermeneutics of plain sense was the alleged fact that the "Scriptures have been purposely written by plain men, so that plain men may understand them." All the "volumes of commentaries and expositions" have really served only "to perplex the truth," and "the accumulation of learned rubbish has made it difficult to discover the simplest matters" like slavery.⁵⁹ This hermeneutics consequently led to a distrust of books and libraries generally: the prodigious number of commentary volumes lining the shelves implied that the Scriptures must be dark and difficult to fathom, an impossibility for biblicists.⁶⁰

Ironically, this anti-intellectual hermeneutics of plain sense was confirmed by scholarship on the original languages of the Bible. A dilettante interest in the findings of German biblical criticism and classical philology was common, albeit selective and cautionary.⁶¹ Proslavery authors announced to the general public the consensus of America's first biblical scholars, such as Moses Stuart, who (although personally antislavery but not an immediate abolitionist)⁶² had demonstrated the fallacy of the "servant" hypothesis. For proslavery interpreters maintaining plenary verbal inspiration, the problem lay not in the Bible itself but in the English text, the King James translation of the Greek *doulos* as *servant* being the specific source of the trouble. "Our English version itself . . . has a tendency to lead to an inadequate conception of the idea [of slavery] conveyed by the original."⁶³ The antislavery and abolitionist "servant" hypothesis, a product of the hermeneutics of semantic subterfuge, was clearly wrong even on a scholarly level. "Hence, after trying in vain the whole apparatus of exegetical torture, they have—with, I believe, much unanimity—set all philology and history at defiance, and absolutely deny that the original words mean slave."⁶⁴ In the service of proslavery, the hermeneutics of historical criticism helped defeat the antislavery hermeneutics of semantic subterfuge.

Not only was the "servant" hypothesis bad scholarship, proslavery charged, but also bad Christian faith:

You [abolitionists] attempt to avert the otherwise irresistible conclusion, that slavery was thus ordained by God, by declaring that the word "slave" is not . . . found in the Bible. And I have seen many learned dissertations on this point from abolitionist pens. It is well known that both the Hebrew and Greek words translated "servant" in the Scriptures, mean also, and most usually "slave." The use of one word, instead of another, was a mere matter of taste with the translators of the Bible. . . . You endeavor to hang an argument of immortal consequence upon the wretched subterfuge, that the precise word "slave" is not to be found in the *translation* of the Bible. As if the translators were canonical expounders of the Holy Scriptures, and *their words*, not *God's meaning*, must be regarded as his revelation.

It is vain to look to Christ and his Apostles to justify such blasphemous perversions of the word of God.⁶⁵

The hermeneutics of historical criticism helped proslavery to show that reliance on the literal meaning of the word of a translator rather than on the original term of the biblical author was wrong and nothing short of infidelity. The hermeneutics of historical criticism reinforced the hermeneutics of plain sense. *Servant* means slave. Semantic obfuscation cannot change the rules of classical philology.

Armed with the hermeneutics of plain sense and a literalism so pure that it rejected the English translation in favor of "original" texts, proslavery clergy moved quickly to discredit the Barnes Hypothesis that Onesimus was not a slave. This hypothesis was a clear philological absurdity and religious perversion of the revealed and plain Word of God. Proslavery writers labeled Barnes a "fanatic" and compared him to Satan quoting Scripture. They easily destroyed Barnes's exegetical arguments constructed with the hermeneutics of semantic subterfuge, for the arguments rested only on the single, flimsy contention that *servant* (*doulos* in ancient Greek) means *slave*.⁶⁶ "You get nothing," writes the Reverend Fred A. Ross, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama, "by torturing the English Version. People understand English. Nay, you get little by applying the rack to the Hebrew and Greek." "It will do no good," writes fellow Old School Presbyterian Charles Hodge, "under a paroxysm of benevolence, to attempt to tear the Bible to pieces, or to extort by violent exegesis, a meaning foreign to its obvious sense."⁶⁷ To focus on the slave Onesimus rather than the master Philemon was to miss the importance of the Pauline Mandate. Paul admitted a great slaveholder into the church. The hermeneutics both of historical criticism and of plain sense showed this fact.

After this exegetical conquest, proslavery marched to attack

another flank of the Barnes Hypothesis, the historical claim that Jesus never met slaves. The gospel story of the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1–10; Matthew 8:5–13) was a popular weapon in this exegetical holy war over competing claims of religious fidelity. The story afforded an instance where Christ recognized and applauded a Roman soldier as a good and faithful master. "Surely remarkable" was the fact that the gospel figure "who exhibited the greatest faith . . . was a slaveholder." Importantly, Jesus praised the centurion's use of commands to order military and domestic subordinates (Luke 7:8–9; Matthew 8:9–10). The plain sense of this language means that military hierarchy and other forms of patriarchy ought to order human relations, especially between master and slave. The Savior restored the sick slave to health "without desiring his master to free him, or uttering a word in censure of their relation to each other." The silence of Christ on emancipation proved his support of slavery. Indeed, throughout the entire Bible, God "has singled out the greatest slaveholders of that age, as the object of special favor."⁶⁸ The proslavery hermeneutics of plain sense, armed with selective use of the findings of historical criticism (e.g., that slavery existed in Roman Palestine), challenged the antislavery and abolitionist hermeneutics of the immutable kernel and the seed growing secretly. The actual "immutable principle" was not liberal love egalitarianism but conservative love patriarchalism.

With their hermeneutics of plain sense, proslavery writers drew on a constellation of related passages to build their case. Not only did Christ and his apostles welcome slaveholders into the church as model believers, but Christ also used slaves as characters in his parables to instruct duty and obligation.⁶⁹ Proslavery added to this literary evidence the historical evidence, from Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88) and others, that significant slave populations existed throughout the entire Roman Empire, including Palestine.⁷⁰

Proslavery aimed its attack next at abolitionist interpretations of the Golden Rule, which the abolitionists based on the hermeneutical combination of immutable kernel and the seed growing secretly. Countering the claim that Jesus preached a kernel of love egalitarianism, proslavery reminded Christian abolitionists that the New Testament as the inspired Word of God could not be divided against itself. The hermeneutical key must be to "interpret the Scriptures so that one passage or part will not contradict another."⁷¹ To be sure, many abolitionists agreed with this interpretative rule and had applied it themselves to read freedom, egalitarianism, and natural rights into the Pauline household duty codes. Proslavery, then, faced the same chal-

lenge as abolitionism: to find coherence between the teachings of Jesus and the ethics of Paul.

The proslavery solution was to interpret Jesus' Golden Rule as love patriarchy. The hermeneutics of plain sense argued against competing hermeneutics of (1) the golden age, (2) immutable principles, or (3) the seed growing secretly. The tradition did not miscarry, according to proslavery. There was direct continuation between the love patriarchy of Jesus' Golden Rule teaching and the love patriarchy of Paul's household duty codes and American southern slave laws, which operated not to end slavery but to curb its abuse by individual masters.

This solution points to the threat that abolitionism posed to northern proslavery conservatives—its antihierarchical tone. The crucial issue here lies in the interpretation of two nineteenth-century principles: egalitarianism and patriarchy as basic yet opposing ways of understanding Jesus and Paul. What proslavery ideologues were looking for was continuity, as opposed to the Whig historiography of progress. This opposition reveals a fundamental tension in southern political culture between the centrality and imperative of hierarchy (among the planter upper-class culture of large slaveholders along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and the Mississippi River) and a fierce attachment to Jacksonian Democracy among yeoman farmers (who owned few slaves) and the white poor (who owned none). The southern middle and lower classes were religious but evangelical and egalitarian: their proslavery argument was based on equality (every white man should be able to own a slave) and property.⁷² The move to patriarchy as the hermeneutical key to reading Jesus and Paul, therefore, belongs to a wider move to assault Jacksonian Democracy and to defend hierarchy as a political system. Studying the different approaches to biblical exegesis on the slavery question, then, provides another perspective on the antihierarchical polemic that plunged America into Civil War.

As the political stakes rose, the preaching against antislavery and abolitionist hermeneutics became more vehement: "The fanatics who find it impossible to explain away these cases of the direct sanction of slavery, and who seek in vain for a line or word which discourages or condemns that institution, seize, in their despair, upon the golden rule . . . and so pervert it as to make it condemn what our Saviour and his apostles directly sanctioned." Proslavery writers pointed out an absurdity in the abolitionist logic of social equality taken to its extreme. The rule interpreted as love egalitarianism leads to social anarchy. It must abolish all hierarchy itself—parent over child, master over apprentice, tutor over pupil, judge over convict, jailer over

thief—rendering society “a chaotic and jarring mass of wretchedness and crime.”⁷³ Jesus Christ did not preach love egalitarianism but love patriarchy. The rule affirmed that men in authority should do to subordinates as they would expect to be treated were they the subordinates. “The father,” for example, “should do unto his child as he would, if a child, and informed of his own interest, wish his father to do unto him.” Likewise, the master should treat his slave as if the master, imagining himself a slave and aware of his own good, would like to be treated. Paul repeated this rule when he commands, “Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal” (Colossians 4:1). “Just and equal” means love patriarchy. Paul, as Jesus before him, attacked not slavery but its abuse by unjust, cruel masters.⁷⁴ The hermeneutics of plain sense scored another victory.

Proslavery pursued the victory of exegetical control over the New Testament with two powerful allies in nineteenth-century American political discourse: racism and conservative republicanism. Both of these ideologies reinforced love patriarchy. The ideology of racism argued that slavery rescued Africans from cruel paganism and savagery. In an extension of the “White Man’s Burden” argument, proslavery contended that the institution was good for African American slaves. “We claim for the institution of Southern slavery, that it has done more for the religious, social and physical condition of the African race, than has ever been done. . . . In less than two centuries, three millions of them now living—to say nothing of the dead—have been brought into a state of . . . Christianity.” The African Negro, before slavery, had been “worshipping the Devil.”⁷⁵ Christian racism argued slavery to be part of God’s plan for African salvation.

This racist argument joined forces with the nineteenth-century backlash against the liberalizing tendencies of the Revolutionary era. Although Thomas Jefferson served as president from 1801 to 1809, as early as the Federalist reaction of the 1780’s a small but growing number of conservatives had begun to reject anything that smacked of being French or Jeffersonian. Interestingly, “northern conservatives, not southerners, were the first Americans to revive the defense of slavery in public, polemical writings following the American Revolution.” The abolitionist, claimed Virginia Baptist pastor Thornton Stringfellow, should “throw away his Bible as Mr. Jefferson did his. . . . Never disgrace the Bible by making Mr. Jefferson its expounder. . . . How can any man, who believes in the Bible, admit for a moment that all are born free and equal?” Such anti-Jeffersonianism is evident in an 1849 southern newspaper editorial arguing for the extension of slavery into the territory acquired by the Mexican Treaty:

We think it unfortunate, however, that Mr. Jefferson, doubtless without due exercise of his peculiar powers of ratiocination, issued the nonsensical and perfectly inexplicable dogma of universality of liberty, and general equalization of human rights; which has been seized hold of not merely by abolitionists but by many political and religious reformers, who under the misconception of the principles of rational freedom, are really destroying, instead of establishing the foundation of right government.⁷⁶

The text proving Christian obedience to "right government" became Romans 13, in which Paul exhorts every person to be subject to governing authorities. Proslavery apologists combined Romans 13 and the Golden Rule to argue love patriarchalism: the reciprocal love ethic applied only within a given social structure, which every citizen must uphold. With its ideology of love patriarchalism, conservative republicanism gave political sanction to proslavery exegesis and theology. Conservative politics joined proslavery religion in challenging the hermeneutics of immutable principles, a misguided Jeffersonian belief in natural right and human liberty. Jesus never preached this utopian nonsense, claimed proslavery religion. Historical criticism appeared to prove proslavery correct, since slavery was both present in Roman Palestine and patriarchal.

The proslavery crusade to battle infidelity inspired further attacks against antislavery and abolitionist hermeneutics. The expediency hypothesis, built on the hermeneutics of the seed growing secretly, took fatal hits. The hypothesis that either Jesus or Paul held back on his alleged condemnation of slavery for reasons of expediency—fearing a Christian slave uprising and Roman military response that would have destroyed the early Church—was held as a historical implausibility and scandalous blasphemy. The so-called servile war hypothesis was infidelity because it betrayed "limited ideas of God's providence and a disregard for the plain letter and meaning of his word."⁷⁷ Such views not only forgot God's protection of the Church but also the power of the Holy Spirit to direct historical events. It assumed God to be absent or even nonexistent—sheer atheism. The hypothesis was denounced also as historically implausible. It painted a perverse portrait of Christ and his Apostle Paul, both of whom, in fact, were not timid men. Jesus boldly exposed the hypocrisy of the Jewish rulers, though he knew that he would be crucified for his truthfulness. Paul was unyielding in his assault on the idolatry of Greece and Rome, an institution more fundamental to pagan society than slavery and so an attack far more seditious. Neither Jesus nor Paul ever feared the wrath of authorities, military or judicial, and both willingly accepted imprisonment and execution for their beliefs.

The supposition, therefore, that either Jesus or Paul refrained from condemning the alleged sin of slavery because he feared it might offend public opinion and threaten his personal safety (or that of the future Church) was to call each a coward or worse. As the South Carolina proslavery pastor Richard Fuller asked rhetorically, Paul "'satisfies himself' while millions on all sides are sinking into hell through this crime—he 'satisfies himself' with spreading principles which would slowly work a cure! Craven and faithless herald! and after this, with what face can he say 'I have kept back nothing!'" With post-Civil War racism and resentment of the abolition of slavery, Robert Lewis Dabney, the Presbyterian minister who served as aide-de-camp to Confederate General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, added, "This hypothesis represents that Saviour who claimed omniscience, as adopting a policy which was as futile as dishonest. He forbore the utterance of any express testimony against the sin of slaveholding, say they [sc. the abolitionists], leaving the church to find it out by deduction from general principles of equity. But in point of fact, the church never began to make such deductions until near the close of the 18th century."⁷⁸ The hermeneutics of the seed growing secretly was held as untenable, as the hermeneutics of plain sense showed.

Proslavery theology also used the hermeneutics of plain sense to counter antislavery and abolitionist claims, based on 1 Corinthians 7:21, Galatians 3:28, and 1 Timothy 1:10, that Paul was an emancipationist. These passages were being misread, plain and simple. First Corinthians 7:21 told slaves not to worry about their status and to remain slaves even if presented with offers of liberty.⁷⁹ Even if the passage could be read in the alternative way, "take freedom," the meaning remained proslavery. Slaves could accept freedom only if offered legally under slave law, through master-sanctioned manumission.⁸⁰ The ideology of racism reinforced the hermeneutics of plain sense. This alternative reading ("take freedom") worked only when master and slave were of the same color. Since (unlike white Roman freedmen) black American freedmen could never attain citizenship or social equality with whites, Paul's words ("take freedom") could not apply to Negroes.⁸¹ In the end, then, it did not matter which reading ("use slavery" or "take freedom") was correct. Paul had said "Art thou called being a servant? Care not for it," yet abolitionists *did* care for it and so disobeyed the word of God.

Galatians 3:28 must be interpreted "in a spiritual sense"; it was metaphorical, not literal. As proof, proslavery authors reminded their audience that Paul, while saying "neither male nor female," did not destroy literal gender differences in actual life: women were still told to obey their husbands.⁸² The reference in 1 Timothy 1:10 ad-

dressed slave *traders*, not slaveholders generally. If abolitionist exegesis were correct, then Abraham and other slaveholding Old Testament patriarchs mentioned in the New Testament as models of faith would have been great sinners, an absurdity to "plain sense" believers. Southerners themselves acknowledged slave traders to be immoral lowlifes, whose reputation for dishonesty earned them reputations similar to that of used-car sellers today.⁸³ Slavery itself was "man-holding," an acceptable Christian activity, whereas illegal slave trading was "manstealing." Proslavery then turned the tables on abolitionists. What 1 Timothy 1:10 denounces as sin was "menstealers," none other than abolitionists who kidnapped or otherwise stole southern slaves from their rightful owners.⁸⁴ The proslavery, plain sense of all these sacred texts had remained undisturbed throughout their history of interpretation until "abolitionism set its cloven foot upon the Bible."⁸⁵ The hermeneutics of plain sense took priority in proslavery argumentation to attack the infidel antislavery and abolitionist hermeneutics of (1) semantic subterfuge, (2) immutable principles, (3) the golden-age historical view, and (4) the seed growing secretly.

Paul himself provided an example of how to deal with the infidelity of abolitionism, since he apparently encountered ancient abolitionists in his own ministry. First Timothy 6:1–5 provided the evidence. After commanding slaves to obey even non-Christian masters, Paul warned that, "If any man teaches otherwise," such a teacher perverted godliness. Just as Paul condemned men like this as having corrupt minds and being destitute of the truth, so must Christians today condemn the infidelity of modern abolitionists.⁸⁶ This passage proved to proslavery adherents that abolitionism was incompatible with Christian orthodoxy. Abolitionism was ancient and came from the Devil. Since the face of infidelity has not changed since New Testament times, there was no golden age.

The greatest threat to orthodoxy, however, was something more sinister: the fifth and final hermeneutics of moral intuition. The abolitionists called believers to follow the authority of individual conscience rather than the plenary inspired authority of the Bible. That hermeneutics was un-Christian because it attacked biblical authority. The appeal to conscience over the Bible made Scripture defective as a system of morality.⁸⁷

Proslavery aimed its hermeneutical and exegetical weapons at Francis Wayland and his college textbook on moral science.⁸⁸ Proslavery apologists accused Wayland of inculcating in American students a hatred toward slavery. After this brainwashing, proslavery charged, Wayland then informed students that they possess "a 'distinct mental faculty'—distinct from judgment—which teaches those

who cultivate it, infallibly, all that is right and wrong; that this conscience, or moral sense, is more to be relied on than the Bible—than the ancient inspirations of God!" as if, said one critic, "man possesses a faculty of *clairvoyance*." The truth was, argued proslavery, that so-called moral conscience was a human product of education and, thus, fallible. Anti-intellectualism encouraged this proslavery argument. Wayland's hermeneutics of moral intuition (that God's Word must be discerned through personal conscience) clashed against the hermeneutics of plain sense (that God's Word was obvious even to those without the benefit of the moral cultivation that education brought). After all, "Most men live without reflection." Unlike conscience, the Bible can be read "with all simplicity of mind."⁸⁹ The Bible was divine, plain, and infallible, whereas conscience was decried as human, erring, and requiring education.⁹⁰ One only needed to observe different people to see that each had a different moral sense. How could conscience be reliable when it generated multiple and conflicting moral voices?

The anti-intellectualism of literalism combined with xenophobia of France, which, in 1848, had abolished slavery in its colonies.⁹¹ Abolitionism was idolatry. "Ye have," charged one proslavery adherent, "like the French infidels, made *reason* your goddess, and are exalting her above the Bible; and, in your unitarianism and neology and all modes of infidelity, ye are rejecting and crucifying the Son of God." To make the Bible conform to human notions of right and wrong was to repeat the blasphemy of France, "an attempt to know the divine attributes and character in *some other way* than through the divine word."⁹² Reliance upon conscience made the Word of God subordinate to the teaching of the human heart. The debate over the intuitive power of conscience was part of a wider clash in American culture between the eighteenth-century liberal, pro-French rationalism of the Revolutionary era and the anti-intellectualism, anti-French xenophobia of nineteenth-century conservatism. The xenophobia was also of England, which, in 1838, abolished slavery in its colonies, and of Germany and its biblical criticism, which denied the plenary inspiration of Scripture and so could be used in the name of proslavery only with extreme caution.⁹³ The theological hermeneutics of plain sense joined the rising tide of conservative politics that would lead to the secession of the southern slave states from the Union and subsequent Civil War.

The proslavery argument illustrates the complicated relationship between the historical-critical interpretation of the Bible and contemporary debate over moral issues. Proslavery charged that abolitionists took the new criticism to distort scriptural plain sense. The

proslavery clergyman John Henry Hopkins, Episcopal Bishop of Vermont, bemoaned:

Even the commentators who have written since the abolition excitement in England, and who show, here and there, its powerful influence, do not intimate the slightest wish to wrest the true meaning of those [biblical] texts. *That* seems to have been the task of a still later period, and is one of the newest inventions of Biblical interpretation which threaten the welfare of the Church and of the country. For I can imagine no transgression more odious in the sight of God, and more sure to forfeit His blessing, than the willful determination to distort His revealed Word, and *make it speak, not as it truly is, but as men, in their insane pride of superior philanthropy, fancy that it ought to be.*⁹⁴

A misguided sense of philanthropy had replaced the Bible as the standard of truth.

In one of the most revealing passages in proslavery literature, Bishop Hopkins further argued this point. Hopkins himself was racked by a moral unease about slavery's goodness; nonetheless, he remained convinced that the hermeneutics of plain sense was the key to divine truth. He yielded his own conscience to biblical authority:

With entire correctness, therefore, your letter refers the question to the only infallible criterion—the Word of God. If it were a matter to be determined by personal sympathies, tastes, or feelings, I should be as ready as any man to condemn the institution of slavery, for all my prejudices of education, habit, and social position stand entirely opposed to it. But as a Christian, I am solemnly warned not to be “wise in my own conceit,” and not to “lean to my own understanding.” As a Christian, I am compelled to submit my weak and erring intellect to the authority of the Almighty. For then only can I be safe in my conclusions, when I know that they in accordance with the will of Him, before whose tribunal I must render a strict account in the last great day.⁹⁵

This passage illustrates the conflict that anti-intellectualism caused. Torn between the rational humanity of conscience and the irrational orthodoxy of literalism, Bishop Hopkins felt compelled by the hermeneutics of plain sense to support an institution he intuited to be evil. His personal dislike of slavery that conflicted with the plain sense of the Bible convinced him that moral taste was relative and so unreliable. Proslavery's biblicism was so extreme as to render rational judgment in debate over moral issues a form of religious infidelity.

Conclusion

Antislavery exegesis constituted an early form of biblical criticism. It was one of many cultural forces, such as deism, Unitarianism, controversies over geology and other natural sciences, and the hermeneutical turns of literary criticism, that promoted more critical readings of the biblical text. The interplay of all these forces prepared the way for the eventual reception in this country of the German higher criticism.

Because of its moral imperative against the pure evil of human chattel bondage, antislavery and abolitionist Christianity was forced away from biblicism into a less literal reading of Scripture. The first step in this move was the development of a hermeneutics of immutable principles, which advanced an egalitarian reading of Jesus' Golden Rule (as the kernel of the New Testament) over against its patriarchal reading by proslavery. This view was combined with Whig theories of human progress in history to form a hermeneutics of the seed growing secretly. Yet, a growing doubt about using egalitarianism to interpret the Pauline household duty codes led radical abolitionists, especially Garrisonians (admittedly not a representative group), to the second step—the total abandonment of biblical authority in favor of secular arguments from conscience.

Some African American abolitionists, such as Frederick Douglass, did not want to go that far and worked with white clergymen to save a biblical understanding of Christianity. These abolitionists were more representative because of their eagerness to build popular support. However, other African Americans, such as Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner, rejected white Christianity altogether and took the third step, that of violence. They employed a hermeneutics of biblical typology and the conjure of apocalyptic eschatology.

The political imperative of proslavery, in contrast, fostered a move toward literalism emboldened by the findings of biblical criticism that the New Testament writers did not condemn slavery (as abolitionists would wish) but instead expressed views similar to those in the wider Greco-Roman slave culture. Biblical scholars argued that the New Testament contained passages that did not merely recommend subjection of slaves to their masters. Those passages signaled acceptance of an organic model of civilization for which such subjection was essential.⁹⁶ Most embarrassing for today's readers of the Bible, the proslavery spokesmen were defending the more defensible position from the perspective of historical criticism.⁹⁷

This essay, then, carries implication beyond its case history of slavery. The opposing values of literalism and moral intuition remain

at odds in American religious culture, shaping contemporary debates over race relations, military conflict, capital punishment, poverty, abortion, full emancipation of women, and lesbian and gay rights. Ready answers to these moral questions all too often fall short of persuasive power because they merely repeat truth claims found in the nineteenth-century battle over slavery and the Bible. Biblical criticism is seldom able to settle contemporary moral debate, but contemporary moral debate can and does shape broad and influential trends in biblical criticism.

Notes

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1. See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), 523–56; see also Jerry Dean Campbell, "Biblical Criticism in America, 1858–1892" (Ph.D. diss., University of Denver, 1982), 29–66.

2. See Kerry S. Walters, *The American Deists: Voices of Reason and Dissent in the Early Republic* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 29–31; and Kerry S. Walters, *Rational Infidels: The American Deists* (Durango, Colo.: Longwood Academic, 1992), 294.

3. See Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 77.

4. See Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 95–96; Herbert Hovenkamp, *Science and Religion in America, 1800–1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 57–78; James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 143–50; and James R. Moore, "Geologists and Interpreters of Genesis in the Nineteenth Century," in *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 322–50.

5. See M. D. Walhout, "The Hermeneutical Turn in American Critical Theory," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57, no. 4 (October 1996): 683–703.

6. For the emergence of American biblical studies, see Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1969). For its precedents, see William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 1: *From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). The Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis was founded in 1880 and is one of the oldest learned societies in the United States.

7. See George B. Cheever, *The Guilt of Slavery and the Crime of Slaveholding: Demonstrated from the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1860), 332–40. This work was the most scholarly attempt to argue abolitionism from biblical exegesis.

8. See Albert Barnes, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Views of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Perkins and Purves, 1846), 242–49; see also Charles Elliott, *Sinfulness of American Slavery*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and J. H. Power, 1851), 2:337; and Charles Elliott, *The Bible and Slavery* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and A. Poe, 1857), 34, 281–82.

9. See Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 91; and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War against Slavery* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), 317. See also Daryl Fisher-Ogden, "Albert Barnes (1798–1870)," in *Dictionary of Heresy Trials in American Christianity*, ed. George H. Shriver (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997), 11–20, although the charges of Old School Presbyterians that condemned Barnes twice for heresy concerned his preaching and publication of New School evangelical theology on original sin, atonement, justification, and other doctrines unrelated to his views on slavery.

10. J. Blanchard and N. L. Rice, *A Debate on Slavery Held in the City of Cincinnati, on the First, Second, Third, and Sixth Days of October, 1845, upon the Question: Is Slave-Holding in Itself Sinful, and the Relation between Master and Slave, a Sinful Relation?* (Cincinnati: Wm. H. Moore, 1846), 336, emphasis in original.

11. For background, see G. Whit Hutchison, "The Bible and Slavery, a Test of Ethical Method: Biblical Interpretation, Social Ethics, and the Hermeneutics of Race in America, 1830–1861" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1996), 153–228; Robert Bruce Mullen, "Biblical Critics and the Battle over Slavery," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 61, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 210–26; J. Earl Thompson, Jr., "Abolitionism and Theological Education at Andover," *New England Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (June 1974): 238–61; John H. Giltner, "Moses Stuart and the Slavery Controversy: A Study in the Failure of Moderation," *Journal of Religious Thought* 18, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1961): 27–

39; and John H. Giltner, *Moses Stuart: The Father of Biblical Science in America* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 123–30.

12. Blanchard and Rice, *Debate on Slavery*, 228; see also 229, 240, 327, 340, 360, 419.

13. See Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, *Letters on the Epistle of Paul to Philemon* (Charleston: B. Jenkins, 1845), 14; G. Bourne, "A Condensed Anti-Slavery Bible Argument," in *Essays and Pamphlets on Antislavery* (1833–1898; repr., Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 82–83; and Caroline L. Shanks, "The Biblical Anti-Slavery Argument of the Decade 1830–1840," *Journal of Negro History* 16, no. 2 (April 1931): 148–49. See also Allen Dwight Callahan, *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 11–12, although without awareness of the larger "servant" translation issue or of the ideology that affects the interpretation.

14. Barnes, *Inquiry*, 318–31; see also Hutchison, "The Bible and Slavery," 140–50.

15. See Fred A. Ross, *Slavery Ordained of God* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1857), 176–79; and Robert A. Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia* (New York: E. J. Hale and Son, 1867), 182–85.

16. See Laura L. Mitchell, "'Matters of Justice between Man and Man': Northern Divines, the Bible, and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850," in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery*, ed. John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 134–65.

17. Daniel R. Goodwin, *Southern Slavery in its Present Aspects: Containing a Reply to the Late Work of the Bishop of Vermont on Slavery* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1864), 116, emphasis in original.

18. Leonard Bacon, *Slavery Discussed in Occasional Essays* (1846; repr., Miami, Fla.: Mnemosyne Publishing, 1969), 180. For Bacon's role in antislavery, see John R. McKivigan, *The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830–1865* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 122, 153, 176, 190; and Hugh Davis, "Leonard Bacon, the Congregational Church, and Slavery, 1845–1861," in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, ed. McKivigan and Snay, 221–45. See also Barnes, *Inquiry*, 258.

19. See Mitchell, "'Matters of Justice,'" 139–49.

20. An important finding of twentieth-century historical criticism is that the New Testament does contain multiple voices, with different theologies and ethics. See, e.g., Wayne A. Meeks, "The Polyphonic Ethics of the Apostle Paul," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1988): 17–29.

21. See Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Case*

Issues in Biblical Interpretation (Scottsdale, Pa., and Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1983), 43–46, 61, although without tracing the historical development of the abolitionist argument. On the Cheevers, Weld, and Hosmer, see McKivigan, *War against Proslavery*, 137–41, 171.

22. I owe the formation of these hermeneutical strategies to Wayne A. Meeks, "The 'Haustafeln' and American Slavery: A Hermeneutical Challenge," in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering, Jr., and Jerry L. Sumney (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 245–52.

23. See Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931; repr., London: G. Bell and Sons, 1965); and Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 13 and *passim* on the ideological factors involved in how one thinks about history.

24. William Hosmer, *Slavery and the Church* (Auburn, Maine.: William J. Moses, 1853), 44–45; Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution* (New York: Lewis Colby, 1845), 78.

25. See Barnes, *Inquiry*, 376; Elliott, *Bible and Slavery*, 284; William E. Channing, *Slavery* (Boston: James Munroe, 1835), 8–9; Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery*, 77–94; Francis Wayland, *Elements of Moral Science* (New York: Sheldon, 1877), 221–28; and *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3: *No Union with Slave-Holders: 1841–1849*, ed. Walter M. Merrill (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1973), 485.

26. An idea present as early as Barnes, *Inquiry*, 346–55.

27. See Cheever, *Guilt of Slavery*, 411–13.

28. See Moses Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: Viking, 1980), 12–17, 27, 32–33, 42, 55, 64, 127–28. The influential work arguing that Christianity ended slavery was Henri Wallon, *Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité*, 3 vols., 2d ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1879), which elevated this moral-spiritual idea to the level of dogma. Wallon's work proved useful to American abolitionists.

29. See Channing, *Slavery*, 111. Channing was a gradualist who, although antislavery, opposed abolitionism. See also Wayland, *Elements*, 223–25; Wayland and Fuller, *Domestic Slavery*, 63–76; and Barnes, *Inquiry*, 283–304.

30. See Cheever, *Guilt of Slavery*, 340, who criticizes Barnes for overlooking 1 Timothy 1:10.

31. For a history of scholarship and possible exegetical solution, see

J. Albert Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995), 68–128.

32. Emphasis in original. The use of italics identifies a word inserted by the translators, which is not in the original Greek. See American Bible Society, Committee on Versions, *Report on the History and Recent Collation of the English Versions of the Bible: Presented by the Committee on Versions to the Board of Managers of the American Bible Society* (New York: American Bible Society's Press, 1851), 24.

33. W. G. Brownlow and A. Pryne, *Ought American Slavery to be Perpetuated: A Debate* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1858), 131; see also 211 and La Roy Sunderland, *The Testimony of God against Slavery* (1835; repr., St. Clair Shores, Mich.: Scholarly Press, 1970), 86; Elliott, *Sinfulness of American Slavery*, 1:104, 2:295; and Elliott, *Bible and Slavery*, 287.

34. Cheever, *Guilt of Slavery*, 416. For an interpretation of the meaning of this passage in its ancient context, see J. Albert Harrill, "The Vice of Slave Dealers in Greco-Roman Society: The Use of a Topos in 1 Timothy 1:10," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 97–122.

35. Cheever, *Guilt of Slavery*, 416.

36. Meeks, "'Haustafeln' and American Slavery," 245; James Brewer Stewart, "Abolitionists, the Bible, and the Challenge of Slavery," in *The Bible and Social Reform*, ed. Ernest R. Sandeen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 51. Influential was also the Scottish school of Common Sense Realism. See George M. Marsden, "Everyone One's Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 79–100.

37. See Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1971); Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten, eds., *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); and Robert P. Forbes, "Slavery and the Evangelical Enlightenment," in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, ed. McKivigan and Snay, 68–106. The American Transcendentalists held similar views. See Richard A. Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics: Institutional Authority and the Higher Criticism of the Bible* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

38. See Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science*, 132–59; and Hovenkamp, *Science and Religion*, 57–78.

39. See Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805–1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 270–305; Wayland, *Elements*, 57–69; and William Sumner Jenkins, *Proslavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 234. Wayland's work was the "moral science" textbook used in many colleges, something Southerners lamented. See James A. Sloan, *The Great Question Answered; or, Is Slavery a Sin in Itself* (Memphis, Tenn.: Hutton, Gallaway, 1857), 140. While holding antislavery views (such as amelioration of slave conditions toward gradual emancipation), Wayland was no abolitionist. He banned discussion of slavery in Brown University classes, and his 1838 tract, *The Limits of Human Responsibility*, condemned abolitionists and particularly the Garrisonian immediatists for their lack of sensitivity to the burdens of Christian slaveholders. See Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, "Suffering with Slaveholders: The Limits of Francis Wayland's Antislavery Witness," in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, ed. McKivigan and Snay, 196–230.

40. J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 180–90.

41. Garrison, *Letters*, vol. 6: *To Rouse the Slumbering Land: 1868–1879*, ed. Walter M. Merrill and Louis Ruchames (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), 145; Garrison, *Letters*, vol. 4: *From Disunionism to the Brink of War: 1850–1860*, ed. Louis Ruchames (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 25, 78; Stewart, "Abolitionists," 51, quoting Henry C. Wright. On Garrison's view that Bible passages glorifying war are not the Word of God, see Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 64.

42. *The Liberator*, May 31, 1850 (see also *The Liberator*, June 7, 1850, and June 14, 1850); *The Liberator* June 28, 1850, and August 2, 1850; "The Raid of John Brown, and the Progress of Abolition," *Southern Presbyterian Review* 12 (January 1860): 797; W. T. Hamilton, *Duties of Masters and Slaves Respectively: or, Domestic Servitude as Sanctioned by the Bible* (Mobile, Ala.: F. H. Brooks, 1845), 8.

43. McKivigan, *War against Proslavery*, 66 (see also 93–110), 184.

44. Frederick Douglass, Speech in Boston, Massachusetts, February 8, 1855, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, vol. 3: 1855–63, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 6; Frederick Douglass, Speech in New York, New York, August 3, 1857, in *Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. Blassingame, 182. Garrison did just what Douglass proposed, when he flung the Constitution into a fire at a public meeting in 1854. See Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Gov-*

ernment of God in Antislavery Thought (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), 189.

45. See Lewis Hayden, Testimony at the Massachusetts State House, Boston, February 13, 1855, in *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, ed. C. Peter Ripley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 4:266–69; and Jermain Wesley Loguen, Letter to Frederick Douglass, March 1855, in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, ed. Ripley, 4:270–73.

46. Frederick Douglass, Speech in New York, New York, May 12, 1859, in *Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. Blassingame, 258; Frederick Douglass, Speech in Glasgow, Scotland, March 26, 1860, in *Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. Blassingame, 363. Douglass satirizes the Garrisonian slogan, “No Union with Slaveholders.” See also *Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. Blassingame, 559, where Douglass mocks the proslavery claim that Philemon supports the Fugitive Slave Law.

47. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, rev. ed. of *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1892; repr., New York: Collier Books, 1962), 78–79.

48. See Frederick Douglass, Speech in Halifax, England, December 7, 1859, in *Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. Blassingame, 283–85; Frederick Douglass, Speech in Rochester, New York, June 16, 1861, in *Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. Blassingame, 440–41; and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 48–49.

49. Resolutions by Lloyd H. Brooks delivered at the Third Christian Church, New Bedford, Massachusetts, June 16, 1858, in *Black Abolitionist Papers*, ed. Ripley, 4:392.

50. Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia, *Tenth Annual Report of the Association for the Religious Instruction of the Negroes in Liberty County, Georgia* (Savannah, Ga.: The Association, 1845), 24–25, emphasis in original; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 294–95.

51. Barnes, *Inquiry*, 319 n. See also Callahan, *Embassy of Onesimus*, 1–2; Milton C. Sernett, *Black Religion and American Evangelicalism: White Protestants, Plantation Missions, and the Flowering of Negro Christianity* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press and American Theological Library Association, 1975), 77; and Clarice J. Martin, “The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: ‘Free Slaves’ and ‘Subordinate Women,’” in *Stony the Road We Trod*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 216–17.

52. See Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 242–43, 250–51; and Hutchison, “The Bible and Slavery,” 276–341.

53. Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 207.

54. *Ibid.*, 222–48.

55. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 163–64; Smith, *Conjuring Culture*, 159–60; and Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 160.

56. See Lester B. Scherer, *Slavery and the Churches in Early America, 1619–1818* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 39–43, 69–74, 129–32. There were a few other isolated white voices speaking out against slavery, some Presbyterian and Baptist, others Methodist, but not many (see *ibid.*, 132–41).

57. See Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 16, 116–20, 308–22; see also Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

58. See Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), esp. 103–31; Mark A. Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” in *Religion and the Civil War*, ed. Randall M. Millar, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 43–73; and Christopher H. Owen, “‘To Keep the Way Open for Methodism’: Georgia Wesleyan Neutrality toward Slavery, 1844–1861,” in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, ed. McKivigan and Snay, 114–15.

59. Iveson L. Brookes, *A Defence of the South against the Incroachments of the North* (Hamburg, S.C.: Republican Office, 1850), 32 (see also William C. Buck, *The Slavery Question* [Louisville: Harney, Hughes and Hughes, 1849], 4, 9); Blanchard and Rice, *Debate on Slavery*, 291 (see also Hamilton, *Duties of Masters and Slaves*, 6); James H. Hammond, “Letters on Slavery,” in *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (1852; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 108; Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery*, 169, 185.

60. See Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery*, 186; see also Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism*, 125 n. 5.

61. See Forbes, “Slavery and the Evangelical Enlightenment,” 92–93.

62. On Stuart’s antiabolitionism, see Mitchell, “‘Matters of Justice,’” 139–49.

63. John Fletcher, *Studies on Slavery: In Easy Lessons* (Natchez, Miss.: Jackson Warner, 1852), 163, 506–85, criticism directed at the “servant” hypoth-

esis of Albert Barnes. See also Ross, *Slavery Ordained*, 59; Thornton Stringfellow, *Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery* (Richmond, Va.: J. W. Randolph, 1856), 52; [William Henry Drayton], *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists* (Philadelphia: H. Manly, 1836), 94; George D. Armstrong, *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1857), 18–21; John H. Hopkins, *Bible View of Slavery* (New York: Society for the Diffusion of Political Knowledge, 1863), 1; Sloan, *Great Question*, 204–6; William Graham, *The Contrast, or the Bible and Abolitionism: An Exegetical Argument* (Cincinnati: Daily Cincinnati Atlas, 1844), 23–26; and Philip Schaff, *Slavery and the Bible: A Tract for the Times* (Chambersburg, Pa.: M. Kieffer, 1861), 20–21.

64. Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery*, 167.

65. Hammond, "Letters on Slavery," 106–7, emphasis in original.

66. See Albert T. Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," in *Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments*, ed. E. N. Elliott (Augusta, Ga.: Pritchard, Albert and Loomis, 1860), 359–74; Thomas Meredith, *Christianity and Slavery* (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1847), 45–51; Ross, *Slavery Ordained*, 176–85; and Longstreet, *Letters*, 8–47.

67. Ross, *Slavery Ordained*, 97 (he adds: "Many of your most pious men, soundest scholars, have been led to the study of the Bible more faithfully in the light of the times. And they are reading it more and more in harmony with the views which have been reached by the highest Southern minds." [98–99]); Charles Hodge, *Essays and Reviews: Selected from the Princeton Review* (New York: Robert Carter and Bros., 1857), 481.

68. N. L. Rice, *Lectures on Slavery; Delivered in the North Presbyterian Church, Chicago* (Chicago: Church, Goodman and Cushing, 1860), 18; [Drayton], *South Vindicated*, 95 (see also Fletcher, *Studies on Slavery*, 116–17; Dabney, *Defence*, 153–54; and Meredith, *Christianity and Slavery*, 16); Stringfellow, *Scriptural and Statistical Views*, 23. Stringfellow's proslavery tract became one of the most influential in the late antebellum period. See Beth Barton Schweiger, "The Restructuring of Southern Religion: Slavery, Denominations, and the Clerical Profession in Virginia," in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, ed. McKivigan and Snay, 300–301.

69. See Brookes, *Defence*, 2–3.

70. See Stringfellow, *Scriptural and Statistical Views*, 42–43; and Sloan, *Great Question*, 176–78.

71. Sloan, *Great Question*, 152. See also Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery*, 172; and J. K. Paulding, *Slavery in the United States* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1836), 20–29.

72. James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 52–67, 145–47.

73. [Drayton], *The South Vindicated*, 95, 98. See also Armstrong, *Christian Doctrine*, 114–16; Samuel B. How, *Slaveholding Not Sinful: Slavery, the Punishment of Man's Sin; Its Remedy, the Gospel of Christ* (New Brunswick, N.J.: John Terhune, 1856), 39–41; John Henry Hopkins, *The Scriptural, Ecclesiastical, and Historical View of Slavery* (New York: W. I. Pooley, 1864), 240–43; and Jenkins, *Proslavery Thought*, 223–27.

74. [Drayton], *The South Vindicated*, 99; Hamilton, *Duties of Masters and Slaves*, 14–17.

75. William H. Barnwell, *Views upon the Present Crisis: A Discourse Delivered in St. Peter's Church, Charleston* (Charleston, S.C.: Letter-Press of E. C. Councell, 1850), 14; N. S. Wheaton, *A Discourse on St. Paul's Epistle to Philemon* (Hartford, Conn.: Case, Tiffany, 1851), 23.

76. Tise, *Proslavery*, 229; Stringfellow, *Scriptural and Statistical Views*, 75 (see also Ross, *Slavery Ordained*, 97; and Blanchard and Rice, *Debate on Slavery*, 44; on conservative republicanism as the center of proslavery ideology, see Tise, *Proslavery*, 204–60); Brookes, *Defence*, 30, the editorial reprinted in pamphlet form (see also Dabney, *Defence*, 188).

77. Jesse B. Ferguson, *Address on the History, Authority and Influence of Slavery* (Nashville, Tenn.: J. T. S. Fall, 1850), 4.

78. Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery*, 6; Dabney, *Defence*, 203. See also Edward R. Crowther, "'Religion Has Something . . . to Do with Politics': Southern Evangelicals and the North, 1845–1860," in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, ed. McKivigan and Snay, 332–33; Sloan, *Great Question*, 166–75; and Brookes, *Defence*, 28–29.

79. See Graham, *Contrast*, 41; Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery*, 189–90 (on the authority of St. John Chrysostom's interpretation); Rice, *Lectures*, 34, 56; Hopkins, *Scriptural, Ecclesiastical, and Historical View*, 100, 161, 168 (important evidence for the use of scholarly commentaries in the nineteenth-century debate over slavery), 211; and Bledsoe, *Liberty and Slavery*, 375–78.

80. See Schaff, *Slavery*, 25–26, with knowledge of the patristic exegetical history on the crux. See also *The Christian Doctrine of Human Rights and of Slavery: In Two Articles, from the Southern Presbyterian Review* (Columbia, S.C.: I. C. Morgan, 1849), 6; Moses Stuart, *Conscience and the Constitution* (1850; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 52–56; Blanchard and Rice, *Debate on Slavery*, 157, 218; and J. L. Dagg, *The Elements of Moral Science* (New York: Sheldon, 1861), 349.

81. See Dabney, *Defence*, 160–61.

82. See Sloan, *Great Question*, 209. Part of the condemnation included criticism of abolitionism joining forces with the women's suffrage movement, which unsexed the female gender. See Bledsoe, *Liberty and Slavery*, 379; and Hammond, "Letters on Slavery," 174 n.

83. See Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (1931; repr., New York: Frederick Ungar, 1959), 365–81; and Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 179–210. Interestingly, a similar contempt is found in ancient slavery. See Harrill, "Vice of Slave Dealers."

84. See Bledsoe, *Liberty and Slavery*, 358; Sloan, *Great Question*, 211–14; Ross, *Slavery Ordained*, 140–59; and Fletcher, *Studies on Slavery*, 570–72.

85. Bledsoe, *Liberty and Slavery*, 377.

86. See James Shannon, *An Address Delivered before the Pro-Slavery Convention of the State of Missouri* (St. Louis, Mo.: Republican Book and Job Office, 1855), 14; Hopkins, *Bible View of Slavery*, 5; George D. Armstrong, *Politics and the Pulpit: A Discourse Preached in the Presbyterian Church, Norfolk, Va.* (Norfolk, Va.: J. D. Ghiselin, Jr., 1856), 35–36; Dabney, *Defence*, 185–92; and Stringfellow, *Scriptural and Statistical Views*, 48–49.

87. See Jenkins, *Proslavery Thought*, 233–34.

88. On the public debate over Wayland's textbook, see Van Broekhoven, "Suffering with Slaveholders."

89. Fletcher, *Studies on Slavery*, 15, 17 (emphasis in original), 97.

90. Ibid., 20; Bledsoe, *Liberty and Slavery*, 375–76; Stuart, *Conscience*, 61–62; Fuller and Wayland, *Domestic Slavery*, 140; and Graham, *Contrast*, 39–41.

91. Slavery had been abolished in the French territories previously, in 1794, by the French National Convention, but the law was repealed by Napoleon in 1802.

92. Ross, *Slavery Ordained*, 77 (emphasis in original), 86 (emphasis in original).

93. Jenkins, *Proslavery Thought*, 236; and William H. Ruffner, *Lectures on the Evidences of Christianity* (New York: Robert Carter and Bros., 1853), 297. Yet, the major source of xenophobia was perhaps the heavy rate of immigration in this period.

94. Hopkins, *Scriptural, Ecclesiastical, and Historical View*, 219–20, emphasis in original.

95. Hopkins, *Bible View of Slavery*, 118; see also 132.

96. See Meeks, "'Haustafeln' and American Slavery," 245; and Kevin Giles, "The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (January 1994): 3–17.

97. Meeks, "'Haustafeln' and American Slavery," 233.

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