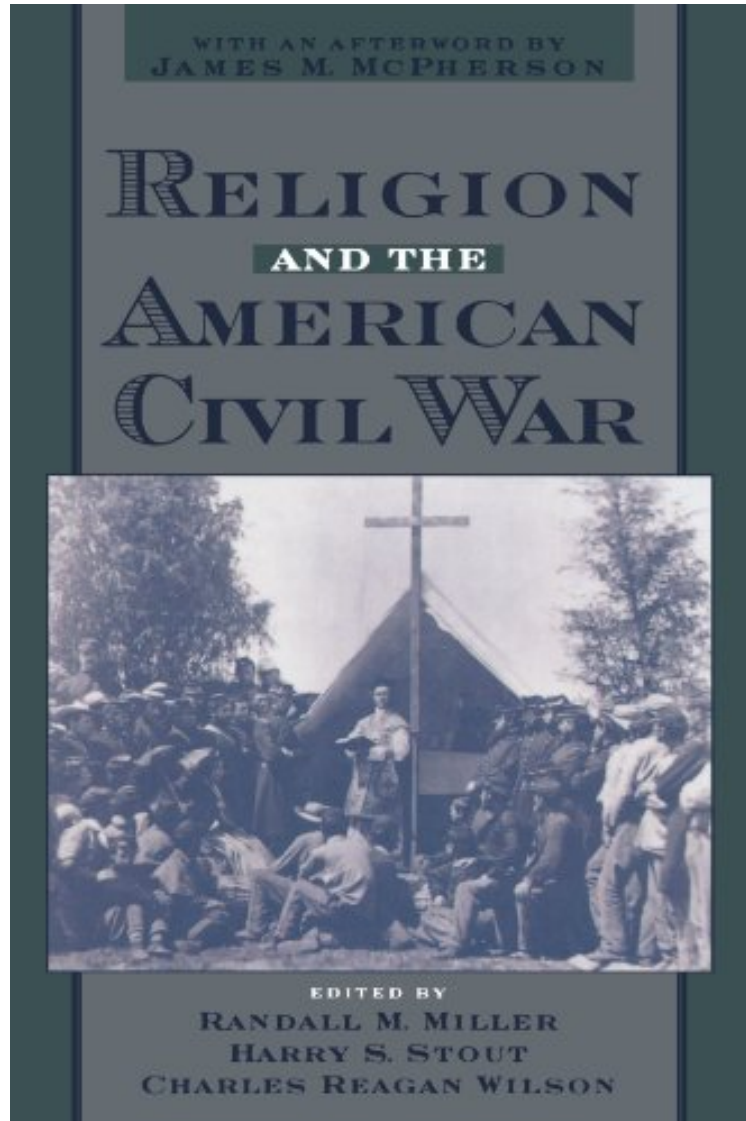


Religion and the American Civil War

From Randall M Miller

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From Randall M Miller : Religion and the American Civil War before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Religion and the American Civil War:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Courtney WhiteUsed for research, well written.0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent historyBy David CooperHow and why so many things happen in this country today are just as applicable from our past historical and religious experiences22 of 24 people found the following review helpful. a must read on the topicBy R. M. WilliamsFirst it is a collection of essays. They are uneven

in both quality and in provoking my interest, they cover an odd range of the topic=Christianity and the American Civil War. There is no evidence that the writers interact with the other essays so i believe it is a collection rather than a deliberately written-for-this-book set. So it looks more like an introduction to a body of interpretation than the analysis of that kind-of revisionist history that the essays represent. But several of the essays are extraordinary. Especially the one by Mark Noll. The Bible and Slavery by Mark Noll chapter 2 of *Religion and the American Civil War* Miller, Stout, Wilson (eds) i've never been moved to write a review of just a single chapter in a book of essays. Tempted several times but i've never done it, this essay is tremendous and deserves a wide audience and careful thought. For me, this chapter has been one of the great ah-ah! just as i thought experiences of the last few years of concentrated studying. I've written in the past that i think slavery as a moral issue and Copernican revolution as a scientific issue are critical events in history that illuminate Biblical hermeneutics. Well, the Sunday School class which begins in about 8 weeks has helped supply the motivation to delve a little deeper in the slavery issue and finding this book and particularly this essay has been a great joy. He writes: "The problem of the Bible and slavery was always an exegetical problem, but never only an exegetical problem. ... (then he offers 4 constituencies who offered answers) The first option was to admit that the Bible sanctioned slavery and, therefore, to abandon the Bible, at least in anything like its traditional shape, in order to attack slavery. (William Lloyd Garrison)...(the second option, since the Bible obviously sanctioned slavery was that) faithful Christians should accept the legitimacy of slavery as it existed in the United States out of loyalty to the Bible's supreme divine authority. (most southern theologians)...A third, and the most complicated, response was held by some abolitionists and moderate emancipationists. They conceded that, while the Bible did indeed sanction a form of slavery, careful attention to the text of Scripture itself would show that the simple presence of slavery in the Bible was not a necessary justification for slavery as it existed in the United States. ... this argument required a movement from the words of the Bible to theories about how the Bible should be applied to modern life, and it often seemed indistinguishable from the next response. (The fourth response) was to distinguish between the letter of the Bible (which might be construed to allow slavery) and the spirit of the Bible (which everywhere worked against the institution)." It is this movement from the words to the meaning of the words or the ideas transmitted to the readers that is the essential difference between a conservative and liberal doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. I've tried to use the idea of a pyramid of interpretation in my Calvin class and will repeat the metaphor in the history class. How the pyramid is constructed is that facts form the bottom layer, the next layer up is low level interpretative theories, mostly about the particular meaning of words in the immediate context. Something like phrase meaning, the next layer is sentence meaning, where it appears that the fundamental meaning of written words appears. (Text without context is pretext.) The layers are constructed inductively from there until at the peak are the fundamental ideas of the text. But what does this have to do with the fight over slavery and the Bible? As Noll aptly points out, "From the record of these sermons, it is evident that proslavery advocates had largely succeeded in winning the Bible, when taken in its traditional sense." Because the traditional hermeneutic in the mid 19thC, like the conservative one today, is tied to the words not the meaning as being the locus of inspiration, as being the very vehicle to transmit meaning, the South won this battle. It also ties into the last sentence of the essay: "The North-forced to fight on unfriendly terrain that it had helped to create-lost the exegetical war. The South certainly lost the shooting war. But constructive orthodox theology was the major loser when American believers allowed bullets instead of hermeneutical self consciousness to determine what the Bible said about slavery. For the history of theology in America, the great tragedy of the Civil War is that the most persuasive theologians were the Rev. Drs. William Tecumseh Sherman and Ulysses S. Grant." For Noll, these four options are reduced to a forced dichotomy--either orthodoxy and slavery, or heresy and antislavery" by the slippery slope to unbelief argument inherent in the idea that to modify your literal hermeneutic was to attack the very basis of inspiration and authority, so that those who spoke against slavery were immediately condemned by Southerners as 'liberals' who did not accept the Bible as the very Word of God. This is the issue that about two years ago had me personally making the connection between a Young Earth Creationist ideology and slavery. The radical dichotomy, the semi-Manichean stance that there are only two sides to the discussion: God's and Satan's, and if you are not with us then you are being used by evil. Noll explains that it is this literal, common sense, man in the pew, democratic hermeneutic that had evolved in the US over the last 250 years that was responsible for the problem. He explicitly ties three things into it: Scriptura sola, the regulative principle, and the Third Use of the Law (moral teaching shows need for salvation as well as a blueprint for the Christian's grateful response to God). It is this democratization of Bible reading and application that has its source in the priesthood of all believers in Luther but only derives its power from its tie into the social culture of the nascent US in republicanism via the English as opposed to the French revolutionary experience. This democratic hermeneutic required that the fundamental meaning be singular, literal, usually narrative, simple for everyone (the hand on the plow ideal) must be able to read the words for themselves. This eliminates the educated, difficult, literary entanglements, complexity, multiple levels etc for the common sense as derived from the Scottish commonsense realism philosophers. The theological clash brought on by two sides with a radical polarization into atheistic abolitionist and faithful Biblical slavery supporters (the logical error of composition) was driven by not just the rise of loud abolitionists who were also not orthodox Christians but the very hermeneutical problem of understanding how to

(re)interpret the obvious texts that supported slavery without subverting the authority and unity of the Bible and becoming those you hate. Noll points out that people believed that there were only three options for this slippery slope of the retreat from the literal views of Scripture: church-authority, the Spirit-enthusiasm, or Reason, all destinations that orthodox American Christians considered abhorrent. "With relentless pressure, skillful defenders of slavery insisted that any attack on a literalist construction of biblical slavery was an attack on the Bible itself." sounds strangely familiar, no? Noll goes on to outline four other communities of faith that had potential answers for this false dilemma: African Americans, Roman Catholics, high-church Protestants and the border state Presbyterians, and why each failed to make their voice heard over the din of sabre rattling that led to the death of 600,000 on the battlefield. (1 white man died for each 10 slaves freed) Noll looks at R. Breckridge and C. Hodge as "two conservative Presbyterians who felt the force of the proslavery arguments but who yet retained a desire to shape culture in Christian ways offered the best chance for articulating an orthodox hermeneutic that could escape the proslavery defense championed by their Southern Presbyterian contemporaries." Breckridge did the separation of the word slavery in the OT and NT from the Southern experience of slavery route. "The shape of the argument was similar for both Breckinridge and Hodge. Both conceded that the Bible sanctioned "slavery", but Breckinridge denied that what the South practiced was biblical slavery, while Hodge felt that the Bible hedged the practice of a legitimate slavery with so many ameliorations that the practice must end when those ameliorations were pursued to the logical "gospel" conclusion. ... Both took for granted that the Bible must be interpreted and that the meaning of its words must be conditioned by other realities—with Breckinridge, shifting social conditions over time, with Hodge the fuller context of the Scriptures themselves." This is the common way you see the argument pursued today, that OT/NT 'slavery' != Southern racial lifetime 'slavery', all they share is a common word, without sharing the higher pyramid level meanings. Noll ends the essay with tackling the problem of confusing race with slavery and the legacy that continues to haunt the US in this regard. It's a good essay, for it sums up in a particularly valuable and systematic way many of the related issues I've been struggling with, thanks MN.

The sixteen essays in this volume, all previously unpublished, address the little considered question of the role played by religion in the American Civil War. The authors show that religion, understood in its broadest context as a culture and community of faith, was found wherever the war was fought. Comprising essays by such scholars as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Drew Gilpin Faust, Mark Noll, Reid Mitchell, Harry Stout, and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, and featuring an afterword by James McPherson, this collection marks the first step towards uncovering this crucial yet neglected aspect of American history.

From Library Journal
The series of essays in this volume originated at a conference on Religion and the Civil War held at the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 1994. The conference premise was that, despite the major resurgence in interest in the Civil War in the last decade, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the war as a religious experience. To remedy this, the conference assembled an impressive array of scholars such as Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Eugene and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Drew Gilpin Faust, and Randall Miller, a frequent reviewer for Library Journal, who were each asked to probe religion's role as well as the connections among religion, war, and society. Faust's essay "Without Pilot or Compass?: Elite Women and Religion in the Civil War South" covers new ground and clearly shows the major role religion played in the lives of women. Charles Reagan Wilson's "Religion and the American Civil War in Comparative Perspective" invites comparisons of the American Civil War with other civil wars. There is an insightful overview written by Phillip Shaw Paludan and an afterword by James M. McPherson. A thought-provoking if somewhat pricey collection; for academic libraries. A Charles C. Hay, Eastern Kentucky Univ. Archives, Richmond
Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. "...the essays offer many provocative new insights...the excellent essays in Religion and the American Civil War succeed brilliantly in the editors' goal of stimulating and deepening the study of religion during a critical era of American history."--Georgia Historical Quarterly "...[an] excellent collection."--News and Observer, Raleigh, North Carolina "...this volume...is one that should be given great consideration by anyone wishing to enrich his or her Civil War library. The essays contained within are well written, very well researched and documented, and contribute greatly to an underrated and misunderstood aspect of the Civil War."--The Civil War Library and Museum "...religion and the American Civil War are two topics that relate to one another in fascinating and revelatory ways....Religion and the American Civil War stands as a welcomed addition to the study of American religious history and to the study of the Civil War."--Koinonia "The essays...give voice to people who were not in charge but whose lives were nonetheless greatly impacted by the war. The resulting story is complex and multilayered and should stimulate the interest of a wide range of readers....All readership levels will benefit from this book."--Choice
About the Author
Randall M. Miller is at St. Joseph's University. Harry S. Stout is at Yale University.