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DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

Following the journey of the memes of the Bible from their original cultural & historical origins to their influence in our world today.

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The Civil War & Southern Belief Systems

By Jim Myers

The Civil War affected the way of life in America in many areas – political, economic and religious. The way Americans viewed each other and life in general changed after 1865. The fact that it was a war of Christians against Christians was nothing new. The colonists Christians had fought the English, French and Spanish Christians to gain their freedom. The thing that was different in this case was that the Christians on both sides were Americans before and after the Civil War. During the Civil War, both sides believed in the same Jesus and prayed to same God for victory. Northern and Southern Christians were assured from their respective pulpits that their cause was just and righteous. How would the religious leaders of the South explain the loss to their members?

There were **1,094,453 casualties in the Civil War** and the 1879 final official report placed the total cost at **\$6,190,000,000**. The Confederacy spent perhaps **\$2,099,808,707**. By 1906 another **\$3.3 billion** already had been spent by the U.S. government on Northerners' pensions and other veterans' benefits for former Federal soldiers. The physical devastation, almost all of it in the South, was enormous: burned or plundered homes, pillaged countryside, untold losses in crops and farm animals, ruined buildings and bridges, devastated college campuses, and neglected roads all left the South in ruins.¹

Before we examine the religious changes that took place in the South, it is important to understand the economic implications of the war. In the South the African slaves were items listed on the balance sheets of companies, along with machinery and equipment. They were valued at almost **three billion dollars**. In order to grasp what their value meant to the economy of the Southern states, it must be understood that **the value of African slaves represented a sum greater than the value of all manufacturing and railroads in the United States combined.**² Therefore, in the South an additional three billion dollars must be added to the other costs, plus the cost of replacing the slaves.

How did the African slaves become part of America? The events that led up to the first African slaves being shipped to America began when King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain commissioned Columbus to discover a new trade route to India to tap into the extraordinarily lucrative spice trade. Instead he discovered a new source of gold and silver for the Spanish monarchy. Between the years 1500 and 1540 the amount of gold that passed through the House of Trade in Spain each year averaged between 2,205 and 3,307 pounds. At today's prices the annual value of the gold would be **\$52,920,000.00** and **\$79,368,000.00**.

Spain also received an upsurge of silver output from Mexico and Peru, which amounted to around 300 tons per years in the best years.³ Today the value of that much silver would be another **\$454,000,000.00**. With the riches from the New World flowing into Spain a golden age of wealth and development began. Rarely have such great riches fallen into the laps of rulers with so little effort on their part and the new wealth promoted extravagant royal habits. In both Portugal and Spain taxes were high, and the distribution of wealth followed the traditional pattern in which the few indulged their taste for grandeur and many penurious peasants and workers struggled to survive.⁴

Unbelievably, the extravagant appetites of the Spanish monarchs and the costs of the wars they waged to acquire even greater sources of wealth led them to the Dutch to borrow money. As time passed the Spanish monarchy became so indebted to the Dutch bankers that the famous Spanish silver fleet sailed across the Atlantic directly to Amsterdam to deliver their valuable cargoes as payments on the loans. However, as time passed they exhausted the gold and silver deposits and needed to find something new. It was then that they discovered an even greater source of wealth -- sugar.

Sugar's desirability and rarity did for the islands of the West Indies what oil later did for the Middle East. It gave them a virtual monopoly on a commodity whose demand would continue to climb for two centuries.⁵ The imported sugar was instantly popular in Europe. Soon the English, Dutch, and French seized other Caribbean islands during the 17th century to exploit this new and lucrative crop. Sugar did more than furnish calories and sweetness; it made possible storing fruits and vegetables throughout the year. There were only three ways to keep food before artificial refrigeration: salting it, preserving it, or drying it. Sugar was the essential ingredient for preserves.⁶

As the demand for sugar increased plantations were operated as "factories in the fields." The plantations were very different from the farms of Europe and are the first examples of highly capitalized agriculture. Agricultural work was always drudgery, but it became brutal when the workers were enslaved and beaten to work harder. The gender ratio in the sugar plantations was often as high as 13 men to 1 woman. The native inhabitants of the islands were treated cruelly by

their plantation owners, many of whom were Christians, One thing is very clear -- when they were far from home they shed their manners and morality. But, when they returned home to live in the luxury made possible by such cruelty, they never questioned the way their great wealth was produced.⁷

The fact that the native peoples were abused in the sugar fields came to the attention of **Bartolme de Las Casas, bishop of Chiapas** and he became their greatest defender.⁸ He made a decision that would help save the local natives, but would have unintended consequences that the bishop could have never imagined. His suggestion would ultimately set the stage for the Civil War in a nation that did not exist at that time. **He proposed that the Spanish import African slaves as a way to protect the native peoples. He argued that Africans were better prepared to work on the plantations.** From his suggestion came one of the most lucrative capitalist's plums of Caribbean commerce, the *asiento*, a contract that Spanish officials awarded for an annual supply of slaves and European goods. The first one, signed in 1595, gave the Portuguese the exclusive rights to land 4,250 slaves annually at Cartagena.⁹

The Virginia Company established an outpost in America in 1607 and quickly used all of its cash up. The company turned to a lottery to raise more money and began distributing the one asset it had, land.¹⁰ At first the work in the fields was done by English indentured servants, but as time passed the use of slave labor became an alluring alternative for the wealthier planters. Initially, when a Dutch vessel brought a score of slaves to Virginia in 1619, investing in slaves was not attractive.

A few decades later settlers arrived with sufficient cash to establish themselves on larger plots of land. The English king began to promote slaves trade from English suppliers, in part to keep the freewheeling Dutch out of their North American colonies. Soon English slavers supplied Virginia with slaves shipped directly from Africa at a good price. A final inducement to switching from English indentured servants to African slaves came from the fact that servants, after completing their labor contracts, threatened to become an unruly underclass.¹¹ The development of tobacco and cotton as major incoming producing crops spread slavery throughout the South. It should be noted that not every Southerner owned slaves -- only 1 in 11 owned slaves. However, the major molders of public opinion were often holders of slaves. This was true of educators, doctors, politicians, and preachers. In some states 40% of the preachers of certain denominations owned slaves.¹² Leaders in the South turned a blind eye to evils of the lucrative system that produced their wealth. *Over a decade before the Southern states officially withdrew from the United States of America, secession had already began in American Christianity.*

The **General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church** met in New York City in 1844 during the intense national debate over whether Texas would be admitted as slave or free state to the Union. Delegates from Northern states introduced the issue when they questioned whether **James Andrew, Bishop of Georgia**, could own slaves and still remain a bishop of the church. *It did not matter that he offered to renounce any ownership interest by transferring their ownership to his wife with a deed of trust. Northerners believed any association with such an evil, necessary or otherwise, precluded his continued service to the church.*¹³ Andrews wanted to resign rather than risk the division of the church, but the **Southern delegates would not permit it because that would acknowledge slavery to be a sin.** After a hot debate, delegates from both regions voted to separate the church, and by May, 1845, the Southern conferences withdrew and formed the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.¹⁴

Baptists, the second largest denomination at the time, also experienced the same fate. Northern Baptists raised the issue of whether slaveholders could be accepted as missionaries. They believed that the willful participation in such a sinful institution was an impediment to appointment, and refused to take any step that might imply they were blessing the holding of slaves. The South was equally determined not to acquiesce in this stigmatization of slaveholding, or to take any action that suggests that holding slaves was immoral. As a result, **in 1845 the Southerners withdrew to form the Southern Baptist Convention.**¹⁵

There was no rush for the powerful denominations to reunite immediately following the war. Southern preachers declared that the South was fighting to preserve the divine economy and protect the "true religion," in opposition to the North where churches had grown corrupt, liberal and denied the very word of God. *The Southern churches saw themselves as "Christian soldiers marching off as to war" to fight a battle against Satan and his "Northern demons." Many Southern Christians heard one message repeatedly -- they were the ones with the righteous cause.*¹⁶

The Southern Christians faced a difficult situation when the war ended. It appeared that God had been on side of the North all along. Southern religious leaders faced some difficult questions. Why had such a terrible thing happened to such a religious people? Was God still on his throne? Were the horrors of defeat the result of some sin on the part of the South? Slowly, a new belief system formed that provided an answer as to why God had chosen not to answer the prayers of the South. A new message emerged from Southern pulpits -- *God refused to answer their prayers because of the region's collective sin -- but that sin was not slavery.*¹⁷

The core idea that would become the foundation of the new belief had been laid during the pre-war years with the doctrine called the "spirituality of the church." **John Holt Rice** stated this doctrine succinctly when he wrote that the church should "confine itself to making good Christians and avoid speaking out on matters beyond its competence." That is to say, it should focus solely on issues of personal morality, rather than trying to address such social evils as slavery.¹⁸

As the course of the war turned against the South after 1863, and during the post war years, the South slowly came to believe that its defeat was the result of the prevalence of drunkenness, card playing, and dancing among Confederate troops and civilians. Such vices had brought the wrath of God down on their heads. No less an illustrious leader as Robert E. Lee gave this view currency. Confederate military set-backs had not been the result of overwhelming numbers of enemy troops, or any ill-advised strategic decisions by him and his generals. They were the result of "drinking, gambling and profanity."¹⁹

Instead of seeing the nation's baptism of blood as a divine act sweeping away slavery, many Southern religious leaders began to preach that defeat had really been an effort on the part of God to get the South's attention, and to bring it to its collective knees in repentance for the drunkenness, card-playing, and swearing that had gone on during the war years. God had allowed the South to taste defeat as part of a larger plan to purify the region, and to insure that its people were the most religious and its churches the purest anywhere.²⁰

At the time the North was embarking on a process of reconstruction to bring the South back into the Union, there was also an effort on the part of the South to re-establish what many had come to believe was the divine order of the races. Under the system of slavery, the African-American had a clear place in the pecking order. He was "the bottom rail" in the social fence while the white planter was the "top rail." But to many Southerners, it seemed as if political reconstruction had inverted that social order, placing the newly freed slaves in positions of political and economic power, while disenfranchising the former Confederates. And so they searched desperately for a way to put African-Americans in their place. The **Klu Klux Klan** was founded by Nathan Bedford Forrest to intimidate blacks who had risen to positions of power in the Reconstruction governments, and to insure that every black knew their place in the larger society. Cross burnings, lynchings, and other such methods proved to be useful tools of social control in the hands of the Klan.²¹

Share-cropping was established to keep newly freed blacks working for their old masters on the old plantations. A loan would be made at the beginning of the planting season for tools, seed, fertilizer, food and clothing. That loan had to be paid back when the sharecropper sold their crops. If there were profits, the sharecropper got to keep a share. The problem was that with the land owner's

creative financing and high interest rates, rarely would a sharecropper break even, much less earn a profit. Since the terms of their lease required them to work till any indebtedness was paid off, freedmen soon found themselves as bound to their former masters as they had been during the days of slavery. The use of debt to keep people in the new form of American slavery would become the tool used by the next generation of profit first capitalists.

*As the fervor in the Southern pulpits heated up a new wave of revivalism was ignited. A number of Southern denominations came to see themselves as the new children of Israel -- God's chosen people. They believed they were the righteous remnant and had been charged with the task of saving the nation from the immorality of the North. Southern preachers taught that slavery was a political and cultural institution that belonged to the secular world, which was beyond their ability to control. **They declared that one's personal faith was what God cared about and every individual was responsible for determining their own eternal destiny. What mattered to the Christian God more than slavery, according to the revivalists that preached throughout the South, was drinking, card-playing, dancing, sex – and tithing!**²²*

A wall of separation was being built in the American culture that separated Christianity not only from politics, but also from business. Many Christians felt perfectly free to engage in work or indulge activities that were contrary to the teachings of the Bible and the church during the week, but then purge their consciences on Sunday morning in a spiritual catharsis. This led to a binge-purge cycle in which individuals binge during the week on the fruits of sin, and then on Sunday purge themselves in an emotional outpouring.²³ During the period 1865-1930, Christians in America embarked on **three major crusades** to address the rapidly expanding problems of society. The roots of two of these crusades predated the Civil War, and only came into their own in the post-war period: **temperance** and **Sabbath observance**.

The **temperance movement** was brought about when the State of Maine passed a law imposing prohibition in 1851. In 1869, a National Prohibition Party was formed, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union was organized in 1874. Eventually this crusade was successful in passing the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution. But its lasting significance comes from the fact that this movement provided a place for women to begin to take an active role in society. Many of the earliest prominent figures in the feminist movement got their start in the Temperance Crusade.

A second crusade was centered around **Sabbath observance**. The idea of compelling everyone to honor the Sabbath was one that received much attention from the churches. This was a reaction to the

"Continental Sundays" of many immigrants. Among the measures that were pursued by this crusade was the prevention of streetcars from running on Sunday, and the reading of Sunday newspapers. Despite countless sermons on this topic and repeated editorials in church newspapers, and resolutions from a host of religious bodies, *the mores of an industrial and urban society had changed, and no "blue law" could alter that.*

The third, and final crusade, concerned **missions**. The idea that "Anglo-Saxons" were a superior breed, had entered American intellectual circles, where it supplied the rationale for American dreams of imperialism. James M. King a Methodist minister in New York made the case for this crusade in painfully clear terms when he wrote: "Christianized Anglo-Saxon blood, with its love of liberty, its thrift, its intense and persistent energy and personal independence, is the regnant force in this country; and that is a most pregnant fact, because the concededly most important lesson in the history of modern civilization is that God is using the Anglo-Saxon to conquer the world for Christ by dispossessing feeble races, and assimilating and molding others."²⁴

A new way of viewing the world and Christianity emerged in the South, but for many of us who were born after World War II, we believed that the messages we heard from the pulpits came from Jesus – nothing was said about the Civil War. ●

¹ <http://www.civilwarhome.com/warcosts.htm>

² Ibid, p. 136.

³ A History of Money By Glyn Davies; p. 187

⁴ The Relentless Revolution: A History of Capitalism By Joyce Appleby; p. 35.

⁵ Ibid, p. 63.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, p. 130.

⁸ Ibid, p. 126.

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 48

¹¹ Ibid, p. 131.

¹² RELIGION 166: Religious Life in the United States; Dr. Terry Matthews. Lecture 11.

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ ibid

¹⁶ Ibid; Lecture 13

¹⁷ ibid

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ ibid

²⁰ ibid

²¹ ibid

²² ibid

²³ ibid

²⁴ Ibid; Lecture 20.

May Memorials

In Loving Memory

**SIDNEY
PERRY
DOSH, JR.**

**Born: October 18, 1938
Died: May 17, 2006**

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*



In Their Remembrance

*May their memories inspire us to
seek those qualities of mind and
heart which they shared when we
walked life's journey together.*

*May we help to bring closer to
fulfillment their highest ideals and
noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our
loyalty to those things which we
valued and shared --
faith, love, peace and devotion
and our biblical heritage.*

*As long as we live, they too will
live; for they are now a part of us,
as we remember them.*

(Inspired from prayers found in Yitzhor
Reflections - The New Mahzor - The
Prayer Book Press)

In Loving Memory

**SIDNEY
BERRY
WARD, SR.**

**October 3, 1891
May 27, 1976**

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**CHARLES L.
"CHUCK"
GREGORY**

**January 25, 1925
April 11, 2010**

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

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**"Belief systems must be large enough to include all of the facts;
they must be open enough to be tested;
and they must be flexible enough to change
when errors or new facts are found."**

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