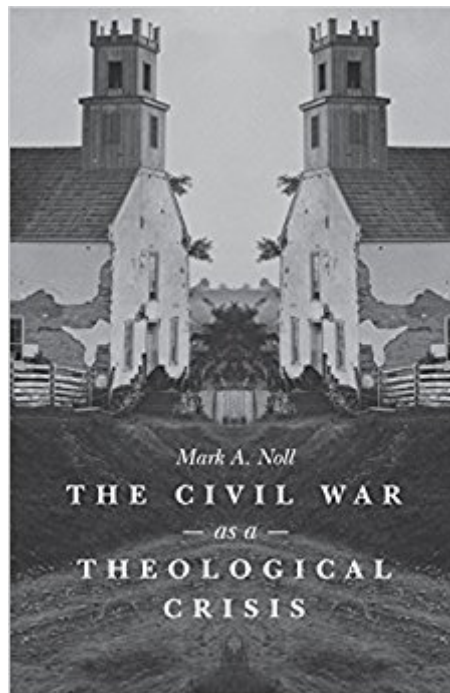


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The Civil War As A Theological Crisis (The Steven And Janice Brose Lectures In The Civil War Era)



Synopsis

Viewing the Civil War as a major turning point in American religious thought, Mark A. Noll examines writings about slavery and race from Americans both white and black, northern and southern, and includes commentary from Protestants and Catholics in Europe and Canada. Though the Christians on all sides agreed that the Bible was authoritative, their interpretations of slavery in Scripture led to a full-blown theological crisis.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In an informative account of the theological dramas that underpinned and were unleashed by the Civil War, Noll (*America's God*) argues that mid-19th-century America harbored "a significant theological crisis." Quite simply, ministers disagreed about how to read the Bible "and as much as it was a result of fierce disagreements about slavery or Union, Noll says, the Civil War was a crisis over biblical interpretation. The Bible's apparent acceptance of slavery led Christians into bitter debates, with Southern proslavery theologians detailing an elaborate defense of the "peculiar institution" and Northern antislavery clerics arguing that the slavery found in the Old Testament bore no resemblance to the chattel slavery of Southern plantations. Noll detours, for several chapters, to Europe, analyzing what Christians there had to say about America's sectional and scriptural debates. He suggests that religious upheaval did not evaporate at Appomattox. In the postbellum years, Americans grappled with two great problems of "practical theology": racism, and the convulsions of capitalism. This book's substantive analysis belies its brevity. As today's church

debates over homosexuality reveal a new set of disagreements about how to read the Bible, this slim work of history is surprisingly timely. (Apr. 24) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Noll has opened up a new, theological understanding of war.--Alabama ReviewA distinctive piece of Civil War scholarship. . . . This slim set of lectures greatly enhances the study of religion's role in the American Civil War and the study of Christian intellectual life during a crucial period of U.S. history. Scholars in both fields will profit especially from its pioneering research into Christian Europe's varied reactions to the American Iliad and its causes. Advanced students and discerning general readers will appreciate the book's lively prose and its suggestive conclusions.--Civil War Book ReviewIn *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, Mark A. Noll breaks new ground on pre-war theological disputes over slavery in scripture and on contemporary discussions of the providential character of the war.--Southern PartisanBound to spark major revisionist studies and challenge young scholars to explore its provocative and convincing theses. . . . [A] masterful analysis of Civil War-era religion.--American Historical ReviewInsightful analysis. . . . Represents a remarkably thoughtful beginning and an excellent model for future scholars.--Anglican and Episcopal HistoryRaises momentous questions for the history of American Christianity while offering . . . intriguing insights into an understudied aspect of our nation's greatest civil ordeal.--Books & Culture[Noll] grapples convincingly with one of the oldest arguments among theologians: their interpretation of what the Bible has to say about slavery.--Black Issues Book ReviewBy one of the premier historians of American religion. . . . It quotes and cites . . . voices on all sides of the issues.--TouchstoneReaders will appreciate Noll's extensive command of the literature relating to his subject. . . . Noll's book adds yet another important commentary to the war that still intrigues Americans.--North Carolina Historical ReviewIntriguing. . . . Both those who pray for an Evangelical majority in America and those who fear the rise of the religious right will find something of importance in this book.--The Common ReviewThe book's particular force derives from its broad perspective. . . . More pathbreaking still is his delving into foreign critiques.--Civil War History[A] well-written and insightful work. . . . Noll makes every word count.--BYU StudiesMark Noll has for several decades been leading an effort to take seriously the religious and theological complexities of America's antebellum and Civil War experience. This concise book . . . both summarizes this scholarship and, in several important respects, advances the conversation.--The Journal of ReligionThe description, contextualization, and analysis of various viewpoints is comprehensive and profound.--Journal of the Illinois State Historical SocietyAn informative account of the theological

dramas that underpinned and were unleashed by the Civil War. . . . This book's substantive analysis belies its brevity. . . . This slim work of history is surprisingly timely.--Publishers Weekly
Displays the care and moral seriousness historians have come to associate with Noll's work. . . . Of unusual interest.--Journal of Illinois History
[The Civil War as a Theological Crisis] was deeply satisfying and profoundly disturbing at the same time. It is to his credit that Noll's evangelical scholarship could raise such intellectual complexities and question such moral scandals.--Presbyterion
Noll has such religious insight. . . . Religious historians and Civil War readers will find this an important book and should read it.--Register of Kentucky Historical Society
The best account and interpretation of how Christian ideas shaped, and were shaped by, the Civil War.--Christianity Today

We all know both the North & South thought God was on their side...Mark Noll explains how culture and the economy informed theology in 3 areas: providence, slavery, and authority. What I found amazing is how slavery became racially defined despite the fact that it isn't in Scripture, and that the slavery of the Hebrews was a far cry from the slavery of the American South. We also see how the Reformation doctrine of the "priesthood of the believer" wrecked havoc with individualistic interpretations taking precedence over ecclesiastical positions. I would have liked a chapter on how the religious differences played out with chaplains, but otherwise this is an excellent book. Without this piece of the puzzle we cannot fully grasp the Civil War.

Very interesting discussion of the intellectual and theological environment during the Civil War period. He provides surprising historical details as well as a good discussion of the underlying presuppositions of both sides (primarily a simplistic biblical hermeneutic and racism) that lead to an inability to resolve the dispute short of a test of arms. He allows his subjects to speak for themselves fully and fairly without importing modern arguments and attitudes into the presentation, and does put his finger on the scales until the end of the book when he gives a great deal of discussion to what he describes as the "conservative Catholic" view from Europe. He also attempts to pull bundle an economic critique in with the institutional a racial critique of slavery, but beyond several assertions that it's intertwined with the other two he never makes much of a case of advance much evidence for it.

In school we learn that the Civil War was a huge crisis. It was a moral crisis over slavery. It was an economic crisis over the cotton economy in the South and the Northern mills that turned that cotton into products for sale. It was a constitutional crisis over the meaning of the Tenth Amendment or

States' Rights. Mark Noll persuasively argues that it was also a theological crisis of immense proportion that affected all Americans down to the present day. Here is the problem as he presents it. Almost everyone from the founding of the Republic sought guidance and justification for all areas of life from the bible. They worked under Protestant assumptions that the bible was God's inspired Word and sufficient for all life and worship. They also worked under the Enlightenment assumption that human beings could understand the bible and make decisions, unaided, drawing from the text and common sense. The problem was that these same people who agreed on almost all major doctrinal issues could not agree on the issue of the morality of slavery. Noll sets out to show the reasons for this problem, the different points of view from both inside and outside the U.S., and from Protestants and Catholics. It is an amazingly balanced look at a very specific aspect of Civil War history that will enrich your understanding of the era he is writing about, but also of the so-called "culture wars" of recent years.

Dr. Noll here provides us with some background to the Civil War. It is, after all, ideas which drive events. The greater theme of this work being that both North and South held onto their individual interpretations of Scripture as their justification for the conflict. Yet this attitude differed, often greatly, from the theology and criticisms of their European counterparts. The detail provided is extensive and reading this effort is not for the faint of heart. Not a single sentence may be skipped for easy reading lest one become lost. If there were one additional section which I wish were present it would be something about the broader eschatological frameworks of the various comments quoted and referenced. The perspectives of amillennial and postmillennial theologians would certainly differ in the direction of both church and state and adding such would enhance this work greatly. But that is not a weakness of the book. It is something that perhaps another historian might pick up to enhance this work.

This book shows how the beliefs and assumptions held by American Christians in 1860 precluded any kind of critical reflection on the Civil War. If you've read Nathan Hatch's *Democratization of American Christianity*, this serves as an excellent second installment in the saga. Many of the ideals whose development Hatch chronicles played important roles in paving the way for the Civil War ethos. This book is also a nice supplement to Harry S. Stout's *Upon the Altar of the Nation*. Stout beautifully chronicles Americans' moral ambivalence, but doesn't really go into the root causes to the extent that Noll does. Nor does Stout explore foreign commentary on the war. Noll's exploration of foreign commentary, in fact, was one of the most fascinating aspects of the book. Foreigners

seem to have seen fairly clearly what nobody in America could see. If you're looking for a rousing or moving narrative, this isn't the book for you. But if you'd like to understand why American theology was paralyzed in the face of the slavery crisis, this little book is ideal. That it's a "little" book is also nice. Noll says a whole lot in only about 160 pages.

This is a fascinating and well-documented study of how people can justify what is obviously evil through the Bible. Not only is it valuable historically, but it has great significance also in the present. The writing style is very clear and while perhaps dry, always to the point and interesting. If you're interested in the Audible narration, the reader is excellent.

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