

Presbyterians and the Sectional Controversy

I. Controversy over Slavery

A. Debate

1. Pro-slavery: James Henley Thornwell
 - a. Leading Southern Presbyterian theologian
 - b. Arguments
 - 1) “Spirituality of the Church”
 - 2) Limited to specific teachings of Scripture
 - 3) Teaches paternalistic care of master for slave
 - 4) Slavery a suitable means of training Africans
 - 5) Slavery not a positive good but a system to regulate relations in a fallen world
 - 6) Slavery not contrary to the “spirit of the Gospel”
2. Anti-slavery: John Rankin
 - a. Presbyterian minister & conductor on Underground RR
 - b. A founder of abolitionist Free Presbyterian Church Synod of the United States
 - c. Change through moral suasion—argument:
 - 1) Do you believe in the Declaration of Ind.?
 - 2) Do you believe that God made all men of one blood?
 - 3) Do you believe that a man should do his own work or pay someone else to do it?

B. Divisions

1. Methodists (1844-45)
2. Baptists (1845)
3. Presbyterians
 - a. Division of 1837-38: Slavery a subtheme?
 - b. New School Presbyterians (1857)
 - 1) Northerners more overtly anti-slavery
 - 2) Split over anti-slavery declarations
 - c. Old School Presbyterians (1861)
 - 1) Tried to downplay slavery issue
 - 2) Gardiner Spring Resolutions: Demanded loyalty to federal govt.
 - 3) Sparked formation of PCCSA
 - 4) Split over the Union, not slavery
4. Significance (from Goen)
 - a. These were the three largest denominations in USA
 - b. This controversy was early (pre-Mexican War)
 - c. Southern churches *seceded* (contributed to myth of “peaceful secession”)
 - d. Were clergy part of Allan Nevins’ “blundering generation”?
5. Civil War as a theological crisis (Mark Noll)
 - a. Both sides saw themselves as a committed Christian people
 - b. Both sides accepted the Bible but didn’t agree on its meaning
 - c. Churches did not heal sectional controversy but actually heated it up

II. Religion and the Civil War Era

A. Prayer Meeting Revivals (1857-58)

1. Not specifically Presbyterian: consciously nondenominational
2. Began with Jeremiah Lanphier and Dutch Reformed Church in NY
3. Lunch hour prayer meetings in cities—“Businessman’s revival”

4. Often layman-led meetings featuring informal prayer, hymns, & testimonies
 5. Idea spread to other venues & cities, even moving to theaters
 6. Had an effect on Britain, esp. Ulster—'59 Revival
- B. In the Military
1. Ministry to Soldiers
 - a. Preaching of chaplains (North & South)
 - b. Colporteurs
 - c. North: Lay evangelists (e.g., US Christian Commission)
 - d. Small groups led by lay soldiers
 2. Famous Revivals
 - a. "Great Revival" in Lee's Army of Northern Virginia
 - b. Dual revivals in Tenn. & Ga. in 1864
 3. Northern denominations could do more than Southern
- III. The Reconstruction Era
- A. Northern Attitudes
1. Religious imagery of the war → Testing
 2. Disappointment
 - a. Shattered postmillennial hopes, no "Golden Age"
 - b. Arrival of materialistic, corrupt "Gilded Age"
- B. Southern Attitudes
1. Religion as consolation in defeat
 2. Segregation of the churches
- C. "Christian Reconstruction"
1. Reconstruction on Christian Principles
 - a. Religiously motivated
 - b. Religious ideologically
 - c. Emphasis: Evangelical Christian
 - d. Agents: Congregationalists, New School Presbyterians, Methodists
 - e. Promoted black education w/ missionary teachers, planting churches
 2. Freedman's Bureau
 - a. Led by General Oliver O. Howard
 - 1) "Christian General"
 - 2) Promoter of army religion
 - 3) Humanitarian
 - 4) Attempted to infuse Christian principles in Bureau (e.g., temperance pledges, support of missionaries)
 - b. Operation
 - 1) Schools, poor relief, labor contracts
 - 2) Secular organization in which Christians worked
 - 3) Did much good work but fell short of goals
- D. Aftermath: Two main churches
1. PCUSA in the North
 2. PCUS, the "Southern Presbyterian Church"
- IV. Presbyterians and African Americans
- A. Background
1. First outreach in Great Awakening

2. Growth: Outpaced by Methodists & Baptists
- B. Organization
1. Black congregations in North: Theodore Wright first black graduate of Princeton Seminary (1828) and pastor & abolitionist in NYC
 2. White-led congregations in the South: Zion Church in Charleston under John Girardeau
 3. Religious instruction of slaves: Charles Colcock Jones
 - a. Princeton-educated plantation owner in Ga.
 - b. Organized “plantation missions” as model in Liberty County
 - c. Wrote catechism for slaves & established black “watchmen” in congregations
- C. After the War
1. Segregated
 - a. Separate synods in South (black-led)
 - b. Short-lived ind. Afro-American Presbyterian Synod
 - c. Cumberland Presbyterians formed a separate “Colored” church
 2. Example: Francis Grimké
 - a. Son of a SC planter & slave mother
 - b. Attended Princeton Seminary
 - c. Pastor in Washington, DC
 - d. Confronted the church w/ the race question
 - 1) Clashed w/ Moody, Sunday, Bryan
 - 2) Advocated political activism
 - e. Yet theologically conservative
 3. Presbyterian numbers small among black Americans