

Lincoln and Other Abolition Era Leaders

Christianity was richly cited in support of slavery and its cruelty. Frederick Douglas in his autobiographical narrative (1845) reported: “I have said my master found religious sanction for his cruelty. As an example, I will state one of many facts going to prove the charge. I have seen him tie up a lame young woman, and whip her with a heavy cow skin upon her naked shoulders, causing the warm red blood to drip; and, in justification of the bloody deed, he would quote this passage of Scripture—‘He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.’ [Luke 12:47] Master would keep this lacerated young, woman tied up in this horrid situation four or five hours at a time. I have known him to tie her up early in the morning, and whip her before breakfast; leave her, go to his store, return at dinner, and whip her again, cutting her in the places already made raw with his cruel lash.”

SECULARISM: Exclusion of religion from public affairs - Religion and religious bodies should have no part in political or civic affairs or in running public institutions. Rejection of religion or its exclusion from a philosophical or moral system.

“Ref: Encarta World English Dictionary, 1999”

The Bible was used to justify the condemning of those believed to be the descendants of Ham (Africans) to slavery. There were four “just titles” for slavery endorsed by the Roman Catholic Church. These were: slaves captured in war, persons condemned to slavery for a crime; persons selling themselves into slavery, including a father selling his child; children of a mother who is a slave. The Catholic Church in southern states was solidly supportive of slavery. This apparently included an explicit endorsement of slavery by Pope Pius IX as late as 1866:

“Slavery itself, considered as such in its essential nature, is not at all contrary to the natural and divine law, and there can be several just titles of slavery and these are referred to by approved theologians and commentators of the sacred canons.... It is not contrary to the natural and divine law for a slave to be sold, bought, exchanged or given”.
--Pius IX (*Instruction* 20 June 1866 AD). (1)

One of the first people to speak out against slavery was Thomas Paine. In 1775, he wrote “African Slavery in America.” “With what consistency, or decency,” he wrote, could colonists “complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they hold so many hundred thousand in slavery.” This was not the first publication to speak out against slavery but it was very influential. Within weeks it resulted in the founding of the first anti-slavery society in America. Paine was an outspoken non-Christian.

There were tensions between northern and southern Baptists over the issue of slavery. Many Baptists in the north thought that slavery was immoral. Southern Baptists thought that God meant for that races to be separate. The economy of the south was dependent on the labor of slaves. The Baptist churches in the south strongly supported the institution of slavery. This resulted in the Southern Baptist Convention being organized in May 8, 1845. (2)

William Lloyd Garrison was the founder and editor of the “Liberator.” This was the most significant issue oriented newspaper advocating for the emancipation of slaves. It was published weekly from 1831 till the end of the Civil War in 1865. He was the founder and leader of the American Antislavery Society with tens of thousands of members.

Garrison was personally religious but the heavy emphasis on the religious justification of slavery forced him to be a freethinker concerning the role of the Bible and religion in general. In the November 21, 1845 issue of the *Liberator* he said, “The Bible should be judged by its reasonableness and utility, by the probabilities of the case, by historical confirmation, by the intuition of the spirit. Truth is older than any parchment.”

Upton Sinclair quoted Garrison as saying. “American Christianity is the main pillar of American slavery.” (3) This was demonstrably true of the states which had societally and legally sanctioned slavery and with the many pro-slavery churches in other states.

Garrison is also quoted as saying, “The Sabbath, as now recognized and enforced, is one of the main pillars of Priestcraft and Superstition, and the stronghold of a merely ceremonial Religion.” (4) He deliberately scheduled a series of lectures in Boston in conflict with Sunday services. Garrison’s position on the role of religion was unmistakable and clear.

Frances Wright, a secularist, was the first woman known to speak out against slavery. She, along with Robert Dale Owen, was co-leader of the radical Freethought movement. She founded a notorious Nashoba community designed to allow slaves to work for their freedom and become educated.

Sarah and Angelina Grimke had an even greater influence in the emancipation effort. They grew up on a slave plantation in Charleston, South Carolina where they had first hand experience with the routine whippings and rapes that were part of slavery. They became Hicksite Quakers, more anticlerical, anti-ritualist and antislavery than the orthodox Society of Friends. Hick’s desire to uproot a reliance on Biblical scripture opened him and his followers to charges of being non-Christian.

The two Grimke sisters were condemned from Congregationalist and Quaker pulpits alike for their views and their actions that were well outside those then acceptable for women. They attracted thousands to their lectures because few people in the free states knew the violent details of slavery as they did. They also drew substantial attention because they were among the first women to speak in public to large American audiences.

The Grimke sisters opened the way for other important women abolitionists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Coffin Mott. Mott, founded the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. In 1837 she helped form the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women. (5) Both of these women were very critical of traditional religion. Stanton Published the very irreverent “The Women’s Bible” (1898). Mott became a Hicksite Quaker of a distinctly secularist bent. She dismissed the irrational and cruel in the Bible as “idolatry” and was quite appreciative of the Unitarian positions rejecting much of classical Christian theology. Stanton described Mott as, “a woman emancipated from all faith in man-made creeds, from all fear of denunciation. Nothing was too sacred for her to question as to rightfulness in principle and practice. ‘Truth for authority, not authority for truth,’ was not only the motto of her life but it was a fixed mental habit.” (6) Stanton and Mott were centrally important to the subsequent founding of the women’s rights movement and they received staunch support from William Lloyd Garrison in those efforts.

Abraham Lincoln is known as The Great Emancipator. He is justly regarded as one of more important

Presidents in American history. It is well known that he was never a member of any church. His life and religious beliefs were accurately reported in a biography by his friend Colonel Ward H. Lamon (1872)-Life of Abraham Lincoln. In this biography, it is universally accepted among his friends in Springfield, Illinois that he was not a believer. He read and admired Thomas Paine's Age of Reason. He apparently was writing a similar book of his own. The premises of this book were that, "First, that the Bible is not God's revelation." and "Second, that Jesus was not the son of God." Lincoln showed this book to a Mr. Samuel Hill, who was also an unbeliever. Mr. Hill destroyed it because he feared that it would ruin the political career of his friend. (7)

One biography that misrepresented Lincoln as classically religious explain his lack of membership in any church with this: "It is true that he was not a church member, but there were special reasons for this. The church with which he was naturally affiliated was the Presbyterian. The most eloquent preacher of that denomination was the Reverend Dr. Palmer of New Orleans, who was an aggressive champion of slavery as a divine institution." (8) Since it is accepted that Lincoln was against slavery this is assumed to explain why Lincoln never joined a church. This may easily have been a good incremental reason for not joining a church, but the primary reason was that Lincoln was a passionate unbeliever.

There is also a very suspect series of religious quotes and references from a biography titled Life of Abraham Lincoln by Josiah Gilbert Holland. Many of the assertions in this book have been debunked by subsequent researchers. There is one quote from a Mr. Newton Bateman given after Lincoln's assassination that is used by religionists to document Mr. Lincoln's supposed Christianity. In it, Bateman claims that Lincoln revealed his belief in Jesus only to him and not to his many other friends because, "I am obliged to appear different to them; but I think more upon these subjects than upon others, and I have done so for years; and I am willing that you should know it."

The profound incoherence of this claim is obvious for numerous reasons. The supposed quote in the Holland book starts with, "Mr. Bateman, I am not a Christian..." This is a blatant contradiction to the asserted quote later, "...Christ teaches it, and Christ is God." This questionable uncorroborated and self-serving hearsay evidence is the only evidence that Lincoln said anything religious up to that time. There is the explicit assertion that the strong leader that keep our nation together was somehow afraid to tell his many friends that he had become a Christian.

It is generally thought that it would have served his political interest to publicly assert his Christianity if this were true. His opponents made much of his atheism and 21 of 23 local preachers were against him for that reason. Later with national political concerns it became a political necessity to start using the Deistic language of others such as Jefferson and Franklin before him. This allows Christians to think the President is not "against" them. Machievelli recommended in "The Prince" that the prince should lead his people to think he is righteous. Lincoln was an excellent politician and this was a necessary part of political leadership.

The motto "In God We Trust" was added during his administration. The Coral Ridge Ministries asserts that "His last act consisted of issuing an edict that every U.S. coin would be printed with the words: 'In God We Trust.'" (9) This act was actually instigated and lobbied for by Salmon P. Chase the Treasury Secretary in 1861 and passed by an act of Congress. Lincoln was in no position to oppose this act. Of course, to the Coral Ridge Ministries this fake "evidence" is used to prove that Lincoln, the unbeliever, was really a Christian.

Any balanced evaluation of Lincoln would report that he was a complete infidel before he went off to Washington. The Civil War resulted in a substantial increase in religiosity in this nation. Lincoln certainly did not wish to offend those who were religious. The fact remains that it was very unlikely that he was ever

a religious person. For an in depth understanding of the details, Franklin Steiner's book titled *Religious Beliefs of Our President's* (1936) is highly recommended. The Chapter on Lincoln is titled "Abraham Lincoln, Deist, and Admirer of Thomas Paine." (10)

References:

- (1) J.F.Maxwell, 'The Development of Catholic Doctrine Concerning Slavery', *World Jurist* 11 (1969-70) pp.306-307.
- (2) Southern Baptists
<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/sbaptists.html>
- (3) Upton Sinclair, *The Profits of Religion* available on the web at <http://www.opgc.org/books/prfrl10.txt>
- (4) Life. Vol. iii. Page 224.
- (5) Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Women in American History' available on the web at http://search.eb.com/women/articles/Mott_Lucretia_Coffin.html
- (6) Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers, A History of American Secularism*, quote re Mott from p85; p66 to 103 for overview of abolition movement including Grimke sisters role.
- (7) Franklin Steiner, *Religious Beliefs of Our Presidents*, chapter on Lincoln on web at <http://www.deism.org/lincoln.htm>
- (8) Henry Ketcham, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*
- (9) James Kennedy, "Immortal Abe Lincoln" online post at http://www.coralridge.org/impact/2004_Feb_Pg8.htm
- (10) Franklin Steiner, *Religious Beliefs of Our Presidents*, chapter on Lincoln on web at <http://www.deism.org/lincoln.htm>

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Thus, the purpose of the organization is to recapture the territory of the secular mind (now claimed by religious extremists) for societal benefit by making the knowledge of alternatives to religion public and ubiquitous.

ASUSA invites all who share our concern with the trend away from the "separation doctrine" to join with us. We are not concerned over the private practice of religion, only with those who are moving the U.S toward theocracy.

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