

## From George Dodd Armstrong's *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery* (1857)

A primary source document to accompany the teaching strategy by Amanda Porterfield, "Religion's Impact on American Social Issues" from the *OAH Magazine of History* 22 (January 2008): 33-36. (<http://www.oah.org/magazine/amreligion/>)

Where God has appointed a work for his Church, he has generally appointed the way also in which that work is to be done. And where this is the case, the Church is as much bound to respect the one appointment as the other. Both the work of the Church and the way are often more distinctly [sic] set forth in the life and ministry of Christ and his Apostles than in any positive precept. But in whatever manner the will of God is made known, that will is law to his Church.

In the case of a race of men in slavery, the work which God has appointed his Church-as we learn .it, both from the example and the precepts of inspired men-is to labor to secure in them a Christian life on earth and meetness for his heavenly kingdom. The African slave, in our Southern States, may be deeply degraded ; the debasing effects of generations of sin may, at first sight, seem to have almost obliterated his humanity, yet is he an immortal creature ; one for whom God the Son died ; one whom God the Spirit can re-fashion, so as to make him a worthy worshipper among God's people on earth, and a welcome worshipper among the ransomed in heaven; one whom God the Father waiteth to receive as a returning prodigal to his heart and to his home. And the commission of the Church, " go ye into all t h world and preach the Gospel to every creature," sends her a messenger of glad tidings to him as truly as to men far above him in the scale of civilization. On this point there can be no difference of opinion among God's people, North or South, who intelligently take I the word of God as their "only rule of faith and obedience." This is the work: of God, assigned by him to his Church, in so far as the slave race among ns is concerned."\*

In what way is this work to be done? We answer, By preaching the same Gospel of God's grace alike to the master and the slave ; and when there is credible evidence given that this Gospel has been received in faith, to .admit them, master and slave, into the same Church-the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, in which " there is neither bond nor free " and to seat them at the same table of the Lord, that drinking of the same cup, and eating of the same loaf, they may witness to the world their communion in the body and blood of the same Saviour. And having received them &to the same Church, to teach them the duties belonging to their several "callings" out of the same Bible, and subject them to the discipline prescribed by the same law, the law of Christ. And this, the teaching of the Church, is to be addressed not to her members only, but to the world at large; and her discipline of her members is to be exercised not in secret, but before the world, that the light which God has given her may appear unto all men. This is just the way in which Christ and his Apostles dealt with slavery. The instructions they have given us in their and in their writings prohibit any other.

In this way must the Church labor to make "good masters and good slaves," just as she labors to make "good husbands, good wives, good parents, good children, good rulers, good subjects. With the ultimate effect of this upon the civil and political condition of the slave the Church has nothing directly to do. If the ultimate effect of it be the emancipation of the slave-we say-in God's name, "let it come." "If it be of God, we cannot "and we would not if we could-"overthrow it, lest haply we be found even to fight against God." If the ultimate effect be the perpetuation of slavery divested of its incidental evils-a slavery in which the master shall be required, by the laws of man as well as that of God, "to give unto the slave that which is just and equal," and the slave to render to the master a cheerful obedience and hearty service-we say, let slavery continue. It may be, that such a slavery, regulating the relations of capital and labor, though implying some deprivation of personal liberty, will prove a better defense of the poor against the oppression of the rich, than the too great freedom in which capital is placed in many of the free States of Europe at the present day. Something of this kind is what the masses of free laborers in France are clamoring for under the name of "the right to labor." Something of this kind would have protected the ejected tenantry of the Duke of Sutherland against the tyranny which drove them forth from the home of their childhood, and quenched the fire upon many a hearth-stone, and converted once cultivated fields into sheep-walks. It may be, that Christian slavery is God's solution of the problem about which the wisest statesmen of Europe confess themselves "at fault." " Bonds make free, be they but righteous bonds. Freedom enslaves, if it be an unrighteous freedom."

\*\*"The fact is, that the great duty of the South is not emancipation, but improvement. The former is obligatory only as a means to an end, and therefore only under circumstances where it would promote that end."-Hodge's *Essays and Reviews* p. 607.