

**THE CHURCH AND
SLAVERY.
[PHILADELPHIA-1857]**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649549313

The Church and Slavery. [Philadelphia-1857] by Albert Barnes

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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ALBERT BARNES

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BY

ALBERT BARNES.

PHILADELPHIA:

PARRY & McMILLAN,

SUCCESSORS TO A. HART, LATE CAREY & HART.

1857.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1866, by
PARRY & McMILLAN,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Eastern
District of Pennsylvania.

STEREOTYPED BY L. JOHNSON AND CO.
PHILADELPHIA.

PRINTED BY T. E. AND P. G. COLLIER.

but one thing that has perilled the existence of the American Union, and that one thing is slavery. There has never been a time when the Union was really in danger until now. There has never been a time when the system of slavery has been so bold, exacting, arrogant, and dangerous to liberty, as at present. There has never been a time when so much importance, therefore, could be attached to the views of individual men; when so much could be done in favor of the rights of man by a plain utterance of sentiment; when so much guilt would be incurred by silence. It cannot be right that any one who holds the system to be evil in its origin, evil in its bearing on the morals of men, evil in its relations to religion, evil in its influence on the master and the slave—on the body and the soul—on the North and the South, evil in its relations to time and in its relations to eternity, should so act that it shall be possible to misunderstand his opinions in relation to it,—so act that his conduct could be appealed to as implying an apology for the system. The circle in which he moves may be a limited circle; his views may influence but few of the living, and may cease to be regarded altogether when he is dead; but for the utterance of those views, and for the position which he takes on this as on other subjects, he must soon give an account at a tribunal where silence on great moral subjects, as well as an open defence of what is wrong, will be regarded and treated as guilt. No man, therefore, should allow himself on these great questions to be in such a position that, by any fair construction of his life and opinions, his influence, however humble it may be, should be made to sus-

tain error and wrong, or be of such a nature that his name can be referred to as furnishing a support for cruelty and oppression.

As it is true that the only thing that ever has threatened to destroy this Union, or that now threatens to destroy it, is slavery, so it is true that the only thing that alienates one portion of the land from the other is slavery. In language, in customs, in laws, in religion, we are, and always have been, otherwise, a united people. We have a common origin. We all look to the same "fatherland," and we all claim that the glory of that land, in literature, in science, and in the arts, is a part of our common inheritance. We look back to the times of the Revolution; and, whatever wisdom there was in council, or whatever valour there was in battle, or whatever there was that was self-sacrificing in the cause of liberty, is a part of the common inheritance of this generation. Our railroads spread a network over all the States, making them one. Simultaneously through all the States of the Union the telegraph bears to millions of minds at once what is of common interest to all. Some of our great rivers roll along through vast States, Northern and Southern; and by our location, and by all the varieties of climate and soil constituting mutual dependence, we are designed by nature to be one people. On the question of slavery only are we divided. This question meets us everywhere, generates all the bad feeling there is between the North and the South, subjects us to all the reproach that we encounter from abroad; and it is the source of all that tends to produce civil strife, to cause alienation and dis-

cord in the churches, or to embroil us with the nations of the earth.

It cannot but be an inquiry of great importance how far *the church* is connected with this state of things, and how far, if at all, it is responsible for it. In a country so extensively under the influence of religion as ours; where religion undeniably so much controls public sentiment; where so large a portion of the community is connected with the church; and where the Christian ministry exerts so wide an influence on the public mind, it cannot be an unimportant question what the church is doing, and what it *ought* to do, in reference to an evil so vast, and so perilous to all our institutions.

I write over my own name. It is not because I suppose that my name will have any special claim in influencing the public mind; and not because I suppose it to be important that I should "define my position," as if the public had any particular interest in my position; and not because I suppose that the public will concern itself long to learn how any one individual thinks or feels on any subject that he may deem of special importance; but because I think it fair and manly that a man should be willing to attach his name to any sentiments which he holds, and which he chooses, for any reason, to submit to the consideration of mankind. I have no wish also to deny that I desire that my name should be found associated with any well-directed effort to remove slavery from the earth. I believe that the religion which I profess is opposed in its whole spirit and tendency to slavery; that its fair and legitimate application would remove the last remnant of it from the

world; and that in every effort which I may make to show to my fellow-men the evils of the system, or to promote universal emancipation, I am performing the appropriate duty of a Christian man, and of a minister of the gospel of Christ.