

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

THE  
CHURCHMAN

NOVEMBER, 1887.

ART. I.—SLAVE-HOLDING IN A NATIVE CHRISTIAN  
CHURCH.

SLAVERY, or Involuntary Labour, is one of the disgraces of the human race, and yet it is one of the oldest of institutions, and one which is only entirely eradicated by the influences of the Christian religion upon modern civilisation, which is itself the outcome of Christian influences, however much Atheists and Anti-Christians may think or say to the contrary. It is true, as will be shown below, that there are some races which will not submit to Slavery, preferring death, just as there are some races of men and beasts, and birds, which cannot be tamed, and prefer extinction; but the domination of stronger over weaker races has been the law of human life, whether developing into Slavery, Helotry, or Serfage. The subject to be discussed is:

- I. With whom alone rests the power of suppressing this abomination.
- II. How is it to be done with the least disturbance of the social system.

We dare not say that Slavery is inconsistent *in itself* with Christian life without ignoring the direct teaching of the Old and New Testament. Smarting with the sense of the bondage in Egypt, Moses in the twenty-second chapter of his third book of the Law, verse 11, repeating words spoken to him by Jehovah Himself, writes: "If the priest buy any such with his money, he shall eat of the holy things; but the hired servant shall not eat of it." And again in the twenty-fifth chapter, verse 44: "Of them (the heathen) ye shall buy bondmen and bondmaids," and again verse 46: "Ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you to inherit as a possession: they shall be your bondmen for ever." Down the whole of the chequered history of the chosen people

to the date of the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon, the status is recognized by the religious law of the nation. The distinction betwixt δούλος and μισθωτός, the slave and the hired labourer, is very marked, and St. Paul is not ashamed to call himself "the slave of Christ," and to write, that he has been "bought with a price." In writing about Polygamy in the pages of the CHURCHMAN, 1886, I argued that that institution had died out under the influence of Greek civilisation, for no one can read Homer and the story of Hector and Andromache, Ulysses and Penelope, and all the immortal legends of the great Græco-Latin races, even their mythology, without recognizing that monogamy, accompanied by concubinage and divorce, were deeply engrained in the common law of the people. In no passage of the New Testament is Polygamy even hinted at, while the existence of Slavery is obvious in the history of the period. We cannot, therefore, brush it aside, and say that God's written law forbids it. St. Paul, when he enumerated in the first chapter of the Romans all the frightful iniquities of the Gentiles, makes no allusion to Polygamy, because it did not exist, or to Slavery, because he did not with his knowledge of the Old Testament recognize it as a sin.

Nor does the history of modern time since the introduction of Christianity help us. It is only within the memory of the living generations that Slavery has ceased to be tolerated by any Christian nation, or Christian State; its cloven foot still presses the soil of Europe in Turkey; Europeans and Americans are reported to hold slaves in countries where that institution still flourishes. Even in countries like Egypt under the temporary protectorate of Great Britain, it still exists. In countries like the Transvaal Republic, if the name is not pronounced, the essence of the evil exists. It appears to be taking a new life in the shape of "Men Stealing" in the South Seas by the British Colonists in Queensland and Fiji, and of "fictitious service-contracts" according to the practice of the French planter in the Komóro Islands, and the Reunion.

More than this, the skirts of the garments of the Ministers of the Episcopal Church of England, and the Congregational Church of England, and (Heaven help the mark!) the Society of Friends are not free from this unhappy stain. In *Mission Life*, May, 1883, I published the whole story; how that in the *Mission Field*—the organ of the S.P.G.—of 1882, pp. 580, 581, appeared the following notice with regard to Madagascar:

The most important and hopeful step is the opening of the college to educate catechists and clergy; the students are all married; each has a house, consisting of a sitting-room, bedroom, and a kitchen, with an *upstairs room for his slaves*.

It transpired that the domestics of the ordained missionary were slaves, being hired from a slave-owner, who had the power to chastise them, and separate husband from wife, and parent from child. It transpired also that the native pastors of all denominations were the stoutest champions of this evil institution. I, and the late Sir Bartle Frere, in 1882 (it was almost his last appearance in public), tried to persuade the S.P.C.K. to withhold a grant to this college, but in vain. I tried in vain (August 14, 1883) to persuade the S.P.G. to forbid the practice in its missions. I was met by the argument of the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon. Soon after came the French invasion of Madagascar, and it was hoped that the Hova natives, struggling for their own liberty, would give freedom to their slaves: but it is not the case. Mr. Cousins of the London Missionary Society appeared a few weeks ago in the Committee of the Bible Society, and I asked him categorically in an assembly composed of men of every Protestant denomination, whether the scandal still continued, and he replied that it did. One member of the Society of Friends, Mr. Joseph Sewell, had the hardihood in a pamphlet published in London, 1876 (Elliot Stock, Paternoster Row), to denounce the custom, but he stood alone. I fear much that even to this day ordained ministers of the Church of England give their countenance to Slavery in their own families. I shall be glad to be contradicted.

The Roman Catholic Missionaries go a step further. In the pages of *Mission Life*, I showed, by quotations from the printed reports of the African missionaries; published in the "Missions Catholiques," how they deliberately purchased children, boys and girls; how sums were subscribed by devout children in France to purchase a little boy, to be named "Pierre," or a little girl to be named "Marie." They call it "Redemption." We know what redemption of a slave means by the sums collected to rescue poor Christians from the Barbary pirates; we can imagine now an African paying a sum to redeem his wife, or brother, or relative. We read in the third Book of Moses, chapter twenty-five, verse 48: "After that he have been sold, he may be redeemed again: one of his brethren may redeem him." But the word "redeem" cannot apply to the deliberate purchase by a Frenchman of an African child. Livingstone tells us in his "Missionary Travels," p. 92, "I have never known an instance in Africa of a parent selling his own offspring. The children are first kidnapped, and then sold to the priests." In the "Missions Catholiques," 1883, p. 54, we read: "A l'hôpital de Zanzibar est annexé une école pour les petites négresses, que l'on rachète, ou que l'on enlève des marchands des esclaves." And again, 1880, p. 220: "Les

esclaves achetés, à bas prix." I think that I can say safely that no Protestant missionary of any Society would lend himself to such transactions. But there is a tendency to error on the other side. A missionary can have no right to convert his station into a refuge for runaway slaves, or to preach abolitionist doctrines. This practice has been expressly forbidden to the missionaries of the Church Missionary Society. I regret to read in the report of the Anti-Slavery Society (of the Committee of which I am a member) a letter by the Rev. Mr. Ashe, of the C.M.S., a young man of very slight experience and extreme abolitionist views, which cannot but be very injurious to the quiet and peaceful work of the evangelist. St. Paul's example is distinctly opposed to such conduct. It must indeed be a painful sight to a missionary to witness the horror of the Slave trade, and of Slavery, and to be unable to protect runaway slaves; but a little reflection will convince him that it is not his duty to interfere, and that he has not the lawful authority or requisite power to do it efficiently, and that he is forbidden by those who send him out to interfere, and that the Consuls of Her Majesty are as unable as himself, and are as peremptorily forbidden as himself, to meddle in matters beyond their jurisdiction.

I now proceed to notice the good side of Slavery in certain social conditions of the human race. The great dictionary of the Latin language tells us that the word "Servus" is thus derived. "Servus dictus a *servando*, quia Imperatores captivos vendere, et per hoc servare, nec occidere solent."

"A chief in Central Africa (Valdez, vol. ii., p. 201) remarked that it was customary for him to sell as slaves those who commit murder or robbery, or other crimes, and that, if slavery were put a stop to, what could he do with them, but put them to death?" "Another chief (*ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 177) remarked that he was sorry that the Portuguese were not inclined to countenance the slave trade, as he thought it better to sell than to put them to death." Another person (Monteiro, vol. ii., p. 20), while expressing himself strongly against slavery, remarks that "despite the declamations of sensitive minds, as long as the barbarity of Africa remains, the barter of slaves will always be considered by philanthropists as the only palliation to the ferocity of the laws that govern these nations."

It has occurred to some minds, that the premature abolition of slavery by force may lead to the merciless slaughter of prisoners, or cannibalism; the captives being useless as an article of trade, must be got rid of. A New Guinea chief hearing of the vast slaughter in the Franco-German campaign, remarked what an abundant supply of food they must have

had with so many bodies. On being informed, that they were not used for that purpose, his reply was, "Why kill them then? They would be valuable if sold."

We know how in India there were formerly slave-markets, and history tells us how slaves, like Joseph, have received the highest offices of the State, but Africa is full of surprises, and we read (Wilson "West Africa," p. 179) how slaves, who conducted themselves well, *became themselves owners of slaves*. The writer knew several cases, where slaves owned a *larger number of bondmen than their own masters*.

Livingstone ("Zambesi," p. 49) tells a most extraordinary story :

A man, who was a pilot, told me, that he had voluntarily sold himself into slavery ; he was all alone in the world and sold himself to a kind master. He got three thirty-yard pieces of cotton for himself, and immediately bought a man, woman, and child for two of the pieces, and had one left. He afterwards bought more slaves, and had at last enough to make up a large caravan with his own slaves.

In the third book of Moses, chap. xxv. ver. 47, we read, "If thy brother wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee." One thing is clear, that Slavery was deemed only a misfortune, and that the holding of a slave was a privilege of wealth ; and it is only in later ages, and more enlightened communities, that it has been discovered to be a frightful moral delinquency, to be gradually stamped out.

For it leads to frightful evils, and has a dark side. Slaves were slaughtered to share the graves of their masters, they were tortured, cruelly chastised, starved, buried alive, carried into eunuchs, polluted into concubines ; all the social relations violated, wives torn away from their husbands, children from their parents : the status was frightful among the heathen, still more frightful among the Mahometans, and most frightful among the Christians in America. "The lot of the slave," as Livingstone remarks ("Last Journals," vol. i., p. 9), "does not improve with the general progress of civilization. While no great disparity of rank exists, his energies are little tasked ; but when society advances, the slave's lot grows harder ; the distance betwixt master and slave increases, as the lust of gain is developed ; hence one can have no hope for improvement in a slave's condition, unless the master returns to or remains in barbarism." This shows that the very existence of Slavery is incompatible with civilization, and therefore with Christianity.

Livingstone foresaw that the improvement of Africa by the introduction of agricultural plantations will make the lot of the poor slave worse ; but it is a comfort to reflect that escape

is always possible in Africa. Already the rumour of plantations in Eastern Equatorial Africa is talked of by German speculators; and it is even asserted, that a black man was only created to work, and must be made to work, and that the Missionaries should have industrial schools to teach them how to work. The French "Engagée" system is merely Slavery in disguise, and by treachery; the practice of the planters in Queensland and Fiji to employ men to kidnap labourers, is Slavery by violence.

One of the saddest consequences of Slavery is that it hardens the heart of the slave-owner, and the slave-holding community. They forget that the body of man is in the image of God, and may possibly become the temple of the Holy Ghost. They talk of it as black ivory or cattle; they treat the slave not as a fellow-creature but a beast. Livingstone remarked ("Zambesi," p. 103), "that custom has made the heart of a certain Spanish priest so callous, that he coldly told a poor man that his kidnapped daughter could not be restored to him." It is this callous state of mind, which leads some of our blood to quote Scripture in support of Slavery. In past ages we read how Roman ladies used to flog their female slaves with iron whips. Travellers to Rome are shown the small tank on the Palatine Hill, full of fish, into which slaves of the Emperors were thrown as a punishment. We read how slaves were left to die on the march, or be devoured by wild beasts, or were killed by the slave-owner in a moment of anger. Unfortunately the African has got the idea in his head of property being possible in a man. A chief offered Livingstone a slave to look after his goats, but was unwilling to give him a goat. We read how a man sold his young and good-looking wife, because she was unfaithful; this inspired all the other wives with fear. I must remark that King Mtesa, the friend of Christian Missions, sent his favourite wife to be killed. Colonel Grant saw her following the executioner to the place of execution; so perhaps it is better to be a slave than killed.

So frightfully complicated is the subject that I ask the thorough-going abolitionist how he is going to dispose of the slaves to whom he gives liberty. Mr. Felkin, in his "U-Ganda," (vol. ii. p. 299), tells us how the Mudir of Kordofan took credit for depriving a Greek Christian merchant of all the slaves which he was conveying to the Nile, and ordered the boys to be turned into soldiers and *the women to be then and there married*, as the only way of disposing of them. We read in the life of General Gordon, by Dr. Hill, that he distributed the female slaves, whom he released, among his Egyptian soldiery as wives on the march. These poor creatures were

already wives and mothers torn from their homes. The release seems worse than the captivity.

It is a comfort to think that even in Africa some races are made of stuff that will not bend to Slavery. Livingstone tells us ("Zambesi," p. 597) "that no Kruman or Zulu, or in fact any of the Kafir tribes can be converted into slaves. Neither in Kafir-land nor Be-Chûana-land has Slavery ever existed. And it is false that Slavery is only looked upon by the African as an ordinary incident of life." Livingstone, in his "Last Journals" (ii. 19), tells us "how he saw relatives bring three goats to redeem a sick boy who was emaciated. The boy shed tears, when he saw his grandmother, and his father shed tears also, when the goats were rejected. 'So I returned, and considered all the oppression, that was done under the sun, and behold the tears of the oppressed, and they had no comforter' (Eccl. iv. 1)."

Beltrame, a Roman Catholic Missionary in the Galla country ("Senaar and Shan Galla," vol. ii., p. 131), tells us "that a poor woman came down from the hills to claim justice for the murder of her husband, and the Turkish ruler ordered her at once to be sold as a slave." He was an officer of the Khedive. A Missionary, on the authority of Sir John Kirk, reported, in 1879, how the Abbé de Baize, a French scientific traveller, who died soon after, sold two women into captivity who had joined his camp for the sake of the protection of a European.

I have given some of these cases (always quoting my authority) that those, who attempt to rush into the subject and issue general orders of a vague kind, may reflect upon the vastness of the problem, and may not suppose, that I minimise the evil or am indifferent to it.

We now inquire how the evil is to be dealt with in a country where the governors are Christians, or where the slave-owners are (nominally) Christian. Let us consider what was done in British India. Sir Bartle Frere, in an Article in the *Fortnightly*, described how during his period of service the institution of slavery, which had been the common law of British India, died away, and is now extinct. I was myself witness of the proceeding. In 1843 a law was passed of a very few clauses. By one any offence was equally an offence, where the sufferer was alleged to be a slave; by the other every right was equally a right, where the person claiming it was alleged to be a slave. Under the first provision incarceration or assault became punishable by a magistrate; by the second a so-called slave could only demand his freedom and it was granted. I have myself endorsed the order on petitions, that the petitioner is at liberty to go where he or she likes. In the course of a generation

the domestic institution has died out. Had the abolitionists had their way, and a proclamation been issued abolishing Slavery under penalties, the streets would have been filled with aged and starving slaves turned out of their owner's homes, and there would have been a commotion all over India. When it is asserted that Mohammedanism cannot exist without Slavery, and that it would create a religious war to abolish the institution in Turkey, it is replied that in British India there are fifty million Mohammedans, and not one possesses a slave. In Tunis the Bey abolished Slavery and in Algiers the French stamped it out.

But how should a Missionary Society act when it is represented that members of the Church founded by the Society held slaves? The Archbishop of Canterbury stated in the House of Lords on April 12, 1883, and stated correctly, that in 1879 the Church Missionary Society laid down a rule that any of the agents of the Society who held slaves should *ipso facto* cease to be such agents, and this rule was enforced. I have above stated how I failed to induce the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to pass the same rule for their Mission in Madagascar. The question has now arisen whether Missionary Societies ought not to go further, and adopt the policy of the extreme Abolitionist Party, "Fiat justitia, ruat cælum."

In a newspaper published on the West Coast of Africa appeared the following lines in 1883:

Was this another instance of slave-holding practices by Sierra Leone men, therefore British subjects, professing Christianity? We fear it was, because we have too much reason to know that not a few Sierra Leone men, educated in mission schools, do not hesitate, when in heathen trading towns, to buy and hold slaves.

Now, if these men were British subjects we may safely leave the matter to the Attorney General of the Colony, as it is a felony to a British subject to sell or buy slaves anywhere, and punishable in the High Court of Justice in London.

In a letter written by "a native" to the *Lagos Times*, dated April 9, 1883, we find the following startling information as to the existence of slave-holding, slave-buying, slave-breeding, and ill-usage by members of the native Churches in independent Yoruba-land, both Episcopal and Wesleyan, and there is good reason to know that the assertions are true:

This evil thing did not exist in the Yoruba Church in the very early days of the missions planted in the country; it seems to have been then tabooed, and faithful native Christian teachers assisted then to hold their people up to it. But after a time and with the acquisition of money, a desire was conceived by members to own, as of old in heathenism, property in their fellow man, and gradually obeyed till it has become a general practice from which only the want of money to make purchases

keeps converts. Liberated African Christians from Sierra Leone and elsewhere shared in the desire and practice. To the credit of the members of the Wesleyan Church at Abeokuta it is to be said, that they were the last of the Christians there to adopt the practice. An influential party in their community, led by an able native agent, for a long time stood bravely and firmly against its introduction till overborne by the weight and persistence of the opposition they encountered, when a concession was made to members of the Church to buy slaves but not to sell them. But, as was said then by one of those who had stood against it, the concession to buy was equal to a concession to sell. He also remarked that this would prove, as it has proved, the ruin of Christianity in the country. Eventually, those who were opposed to the introduction of the practice fell into it themselves with those who were originally in favour of it; and now there, as in other parts of the Yoruba mission in places not under British rule, slave-holding is a general practice; an exception is not known. Christians buy slaves, breed slaves, sell slaves, own fellow believers as slaves, and sometimes sell baptized fellow Christians, their slaves, to heathens and Mohammedans, a thing that may not be found in Mohammedanism; separate slave children from slave parents for the market; are often harder upon their slaves than heathen slave-owners are, heathens themselves being witnesses; are sometimes most unwilling to allow their slaves to buy their freedom, even though they be Christians like themselves, and these may, if they be women, have been made concubines or secondary wives of and have borne their masters children; and would place most exorbitant prices upon them, where heathens would be content with an almost nominal sum; would often demand from their slaves, even from poor women working for the support of themselves and their children, the payment annually of four or five bags of cowries, which value from about forty to fifty shillings, as interest on purchase money, where a heathen master is content to have only one bag; are most unwilling to part with the system and have persecuted for it and been found ready and willing to invite the aid of heathens to the work of persecution. There is a mania everywhere in the Christian community for slave acquisition, which had seized pastors, catechists, and other agents also. A man's importance is measured by the number of slaves he possesses. And as amongst heathens, so among professed Christians. Slavery feeds Polygamy, and Christians may be found, to whom much respect is conceded by the Church, whose harems are more numerous than those of many a heathen on account of the larger number of wives. Slavery in the Churches has destroyed the brotherhood of Christians, since it prevents an equality of standing in the Church; and this in a community where class distinction should not be known! The cruelty of some Christian slave owners, even of women, has been known to end the lives of their slaves. Is this Christianity? Is this the Christianity that we look forward to for the conversion of Africa from heathenism? And where, beyond British territory, is it higher or better?

Now the question which arises, and which I submit for consideration, is—What can a Missionary Society do to check such evils? The state of things described is not within British territory, and therefore the State cannot interfere. A Lay Missionary Society cannot interfere with the ecclesiastical discipline of a native Church: that is the prerogative of the Bishop. Nor could, under any circumstances, conditions be attached to baptism which are

not supported by the authority of the New Testament. Polygamists may be refused baptism because they are notoriously living in a sin against the words of our Lord, "Male and female created He them," and the universal custom of the Church from the earliest ages; but Slavery has never been placed under the ban of Christianity. In some Churches total abstinence from spirituous liquors has been made the conditions of Church membership. Against all such narrowing of the great invitation, "Repent and be baptized," I must protest.

All that a Society can do is to address a letter to these Churches, reminding them of the great example set to them by the British nation, to whom they owe the suppression of the foreign Slave trade and their knowledge of the Gospel, and exhorting them to adopt the four following principles:

I. Never to sell or buy a slave;

II. If their circumstances permit them, at once to free their slaves;

III. If their circumstances do not permit them to treat their slaves as brothers, never to raise the hand against them, and respect the chastity of the female slaves;

IV. Let all children born henceforth be born free. Let them do this for Christ's sake, Who bought them.

It appears to me that anything beyond this will stultify itself. The conscience of individuals should be appealed to; their pastors should enforce this from the pulpit. We must recollect that the Yoruba Church is a weak native Church in the midst of a strong heathendom: it would be tantamount to breaking up the Church to excommunicate all slaveholders. And this was not the way in which St. Paul dealt with the early Church. He was very gentle with their errors and backslidings. These Churches are independent; support their own pastors; hold their own synods, and are not to be dictated to by foreigners, however well intentioned. If they transferred their slaves to their heathen relations by real or fictitious contracts, it is not clear what would be the gain to the slaves. They might go through the form of manumission, and the slaves might next day be seized by the heathen chiefs and appropriated. The problem is one difficult to solve.

ROBERT CUST.

EASTBOURNE, September 14, 1887.

