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Slavery in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and History

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I. The Old Testament

1. The Term 'Slave' in the Old Testament

The term *slave* in Bible translations is given to misunderstanding, because it is all too easy to mistakenly read the cruel slavery of the Greeks, Romans, Muslims, Europeans and Americans into the Old and New Testaments. For this reason, to describe what was allowed in the Bible, one should rather speak of 'bonded labour' (albeit only for real debts), 'labour service', or with Georg Huntemann 'servanthood work'.[1]

The legal position of a slave/servant in Israel, over against the position of slaves among other peoples, was extraordinarily good. 'The lot of slaves does not appear to have been particularly harsh.'[2] This is demonstrated in the fact that there is no word for 'slave', but rather the same word that was used for 'worker'. 'The Bible uses the same word, *'ebed*, for servants as well as for slaves, such that it is often difficult to determine which meaning is meant in a particular section.'[3]

Leviticus 25:6 distinguishes between four dependent types of labour: the manservant (slave), maidservant, hired worker and temporary resident.[4] In other passages, a distinction is made between the salaried hired worker and the temporary resident (Lev 22:10; 25:40).

2. Slaves' Rights in the Old Testament

Even prior to the covenant at Sinai,[5] one reads in Job 31:13-15: 'If I have denied justice to my menservants and maidservants when they had a grievance against me, what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did

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1 Georg Huntemann. *Biblisches Ethos im Zeitalter der Moralrevolution* (Hänssler: Neuhausen, 1996), 89.

2 'Slavery', in Isaac Landman, ed., *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 9 (New York, 1948), 566.

3 'Slavery', 566.

4 Hans Walter Wolff. *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1977), 289.

5 I assume that the Book of Job reports from a time prior to or during Abraham's life. See Henry M. Morris, *The Remarkable Record of Job: The Ancient Wisdom, Scientific Accuracy, and Life-Changing Message of an Amazing Book* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

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not the same one form us both within our mothers?'

A central social meaning is attached to the fact that in the Sabbath commandment, servants/slaves were also expressly freed from work for the day (Ex 20:10; 23:12; cf. Deut 5:14–15). In this context it should also be considered that in the Old Testament the masters of the slaves (as well as the rulers and the local masters) and their families always worked as well and that in the Bible, work is part of what gives a person dignity. Gustav Warneck observes in this regard, 'Christian mission demonstrates via word and example that the brand of shame that is seen upon work due to slavery *rests upon a divine command*.'[6]

A slave/servant in the Old Testament was not a possession of his or her master without rights, as in Greek, Roman, Islamic or modern colonial slavery.[7] Rather, the servant had full rights in the presence of a judge. As Job made clear, this is the case because the servant is just as much created by God as every other person. Also, because the servant is an image of God, he or she may not be infringed upon (Job 9:6). For this reason, 'If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies as a direct result, he must be punished' (Ex 21:20).

As John Murray presented rather fittingly, in the Bible the master does not own the slave/servant but rather his or her work.[8] For that reason, a slave could have his own possessions (e.g. 1 Sam 9:8; 2 Sam 9:10, 12; 16:4; 19:18). That was the only reason why, should the occasion arise, he could buy his own freedom (Leviticus 25:29–30 would have applied to slaves).

Generally speaking, there were numerous protective measures relating to slaves/servants.[9] No master was to 'rule … ruthlessly', either over slaves (Lev 25:43, 46) or over hired workers (Lev 25:53). A slave in Israel was to serve for six years at most (Ex 21:2; cf. Deut 15:12, 18). If he wanted to offer lifelong service, the slave had to conclude an eternal covenant with his master (Deut 15:16–17). This condition demonstrates once again just how great the relationship of trust between master and servant could be. Israelite slavery could not have been so bad if some people voluntarily chose to make it a lifelong arrangement.

A slave/servant could be corporally disciplined as one's own children were (which in Europe was also common with employees until around 1900), but if he suffered harm, for instance by losing an eye or a tooth, he had to be freed (Ex 21:26–27). After the end of the period of slavery, the master had to give the slave/servant enough property so that he could establish his own existence: 'And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed.

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6 Gustav Warneck, *Die Stellung der evangelischen Mission zur Sklavenfrage* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1889), 67.

7 On the history of slavery, see Susanne Everett, *Geschichte der Sklaverei* (Augsburg: Bechtermünz Verlag, 1998); Milton Meltzer, *Slavery: A World History* (New York: Da Capo, 1993, originally published in two volumes in 1971–1972), abridged as *All Times, All Peoples: A World History of Slavery* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

8 John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 97–98.

9 Wolff, *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments*, 290–95.

Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you' (Deut 15:13–14). The reasoning for this, expressed next to the reminder that Israel was once itself oppressed as slaves, is of great importance: 'Do not consider it a hardship to set your servant free, because his service to you these six years has been worth twice as much as that of a hired hand [that is, arguably, the profit gained and the salary saved]. And the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do' (Deut 15:18). The work of a slave is worth his wages. The wage consisted mostly in working off debts; however, it was also expressed in the form of a generous endowment to establish the slave's future.

Next to this was a 'right of redemption' (Lev 25:48) for slaves/servants, who had to be set free when they themselves or someone else bought their freedom (Lev 25:47–55). There even existed a 'redemption duty' upon the 'uncle' or the nephew, that is to say, the closest relatives ('his closest blood relative'; Lev 25:49).

This right of redemption suggests that slavery was a state that should be ended as soon as possible. Paul writes similarly: 'although if you can gain your freedom, do so' (1 Cor 7:21)—a statement that he refused to make about marriage.

A slave could be named as an heir, which as a rule occurred via adoption (e.g. Gen 15:2–3; 1 Chron 2:34–35[10]) and indeed not only in the case of childlessness, but rather also in the place of

the biological heirs (Prov 17:2). Abraham had a servant named Eliezer (Gen 15:2), who was 'the chief [or oldest] servant in his household' and was 'in charge of all he had' (Gen 24:2). What trust Abraham placed in his slave/servant! This servant of Abraham was charged with searching out a wife for Isaac, his future master (Gen 24). Furthermore, the slave/servant could become an heir by marrying a daughter who was to receive an inheritance (1 Chron 2:35). Thus, complete upward mobility was possible for a slave.

A slave/servant was circumcised (Gen 17:12–13; Ex 12:44) and with that action was completely accepted into the covenant with God. He took part in the Passover (Ex 12:44) as well as in sacrifices and fellowship meals (Lev 22:11). He was to expressly rejoice in worship (Deut 12:12, 18; 16:11, 14).

One of the most astounding commands regarding the limitations on slavery is in Deuteronomy 23:15–16: 'If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand him over to his master. Let him live among you wherever he likes and in whatever town he chooses. Do not oppress him.' Hans Walter Wolff writes in this connection, 'This law is, as far as the ancient Orient is concerned, unique.'[11]

Since God wants men to be free, as Leviticus 25:39–43 shows, slavery was not generally viewed positively and was to be avoided if at all possible. The poverty of a person was not to be exploited in order to bring him under a condition of slavery. For this reason, Amos (2:6) strongly rebukes the sell-

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10 W. S. Bruce, *The Ethics of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), 187–88.

11 Wolff, *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments*, 293.

ing of the poor. Gentile slaves are an exception in Leviticus 25:44–46.

I do not wish to imply that the Old Testament already understood the legal protections present today for those who are employed and dependent. However, the Old Testament set itself apart from its surrounding environment in terms of legal protection for dependent employees and was far ahead of its time in this morally sensitive area. In no case did Old Testament slavery correspond to later European and Islamic slavery. The way in which Christian slave-owners in the American South used the Old Testament up into the nineteenth century was misguided and unjustified. If slave-owners had held to the Old Testament, they could not have held their slaves, due simply to the fact that the slaves had been obtained through robbery and had no right to become free.

3. Releasing Slaves in the Old Testament

The release of a slave was considered a good thing. The liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt was still remembered, as simultaneously a liberation from spiritual slavery in Egypt and from the visible slavery of compulsory labour (Ex 13:3, 14; 20:2; Deut 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; Ps 81:6–8; Jer 11:4; 34:13; Micah 6:4). This becomes particularly clear in the reasons provided for the protective regulations for slaves in Leviticus 25: 'Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. Do not rule over them ruthlessly' (Lev 25:42–43). 'For the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the

Lord your God (Lev 25:55).

Freeing a slave was above all called for when the reason for the enslavement was unjust: 'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?' (Is 58:6). The actual year of freedom was the Year of Jubilee. (Jesus quoted this text in Luke 4:16–22 together with Isaiah 61:1–4 at one of his first public appearances, proclaiming that the fulfilment of the year of freedom had begun with him.)

The most comprehensive chapters on proclaiming freedom are found in Jeremiah and Nehemiah. In Jeremiah 34:8–22, a 'covenant' was made under King Zedekiah to release all slaves in the course of the Year of Jubilee, that is to say, to 'proclaim freedom' (Jer 34:17). When the 'leaders' take back their slaves, their sin brings God's anger on them (34:19–22). In the process, God expressly reminds them of his law of the Year of Jubilee (34:14–15, 17) and of the liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery (34:13).

There were also times other than the Year of Jubilee when slaves were set free, as the second Old Testament report of a large-scale release of slaves shows. Nehemiah 5 reports a major action to forgive debt by the wealthy, by which many slaves were given their freedom and additional people were prevented from becoming slaves.

In summary, we can say that the Jews 'differentiate themselves from all peoples of antiquity … in that they had the most highly advanced protective legislation for slaves.'[12]

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12 Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto, *Sklaverei und*

4. The Death Penalty for Slave Thieves and Slave Traders

There was no situation in which it was legal to bring someone into slavery through theft or sale. The death penalty was the punishment for such actions: 'Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death' (Ex 21:16).[13] 'If a man is caught kidnapping one of his brother Israelites and treats him as a slave or sells him, the kidnapper must die. You must purge the evil from among you' (Deut 24:7).

This instruction by itself firmly and clearly condemns Greek, Roman, Islamic and the varieties of modern colonial slavery. Practically all the blacks in North and South America became slaves by abduction. The slave traders and their financiers in genteel banking houses and aristocratic families assaulted the lives of others and thus, according to Old Testament law, forfeited their own lives. Gary North points out correctly that this condemnation applied not only to the brutal slave hunters, but also to the respectable English and American citizens who financed the slave trade.[14]

5. How an Individual Become a Slave?

So how did someone (legally) become a slave according to the Old Testament?

One could become a slave by obligating oneself to remain a slave for life (Ex 21:5–6) or by being born as a slave (Gen 14:14; 15:3; 17:12–13, 27; Ex 23:12; Lev 22:11). Both ways, however, presupposed already existing slavery. This also applied to the purchase of non-Israelite slaves (Lev 25:44–45; Gen 17:12–13, 27; 37:28–36; 39:1). Here the issue is likewise the sale of slaves who in some other manner had become slaves. Normally only the following individuals could (involuntarily) become slaves/servants:

Prisoners of war (Num 31:7–12; Deut 20:10–14; 21:10–14; Gen 14:21). According to Deuteronomy 20:11, Israel always had to first offer peace to a besieged city, which then meant 'forced labour', that is, slavery with all its associated rights. If peace were refused, the Israelites sought to destroy the city. Given this situation, slavery was therefore an act of grace. This type of slavery is no longer possible in New Testament times, because in my opinion God no longer gives any people a command to destroy a city.

Individuals unable to pay debts. Here lies the focal point of Old Testament slavery, in which one sought to work off a debt to another.[15] In this case, a person could resort to putting himself in a position of slavery (Lev 25:39–55; Deut 15:12–15; cf. Ex 21:2–6) or give his children over into slavery (Ex 21:7–11; Neh 5:5) and then also, of course, could redeem his family or himself later. In 2 Kings 4:1 a 'creditor' takes two sons of a woman as slaves.

However, the process of slavery

Freilassung in der griechisch-römischen Welt (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2009), 203; cf. 203-9.

13 Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 65–84.

14 North, *Victim's Rights*, 79.

15 Paul Volz, *Die Biblischen Altertümer* (Wiesbaden: Fourier, 1914, rpt. 1989), 505.

was not only a burden but also social welfare for an individual who due to no fault of his own became bankrupt. 'As elsewhere in the old Orient, slavery attributable to debts, in which the family would then get involved, was not actually a penalty; rather, it was civil law compensation to the creditor from the debtor for his inability to pay.'[16]

This Old Testament system must not be confused with debt servanthood today. Nowadays, debts are wrongfully caused and cannot be repaid, such as when fictitious user fees for tools in India exceed wages. In the Old Testament, we are dealing with real debts that had to be duly paid off or worked off.

Criminal offenders. In addition, an individual unable to pay his debts could be placed into slavery by a court order. Insofar as criminal offenses are concerned, slavery fulfilled the function that financial penalties and imprisonment should have today. This applied especially to thieves (Ex 22:1–3; Lev 25:40). Exodus 22:2 states, 'A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay for his theft.'

II. The New Testament

Many have been concerned about the fact that the New Testament asks slaves/servants to work particularly well and honestly for their masters (Tit 2:9–11; Eph 6:5–9; Col 3:22–4:1; 1 Tim 6:1–2; 1 Pet 2:18–25; 1 Cor 7:21–24). However, the justification is important:

'not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men' (Col 3:22). In other words, the actual employer is not the person who pays the wages, but God! The slave knows that in God's eyes his work is good and worthy. Was this approach designed to put the slave simply at the master's whim? Hardly.

Additionally, the New Testament turns against the slave trade. Michael Parsons writes, 'It should be emphasized that the New Testament writers did not overlook the errors of slavery. The Pauline list of lawbreakers includes slave traders (1 Tim 1:9–10). John includes slavery in his analysis of the errors which permeated Babylon, whereby the city would be judged (Rev 18:13).'[17]

The sharp admonitions given to masters can be understood only if based on this framework. The admonitions reminded the masters of their lawful responsibilities, because God does not look at a person's standing: 'Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven' (Colossians 3:25–4:1).

The same Paul who encouraged slaves to work well and to prove their Christian faith as slaves also wrote, 'Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. Were you a slave when you were

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16 J. Scharbert, 'Strafe: II. Biblisch', col. 1099 in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, ed. Josef Höfer, Karl Rahner et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), vol. 9.

17 Michael Parsons, 'Slavery and the New Testament: Equality and Submissiveness', *Vox Evangelica* 18 (1988): 90.

called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave' (1 Cor 7:20–22). In Philemon, in fact, Paul vehemently seeks the freedom of a slave.[18]

In sum, Paul clearly recommends the emancipation of slaves and even fights for it. However, belief in God reprioritizes one's values. It is not work that makes life valuable, but rather the Creator and Redeemer who gives the work. The penetrating power of Christianity consists in the fact that by pointedly calling upon the righteousness of God, it calls for and promotes righteousness. Even when outward freedom is denied, in thankfulness towards God our call to stop being a slave to sin continues and is not dependent on external circumstances. Internal freedom can and should precede external freedom. Yet the New Testament follows the Old Testament's rejection of slavery in the forms that we know from Greek, Roman, Islamic or modern colonial history.

III. Slavery and Christians: From the Early Church to Abolition

The early church unsettled the Roman world and Hellenistic civilization, in which slavery was an inherent part of the structure of society.[19] It did this by making it possible for slaves to have complete participation in their congregations and by setting slaves free or buying their freedom on a large scale.[20]

'With the demand for equality before God, which always taught Christians to see in other Christians only another individual with whom one was a slave of the Lord, the lowest standing became the standing of the Christian.'[21]

'Slaves were even able to become clerics, indeed even bishops.'[22] The most famous example is Bishop Kallist (d. 222 AD), who rose from slavery to become Bishop of Rome.[23] 'All the Roman bishops up to Victor I (189–198) may very well have been former slaves or Orientals.'[24]

Freeing slaves counted in the early church as a good work, Christians were publicly engaged in efforts relating to

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18 Herbert M. Carson, *The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 21–24.

19 Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto, *Sklaverei und Freilassung in der griechisch-römischen Welt* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2009); Stefan Knoch, *Sklavenfürsorge im Römischen Reich: Formen und Motive* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2009); Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto (ed.), *Unfreie Arbeits- und Lebensverhältnisse von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart: Eine Einführung* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2009).

20 Henneke Gülzow, 'Soziale Gegebenheiten der altkirchlichen Mission', in Heinzgünter Frohnes and Uwe W. Knorr, eds., *Die Alte Kirche* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1974), 227–28.

21 Henneke Gülzow, *Christentum und Sklaverei in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1969), 173.

22 Adolf Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Wiesbaden: VMA-Verlag, 1924), 193.

23 Gülzow, *Christentum und Sklaverei*, 146–72.

24 Johannes Neumann, 'Bischof I: Das katholische Bischofsamt', in Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller, eds., *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 6 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 659.

the destiny of slaves,[25] and slaves had full rights in the church.[26]

Gary North argues that slavery actually found its end in Christ on the cross but that only in the course of the Christian church's development did this realization grow.[27] This view should not be dismissed. The Christian faith has made various contributions to history that are not traceable back to an expressed biblical command or prohibition, such as time off from work on weekends, the end of the degradation of women, and the prohibition of child labour.

Even though the abolition of slavery in the Christian world took considerable time, the issue was disputed frequently over the centuries. For example, 'The Synod of Châlons in France declared the following in 650 AD: "The highest piety and religion demands that Christianity be completely freed from the chains of slavery." In 922 AD the Koblenz Synod in the East Frankish Empire came to the resolution that the sale of a Christian was to be considered murder.'[28]

'The first legal book in history to reject servitude and—*a fortiori*—slavery is the *Sachsenspiegel* (literal English translation is "Saxon Mirror"), dated 1235 AD. It was composed by Eike Repgow. In it the lack of freedom is seen as an injustice which by practice of habit comes to be seen as just. Jesus' teaching on paying taxes to Caesar indicates that a coin belongs to the person whose picture it bears; since man bears God's image, he belongs to God and no one else.'[29]

During the European conquest of Latin America, the Pope (unsuccessfully) spoke out on behalf of the natives' human dignity and against their enslavement. [30]

With this background, we can understand why Protestant world missions and missionaries such as David Livingstone or Elias Schrenk engaged in massive efforts to end the slave trade and slavery. This form of slavery had absolutely nothing to do with what was allowed in the Old Testament. The anti-slavery movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not primarily take its arguments and inspiration from human rights convictions but from religious beliefs.[31]

European involvement in the slave trade began in 1444 when a Portuguese expedition unloaded 235 slaves from Mauritius in Lagos, Nigeria. In 1510, the first fifty black slaves were brought from Spain to Haiti to work in the silver mines, and in 1619 the first

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25 Gülzow, *Christentum und Sklaverei*, 173–76.

26 Harnack. *Die Mission und Ausbreitung*, 192–95; Gülzow, *Christentum und Sklaverei*, 76–146 reviews the question of slavery in early Christian documents and churches in detail, on the basis of the few available sources.

27 Gary North, *Tools of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 186–87.

28 Egon Flaig, *Weltgeschichte der Slaverei* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2009), 157.

29 Flaig, *Weltgeschichte der Sklaverei*, 158.

30 Flaig. *Weltgeschichte der Sklaverei*, 164–65; Thomas Schirrmacher, *Rassismus* (Hänssler: Holzgerlingen, 2009), 59; Matthias Gillner, *Bartolomé de Las Casas und die Eroberung des indianischen Kontinents* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1997).

31 Jozef Punt, *Die Idee der Menschenrechte: Ihre geschichtliche Entwicklung und ihre Rezeption durch die moderne katholische Sozialverkündigung* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1987), 168.

slaves came to what is now the United States.

The transatlantic slave trade was a business triangle in which cheap goods, hard liquor and weapons from Europe were often exchanged for slaves from Africa, which were in turn exchanged for American colonial goods.[32] It was taken for granted that some of the slaves would die; they were valued and treated as goods, not as people. Between 1450 and 1900, one to two million slaves died during approximately 50,000 passages by ship.[33]

IV. The Role of Evangelicals in the Abolition of Slavery

From one day to the next, the British gave up 800,000 slaves in 1834.[34] How did this happen? Along with other economic and social factors, evangelical revivalism was significantly involved in bringing an end to slavery.[35] This applies to the legal abolition of slavery in Great Britain as well as to the anti-slavery movement in the US.[36]

In 1688, Quakers in England and the US first demanded that all slaves be released. By 1780, all Quakers had released their slaves.[37] George Whitefield and John Wesley, who set Methodist revivalism in motion in England and the US, fought vehemently against the 'sin' of slavery. Wesley published *Thoughts upon Slavery* in 1774. Beginning in 1784, Methodists excommuni-

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32 Christian Delacampagne, *Die Geschichte der Sklaverei* (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges, 2004), 112–24.

33 Jochen Meissner, Ulrich Mücke and Klaus Weber, *Schwarzes Amerika: Eine Geschichte der Sklaverei* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2008).

34 Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 265.

35 The most important literature on the role of Evangelicals in the anti-slavery movement is as follows. In Great Britain: Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810: The Story of the First American Revolution for Negro Rights* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1975); J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (London: Routledge, 1998); Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel

Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006, esp. 333–450; Eric Metaxas, *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007 (unfortunately without footnotes). In the USA: Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse: 1830–1844* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1964); Mark A. Noll, *Das Christentum in Nordamerika. Kirchengeschichte in Einzeldarstellungen 4* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verl.-Anstalt, 2000), 114, 121–123; Donald G. Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality 1780–1845* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 3–28 (on the Methodist split in the USA over the question of slavery). On both Great Britain and the USA: Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 205–41; Alvin J. Schmidt, *Wie das Christentum die Welt veränderte* (Gräfelfing: Dr. Ingo Resch, 2009), 325–48; Flaig, *Weltgeschichte der Sklaverei*, 199-201.

36 S. Dave Unander, *Shattering the Myth of Race: Genetic Realities and Biblical Truths* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 24–26, 36–40.

37 On the leading role of the Quakers in Great Britain and the US, see John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 198–99; Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition*, 200–235; Brown, *Moral Capital*, 391–450.

cated slaveowners.

In England, many friends of Wesley who were involved in politics became active in opposition to slavery. The most famous of these was William Wilberforce (1759–1833).[38] Others worthy of mention are Thomas Clarkson[39] and the former slave trader John Newton, who wrote a book against the slave trade[40] as well as 'Amazing Grace', which became the anthem of the anti-slavery movement.

Religious advocates for the abolition of slavery outdid modernists, such as the leaders of enlightened and revolutionary France, in this regard. Egon Flaig explains, 'Those who carried on this battle are not to be found in Enlightenment philosophy; where one makes a find is in the spiritual realm of Protestant minorities.'[41] In contrast to the situation in France, scientific racism could not make progress in places where a strong evangelical movement insisted that all people had descended from a single progenitor, Adam, and were thus equal.[42]

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), the most famous abolitionist book in the US, was written by the daughter of the famous evangelical revivalist preacher Lyman Beecher. And this was not even the most radical book against slavery written by its author, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896).[43]

Alvon J. Schmidt estimates that in the US, two-thirds of the anti-slavery movement consisted of Evangelicals.[44] Jochen Meissner writes that 'the Evangelical-sectarian origins of many European settlements in the territory of the present-day USA offered fertile ground for the spread of ideas which condemned slavery.'[45]

Evangelicals in Great Britain led the first large anti-slavery campaign in history, beginning in the 1780s. Their efforts demonstrated for the first time how a political minority without influence can assert its human rights concerns by mobilizing a population. In one of their campaigns, they collected about a million signatures.[46]

Along with all the moral considerations, slavery was also not a profitable contributor to the economy; rather, in economic terms it produced a loss. If slaves had been replaced by oxen, tools and a feudal levy system at the time when sugar cane plantations sprang up, the revenues and the profits would have

38 John White, 'Christian Responsibility to Reform Society: The Example of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 32, no. 2 (2008): 166–72; Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, 159–227; Metaxas, *Amazing Grace.* Wilberforce's evangelical theology is expressed best in his book *Real Christianity* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1982).

39 See in particular Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery*, 70–95.

40 John Newton, *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* (London: J. Buckland and J. Johnson, 1788).

41 Flaig, *Weltgeschichte der Sklaverei*, 199–200.

42 George M. Fredrickson, *Rassismus: Ein historischer Abriss* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edi-

tion, 2004), 69–70.

43 Ellen J. Goldner, 'Stowe, Harriet Beecher', in *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, vol. 3 (Detroit: Thomason Gale, 2008), 101–2.

44 Schmidt, *Wie das Christentum die Welt veränderte*, 330–44.

45 Meissner et al., *Schwarzes Amerika*, 198; see also p. 202.

46 Drescher, *Abolition*, 202, 209, 220, 229.

William Wilberforce became a representative in the British House of Commons in 1780. He converted to evangelical Protestantism in 1784 on a trip through continental Europe and founded the Abolition Society to elevate morals and especially to abolish the slave trade. In a parliamentary meeting in 1789, Wilberforce, along with William Pitt, petitioned for the first time in the House of Commons to abolish the slave trade. Again in 1792 a petition was filed, this time successfully. Yet implementation was prevented due to war and the situation in the colonies. Not until 1807 did an act of Parliament end the British slave trade. Slave traders within the British sphere of control were viewed as pirates and punished. The US followed suit, and beginning in 1808 the slave trade was forbidden.

At that point Wilberforce set his sights on implementing this prohibition in the rest of the civilized world. Upon his urging, Lord Castlereagh successfully raised the issue at the Congress of Vienna, eventually achieving agreements in which France, Spain and Portugal obligated themselves to forbid the slave trade.

After the slave trade was abolished, Wilberforce moved to ostracizing and eliminating slavery itself. In 1816, he presented a motion in Parliament to reduce the number of slaves in the British West Indies. The government began considering the emancipation of all slaves in 1823, and Wilberforce delivered impassioned speeches throughout the fierce debate until, in 1825, he had to retire due to health reasons. He died in 1833 and was buried in the church of the British crown, Westminster Abbey.

been much higher.[47] Slaves could not earn anything. Any additional effort was pointless, and thinking for themselves was of no benefit. Rather, in the best case, it was only of value to the master. 'During all of human history, slaves' passivity always led to the downfall of the system that made use of their services.'[48]

In 1776 the abolitionists received additional support from an unexpected direction—a standard work of economics, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith came to the conclusion that slavery was uneconomical, on the one hand due to the fact that it ruined the country, and on the other because the subsistence of slaves was more expensive than that of a free worker. However, he made it clear to which basis slavery, according to his own conviction, could be traced back: 'The pride of mankind misguides man to enjoy domination … he will generally prefer the services of a slave to the services of a free man.'[49]

The American South, with its slave-based society, was economically poor in contrast to the slave-free North, even

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[47] For details, see Henry Hobhouse. *Fünf Pflanzen verändern die Welt* (Frankfurt: DTV, 1987), 97; cf. the concrete calculations for a sugar plantation in Susanne Everett, *Geschichte der Sklaverei* (Augsburg: Bechtermünz Verlag, 1998), 74–75.

[48] Hobhouse, *Fünf Pflanzen verändern die Welt*, 233.

[49] Everett, *Geschichte der Sklaverei*, 137.

though some large plantation owners wallowed in wealth.[50] This should, however, not lead to the assumption that slavery was abolished because it was already in decline. More recent research shows that slavery was at a high point with respect to its profitability for those participating in it and that the number of transported and engaged slaves was higher than ever before. Additionally, slavery was abolished at the time when British pride was at its highest level.[51]

The abolition of slavery was advanced primarily by moral purists to whom the supposed economic consequences paled in comparison to the human dignity of those affected by slavery.[52] The French Revolution, meanwhile, left slavery in the colonies untouched and put down uprisings by slaves. Thus the Enlightenment did not make any significant contribution to the abolition of slavery.[53]

In 1975, Roger Anstey argued that evangelicals were so strongly opposed to slavery because they understood conversion and redemption to be a transfer from the slavery of sin into the freedom of the gospel, and for that reason they could only view slavery negatively.[54]

Christopher Leslie Brown writes in his monumental history of the abolition of slavery, *Moral Capital* (2006), that the role of evangelicals has been largely overlooked since Anstey's comprehensive investigation.[55] Seymour Drescher, author of a monumental history of the anti-slavery movement, agrees, noting that Wilberforce's role was especially suppressed.[56]

One reason for this failure to acknowledge evangelical contributions is that from about 1975 to 2000, the abolition of slavery was mainly accounted for in economic and social terms. Only since then did the view come to predominate which says that slavery was abolished at the time of its high point, that without the anti-slavery movement it would have still been able to continue for a long time, and that the decisive reasons were not primarily economic but rather derived from intellectual history.[57]

Additionally, evangelical women played a central role in the anti-slavery movement, because it was primarily an uprising of lay people and not of ecclesiastical or political office holders.[58]

William Gervase Clarence-Smith has depicted how the great religions of the world stood in reference to the abolition of slavery.[59] The first large-scale rejection of slavery occurred in the Protestant world. On the Catholic side, several popes opposed slave trading, but even in the papal states there were slaves. Not until 1839 did Pope Gregory VI turn against the trading of slaves (but still not against slavery in

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[50] Everett, *Geschichte der Sklaverei*, 233–35.

[51] Drescher, *Abolition*, 121.

[52] Drescher, *Abolition*, 205–6, 331.

[53] Drescher, *Abolition*, 161–65; Meissner et al., *Schwarzes Amerika*.

[54] Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition*, 157–83.

[55] Brown, *Moral Capital*, 342–45.

[56] Drescher, *Abolition*, 335–37, 377–80; see also Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, 195–96.

[57] Meissner et al., *Schwarzes Amerika*, 174.

[58] Brown, *Moral Capital*, 343ff.

[59] William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 219–34.

itself). Finally, in 1888, when Brazil became the final Catholic country to abolish slavery, Pope Leo XIII turned against slavery itself and condemned Islamic slavery. Orthodox churches needed even longer to come to this view.[60]

In Buddhism (as in most Eastern religions), there was as in Christianity predominantly an early shift from slavery to serfdom. More official Buddhist rejections of slavery began only in the nineteenth century.[61]

V. Slavery in the Islamic World

Slavery by Europeans was surely bad, but slavery in Islam was vastly more brutal. 'The largest slave traders and owners of slaves in history were the Arabs.'[62] Whereas many descendants of European slaves survived, the slaves of Islamic peoples were seldom able to increase and thus perished. As a result, many people think that only Western peoples held slaves. In contrast, as Tidiane N'Diaye writes, 'While the transatlantic slave trade lasted four hundred years, Arabs plundered the African continent south of the Sahara for thirteen hundred years. The largest portion of the millions of deported Africans died as a consequence of inhumane treatment and systematically used castration.'[63]

Egon Flaig says of Islamic slavery that it was the largest such system in world history: 'This first world economic system … called for a steady and enormous influx of slaves. It was also for this reason that permanently fighting wars and incessantly attacking non-Muslim neighbors was of decisive importance.'[64]

N'Diaye explains that 'Arab Muslims plundered black people groups from the seventh up into the twentieth century', holding a monopoly on African slavery for almost ten centuries before the Europeans arrived and deporting almost ten million Africans.[65]

Moreover, Muslims were also quite willing to enslave Europeans. This was part of the reason for Europe's panic when the Turks stood before Vienna. From 1580 to 1680, an estimated 7,000 Europeans were enslaved every year and carried off to the Maghreb states.[66]

The centuries-long theological debate about the appropriateness of slavery that occurred among Christians never took place in the Islamic world.[67] N'Diaye suggests the reason for this absence: 'Simply stated, in the Arab-Islamic world a tradition of critique or even of self-criticism has simply been always missing, especially when it has to do with non-refuted practices of Islam.'[68]

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60 Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*, 223–28.

61 Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*, 229ff.

62 Walter Krämer and Götz Trenkler, *Lexikon der populären Irrtümer* (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1997), 288.

63 Tidiane N'Diaye, *Der verschleierte Völkermord: Die Geschichte des muslimischen Sklavenhandels in Afrika* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Row-

ohlt, 2010), 12.

64 Flaig, *Weltgeschichte der Sklaverei*, 87.

65 N'Diaye, *Der verschleierte Völkermord*, 211.

66 Flaig, *Weltgeschichte der Sklaverei*, 28.

67 Flaig, *Weltgeschichte der Sklaverei*, 199; Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*.

68 N'Diaye, *Der verschleierte Völkermord*, 203; for rare exceptions, see Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*, 232–34.

Western authors tend to treat the history of Islamic slavery with a velvet glove, and the topic is simply ignored by Muslim authors. Muslims have long denounced Christian slavery, but they usually forget to mention their own. At the World Muslim Congress in Mogadishu in 1964–1965, thirty-three Islamic countries maintained that they could not have fellowship with countries that operated imperialistically and supported the un-Islamic institution of slavery; however, in this connection they mentioned only Western countries and ignored their own cases.[69]

VI. Conclusion

The Old and New Testaments did not totally outlaw slavery in all circumstances, but their comprehensive provisions for the legal protection of servants and maidservants, as well as the right to be redeemed through the use of a slave's own possessions or by others, fundamentally distinguish the slavery accepted therein from the slavery of the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries and certainly from the illegal forms of slavery, primarily child labour and sex trafficking, that continue today.[70] Despite many twists and turns, Christians eventually reached the clear understanding that modern slavery was abhorrent to God and that all slaves should be set free.

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[69] Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*, 1–2.

[70] On slavery in the contemporary world, see Thomas Schirrmacher, *Human Trafficking: The Return to Slavery*, 2nd ed. (New York: World Evangelical Alliance, 2017).