



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

# Reconstruction

The Deep Roots of Early Christian Theology



# Reconstruction: Motivation

- Deconstructing Christian faith is common
- Common outcomes: Collapse? Holes?
- Why construct at all?
- Early Christianity helps us discern a strong foundation

# Reconstruction: Objectives

- Identify controversial issues commonly debated in Western Christianity
- Examine early Christian views on the issue
- Identify if, where, and why Christians shifted on the issue
- Recover a framework for approaching the issue in today's context



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# Reconstruction

## The Deep Roots of Early Christian Theology

- 4/30 Slavery and the Early Church: Got it Right
- 5/7 Some of the Early Church
- 5/14 The Sabbath, the Temple, and the Healing of Creation:  
A Journey from Jerusalem to the Monastery of Alexandria
- 5/21 The Sabbath and the Temple? Well in the Early Church
- 5/28 The Sabbath and the Temple: Is It? Why Do We Need It?
- 6/4 Scripture: Is the Bible the Product of Empire? Violence?
- 6/11 Politics, the Church, and Jesus' Restorative Justice
- 6/18 Sexual Ethics and the New Creation
- 6/25 The Person, the Face, and the Climb Up the Mountain:  
Gregory of Nyssa and the Shaping of Desire



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# Slavery: How the Early Church Got It Right

Mako A. Nagasawa

The Anástasis Center for Christian Education and Ministry

# Outline

1. Early Christian Abolition (15 min) + Disc
2. Old Testament (15 min)
3. New Testament (10 min) + Disc
4. Slavery in Colonialism (10 min)
5. Open Q&A

# Outline

1. **Early Christian Abolition (15 min) + Disc**
2. Old Testament (15 min)
3. New Testament (10 min) + Disc
4. Slavery in Colonialism (10 min)
5. Open Q&A

# To Ponder

- Does the Bible support slavery?
  - What arguments have you heard that the Bible supports or doesn't support slavery?
- Does it matter what the Bible says about slavery in today's society?

# Slavery Today: What's At Stake

## 1. Sex trafficking, forced prostitution



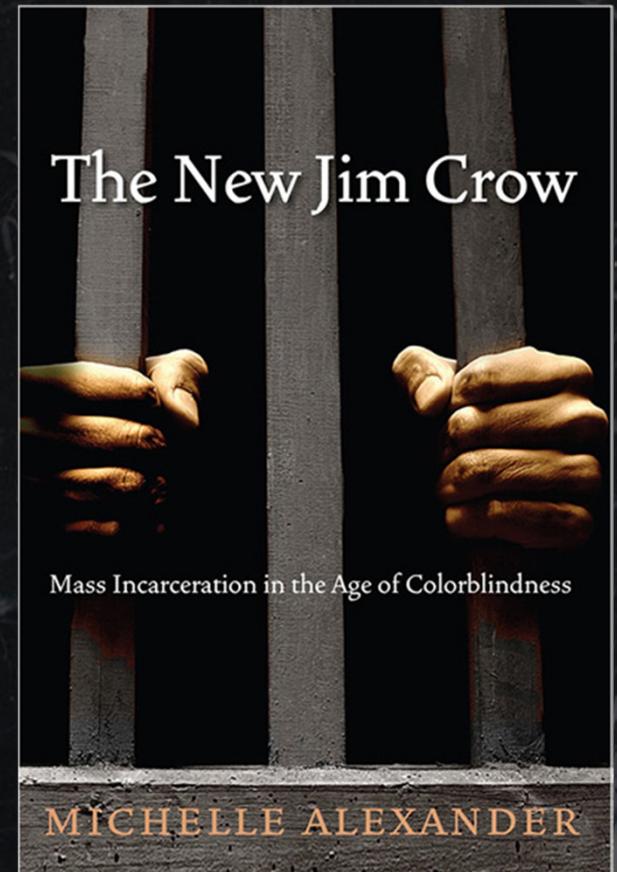
# Slavery Today: What's At Stake

1. Sex trafficking, forced prostitution
2. Child soldiers



# Slavery Today: What's At Stake

1. Sex trafficking, forced prostitution
2. Child soldiers
3. Prison, criminal justice



# Slavery Today: What's At Stake

1. Sex trafficking, forced prostitution
2. Child soldiers
3. Prison, criminal justice
4. Debt, bonded labor



# Moral Foundation for Abolition: Christian Faith?

1. What does the Bible say, really?
2. If the Bible is ambiguous at best, can we do better?
3. Do I need to interpret the Bible metaphorically?
4. How to understand U.S. history?

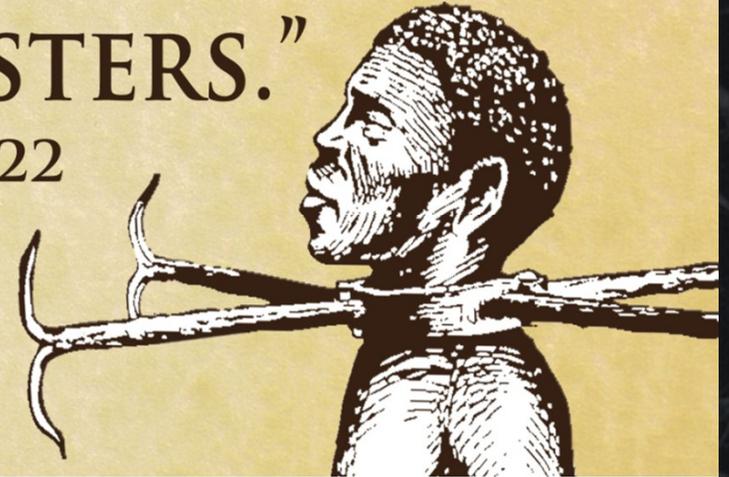
# Moral Foundation for Abolition: Christian Faith?

“SLAVES, OBEY YOUR MASTERS.”

- COLOSSIANS 3:22

This lesson in Bronze Age ethics  
*brought to you by*

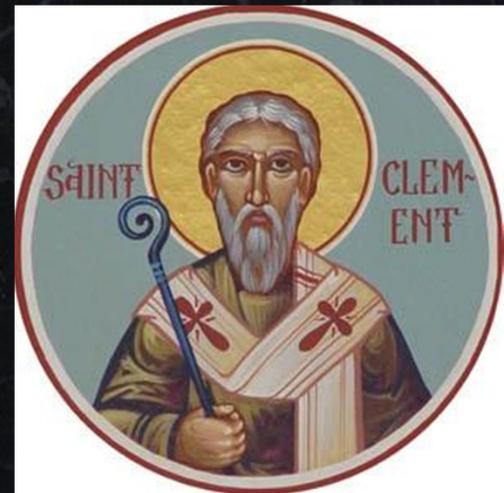
**THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE** *and*  
the House of Representatives.



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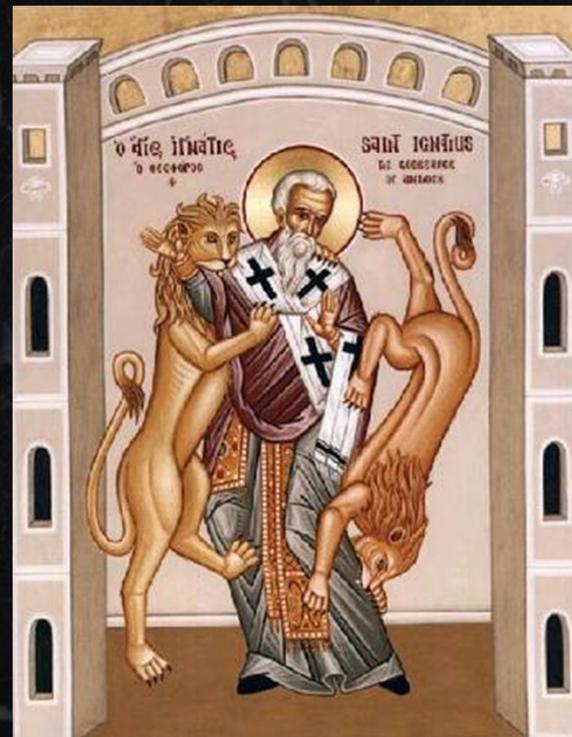
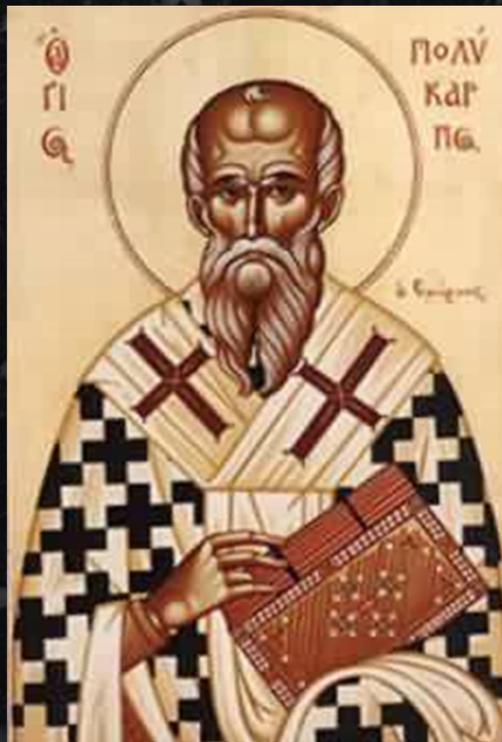
# Christian Emancipation

- ~90 AD: Clement of Rome observes, “We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds, in order that they might ransom others.”  
(1 Clement 55)



# Christian Emancipation

- ~90 AD: Polycarp of Smyrna (69 – 155 AD) and Ignatius of Antioch (~50 – 117 AD), second generation Christian leaders, free their slaves. Edward Rogers, *Slavery Illegality in All Ages and Nations* (1855)



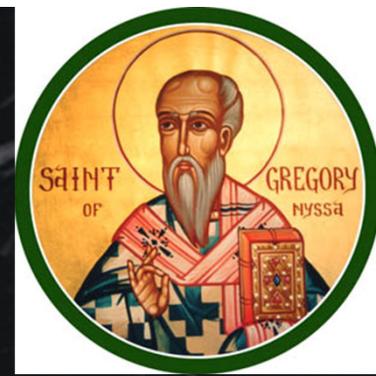
# Christian Emancipation

- 95 – 135 AD: Ovidius, appointed bishop of Braga (in modern day Portugal) under Pope Clement I in 95 AD, emancipates 5,000 slaves.

# Christian Emancipation

- 98 – 117 AD: A Roman prefect named Hermas received baptism at an Easter festival with his wife, children, and 1,250 slaves. On that occasion, he gave all his slaves their freedom and generous gifts besides.
- 284 – 305 AD: Chromatius emancipates 1,400 slaves after they are baptized with him

# Christian Emancipation



- 379 AD: Gregory of Nyssa, in a sermon during Lent, preaches:

“God said, let us make man in our own image and likeness (Gen 1:26). **If he is in the likeness of God, and rules the whole earth, and has been granted authority over everything on earth from God, who is his buyer, tell me? Who is his seller?** To God alone belongs this power; or rather, not even to God himself. For his gracious gifts, it says, are irrevocable (Rom 11:29). God would not therefore reduce the human race to slavery, since he himself, when we had been enslaved to sin, spontaneously recalled us to freedom. **But if God does not enslave what is free, who is he that sets his own power above God’s?**” (Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes)

# Christian Emancipation

- 398 – 407 AD: John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, teaches *from Ephesians*:
  - “In Christ Jesus there is no slave. Therefore it is not necessary to have a slave. Buy them, and after you have taught them some skill by which they can maintain themselves, set them free.”
  - Slave marriages and families have rights to stay together

*See Commentary on Ephesians, 6:9; Homilies on Ephesians, 22:2; cf. Basil of Caesarea, Epistle 199:42.*

# Christian Emancipation

- 390 – 400 AD: The *Apostolic Constitutions*, a summary of Christian teaching to that point, directs Christians: “As for such sums of money as are collected from them in the aforesaid manner, **designate them to be used for the redemption of the saints and the deliverance of slaves and captives.**”

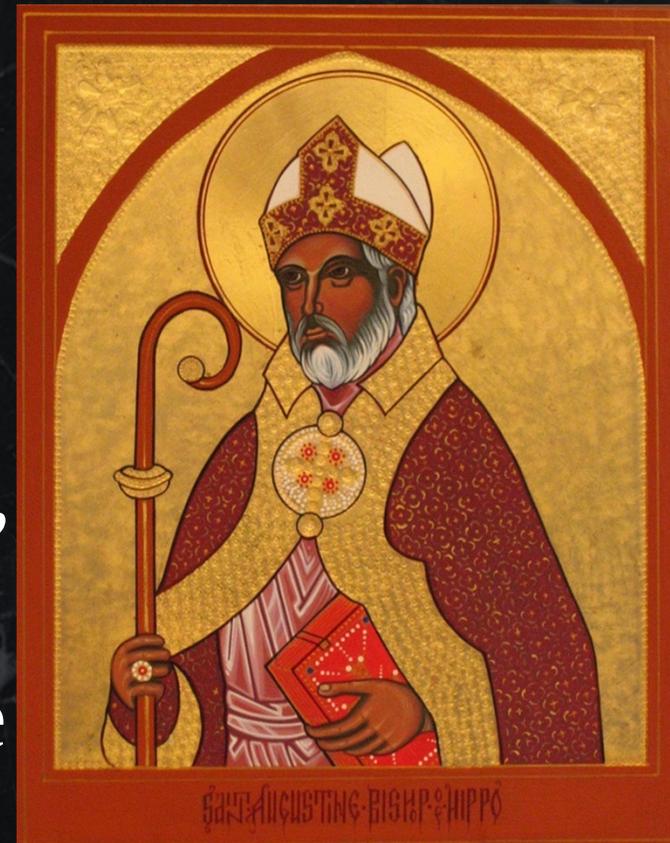


# Christian Emancipation

- 395 AD: Augustine (bishop of Hippo from 395 – 430 AD) notes that the Christian community regularly used its funds to redeem as many kidnapped victims as possible, and had recently purchased and freed 120 slaves whom the Galatians were boarding onto **their ships**

Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)



# Christian Emancipation

- 400 AD: Acacius, bishop of Amida, in modern day eastern Turkey/western Mesopotamia ransoms 7,000 Persian prisoners being held by Romans
  - “When the war [between Byzantium and Persia] ended in 422, it may have been this generous gesture of Acacius that speeded the negotiations for peace and brought an end to persecution in Persia.”
    - Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Volume 1 (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, NY, 1998), p.160. This incident was surely unusual in its magnitude, but probably not in its character.
  - Acacius sold church property to obtain the ransom funds

# Christian Emancipation

- 635 AD: The Nestorian Stele is erected in Chang-an, capital of the Empire of China, to honor Alopen, Syrian Christian priest and missionary, and the Chinese Christian community
  - “They do not keep slaves, but put noble and mean all on an equality; they do not amass wealth, but cast their property into the common stock”



# Christian Impact on Law & Policy

- 315 AD+: Constantine
  - imposed the death penalty on those who kidnap and enslave children
  - forbade separating slave families
  - made manumission possible at a church service
- Since Constantine was (at best) a new Christian (313 AD), this indicates that the Christian community had a strong antislavery position



# Christian Impact on Law & Policy

- 595 AD: A council at Rome under Gregory the Great permits a slave to become a monk without any consent from his master



# Christian Impact on Law & Policy

- 649 AD: Clovis II, king of the Franks, frees and marries his British slave Bathilde; together, they dismantle slavery in France.
- 1000 AD: Stephen I of Hungary abolishes slavery



# Christian Impact on Law & Policy

- 1102 AD: The London Church Council forbids slavery and the slave trade, which abolishes both throughout England, emancipating 10% of England's population
- 1117 AD: Iceland abolishes slavery
- ~1300 AD: The Netherlands abolishes slavery
- 1335 AD: Sweden (which included Finland at this time) makes slavery illegal

# Christian Impact on Law & Policy

- So how did these Christians understand the Bible?

# The Early Christian View of the Old Testament

- Slavery contradicts Genesis 1 and 2:

“God said, let us make man in our own image and likeness (Gen 1:26). **If he is in the likeness of God, and rules the whole earth, and has been granted authority over everything on earth from God, who is his buyer, tell me? Who is his seller?** To God alone belongs this power; or rather, not even to God himself. For his gracious gifts, it says, are irrevocable (Rom 11:29). God would not therefore reduce the human race to slavery, since he himself, when we had been enslaved to sin, spontaneously recalled us to freedom. But if God does not enslave what is free, who is he that sets his own power above God’s?”

- Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 394), *Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes*  
Bishop of Nyssa (Cappadocia, Asia Minor) from  
372 – 376 and 378 – 395



# The Early Christian View of the Old Testament

- Israel as Partial Restoration of Adam and Eve, but Unfaithful

Gregory critiqued King Solomon, for violating Jewish Law:

“I acquired slaves and slave girls.’ [Eccl.2:7] What is that you say? You condemn a person to slavery whose nature is free and independent, and in doing so you lay down a law in opposition to God.

- Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 394), *Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes*  
Bishop of Nyssa (Cappadocia, Asia Minor) from  
372 – 376 and 378 – 395



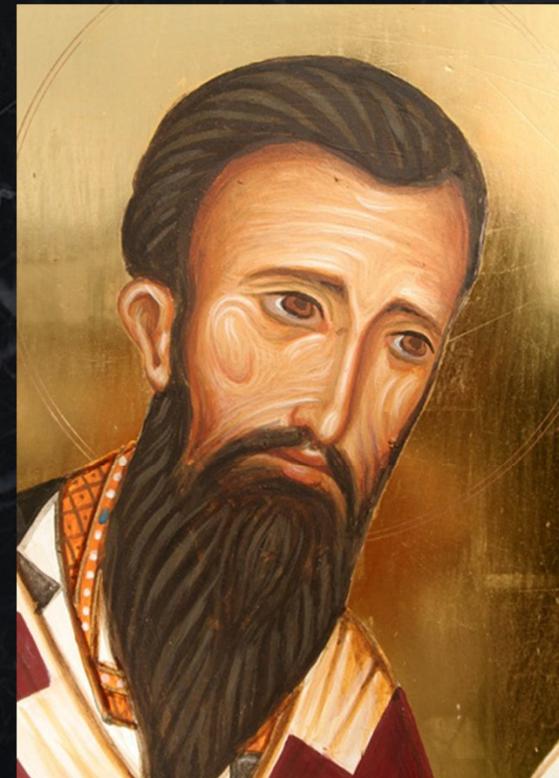
# The Early Christian View of the Old Testament

- Marriage and the Original Creation

Marriage between slaves is just as valid. Slaves are just as human.

- Basil (the Great) of Caesarea (330 – 379), *Epistle 199:42*

Bishop of Caesarea (Cappadocia in Asia Minor) from 370 – 379



# The Early Christian View of the New Testament

- The Human Body is Meant for Jesus' Spirit

- <sup>6:19</sup> Do you not know that **your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit** who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? <sup>20</sup> *For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.* (1 Corinthians 6:19 – 20)
- <sup>7:21</sup> Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. <sup>22</sup> For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. <sup>23</sup> *You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men...* (1 Corinthians 7:21 – 23)

# The Early Christian View of the New Testament

- The Human Body is Meant for Jesus' Spirit

“[Joseph, though a slave, did not yield to being a sex slave.] In fact, **there are limits set to slaves by God Himself**; and up to what point one ought to keep them, has also been determined, and to transgress them is wrong. **Namely, when your master commands nothing which is unpleasing to God, it is right to follow and to obey; but no farther.** For thus the slave becomes free. But if you go further, even though you are free you have become a slave. At least he intimates this, saying, “Be not ye the servants of men.””

- John Chrysostom (c.349 – 407 AD), *Homily on 1 Corinthians 7*

Bishop of Antioch (386 – 397)

Archbishop of Constantinople (397 – 407)



# The Early Christian View of Prostitution as Slavery

“Prostitutes were supposed to register with the authorities; a state tax on these registered prostitutes was introduced in the first century A.D. A woman who had once registered as a prostitute retained that stigma for the rest of her life, even if she ceased all professional activity. **Although the Church fathers fulminated against the commerce of the body with the same ferocity as against other sins of the flesh rampant in the Roman world, prostitution, being a social phenomenon rather than a personal sin (such as fornication), did not, strictly speaking, lie within the spiritual jurisdiction of the Church.** Despite its condemnation of all premarital and extramarital sexual activity, the Church recognized prostitution to be an inevitable feature of worldly society, which it had no hope or ambition to reform. Saint Augustine even warned that the abolition of prostitution, were it possible, would have disastrous consequences for society; the practice, he believed, was a necessary evil in an inevitably imperfect world...

# The Early Christian View of Prostitution as Slavery

“Canonical wrath was focused, rather, on those who profited from this commerce, for, while prostitution was regarded as a social phenomenon distinct from the sin of fornication, procuring was considered by the Church to be synonymous with the sinful act of **encouraging debauch** (since the latter is usually associated with a pecuniary motive, whereas fornication can be committed out of passion as well as out of desire for money). Procuring was therefore considered to be a matter of spiritual jurisdiction, and strong measures were taken against it at the Council of Elvira (c. 300), whose canons were included in most of the major canon-law collections of the Middle Ages.”

- Leah Lydia Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 12 - 13

# Discussion

- What are your reactions to the early Christian anti-slavery views and actions? Have you heard these examples before?
- What do you think of the biblical arguments against slavery based on:
  - Humanity made in “the image of God” (Genesis 1)?
  - The human body is “meant for the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6 – 7)?
- Is this a selective reading of Scripture? Were early Christians right to form their beliefs about slavery around these passages?

# Outline

1. Early Christian Abolition (15 min) + Disc
2. **Old Testament (15 min)**
3. New Testament (10 min) + Disc
4. Slavery in Colonialism (10 min)
5. Open Q&A

# Two Major Issues

- Scripture
  - Were the early Christians right?
- U.S. History as part of Church History
  - How do we understand what happened?
- Scripture: [www.anastasiscenter.org/race-slavery-belief-systems](http://www.anastasiscenter.org/race-slavery-belief-systems)
  - “Slavery in Christianity, Part 1: Slavery in the Bible, Slavery Today”
  - “Slavery in Christianity, Part 2: Abolitionism from the First to Fifteenth Centuries”
- U.S. History: [www.anastasiscenter.org/blog](http://www.anastasiscenter.org/blog)
  - “A Long Repentance” blog series

# OT: One Basic Question

- The Hebrew word
  - *ebed* (singular) and *ebedim* (plural)
- The Greek word used in translation
  - Septuagint
  - *duolos* (singular) and *douloi/doulai* (plural)
- English translations
  - Slave? (RSV, NRSV, NASB, ESV)
  - Servant? (KJV, ASV, AMP, NIV, NKJV)
  - Something else?
- Words and Contexts: “I’m mad about my flat”
  - The “word-thing fallacy”
  - The early Christians were very good at understanding how words are influenced by contexts and translation (see Nicene Creed)

# OT: Context

- What we call “slavery” or “indentured service” reflects the fact that ancient Israel’s primary political and economic institution was the *household*; they did not have
  - apartments or homeless shelters (to house)
  - banks (to lend)
  - corporations (to employ)
  - police (to enforce laws)
  - prisons (to incarcerate)
  - or halfway houses (to rehabilitate)
- *Households on farmlands* served all those functions.

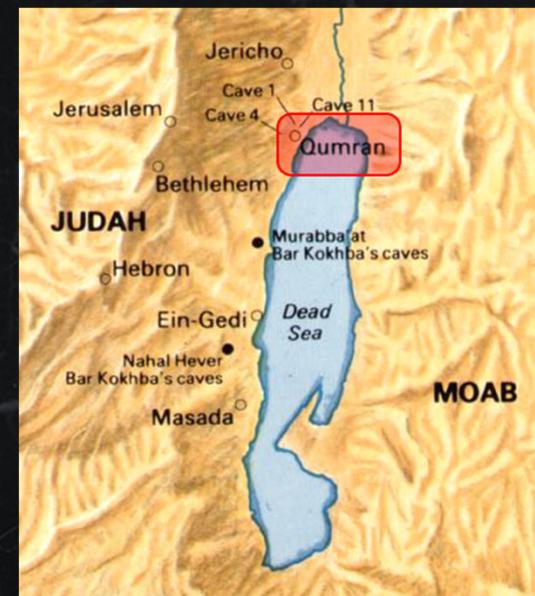
# OT: Context Sensitive Reading

- Jews in Alexandria, Egypt
  - Not in the garden land
  - “They do not have slaves to wait upon them as they consider that the ownership of servants is entirely against nature. For nature has borne all men to be free, but the wrongful and covetous acts of some who pursued that source of evil, inequality, have imposed their yoke and invested the stronger with power over the weaker.” Philo of Alexandria, *On the Contemplative Life*, chapter 9



# OT: Context Sensitive Reading

- Jews in the Dead Sea region
  - Not in the garden land
  - “The Essenes rejected slavery in principle as incompatible with the equality of all men before their Creator.” Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p.14
  - Chadwick is probably drawing on Josephus, a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish historian: “This is demonstrated by that institution of theirs, which will not suffer any thing to hinder them from having all things in common; so that a rich man enjoys no more of his own wealth than he who hath nothing at all. **There are about four thousand men that live in this way, and neither marry wives, nor are desirous to keep servants; as thinking the latter tempts men to be unjust.**” Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.1.5



# The Old Testament & Slavery

<i>Source of slaves</i>	<i>Ancient world</i>	<i>OT: of Hebrews</i>	<i>OT: of non-Hebrews</i>
War captivity	Common	No	Very limited
Kidnapping, piracy	Common	No	No
Purchase from slave trade	Common	No	No
Perpetual involuntary servitude (birth to slaves)	Common	No	No
Sale by parents	Common	No	No
Indentured servitude: misfortune	Common	Very limited	Limited
Indentured servitude: debt	Common	Very limited	Limited
Penal servitude	Common	Very limited	Very limited
Voluntary servitude	Common	Possible but limited	Possible past jubilee
Political vassalage	Common	No	No

# OT: No Kidnapping

- No stealing, coveting (Ex.20:15, 17).
  - But “he who kidnaps (steals) a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death” (Ex.21:16).



# OT: No Slave Trade

- “For they are **My** servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt; they are **not to be sold in a slave sale.**”  
(Lev.25:42)

# OT: Very Limited Self-Indenture

- Interest-laden loans were the chief cause of people being sold into slavery in many places in the Ancient Near East and contributed significantly to slavery in classical Greek and Roman society T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, editors, 'Slavery', in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, InterVarsity Press: Downers' Grove, IL, 2003



# OT: Very Limited Self-Indenture

- Lending money with **interest was strictly forbidden**, which protected the poor from exploitation
  - Ex.22:26 – 27, Lev.25:35 – 38, Dt.23:19
- Lending money without interest was mandatory upon being asked:
  - “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but **you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks**” (Dt.15:7 – 8)

# OT: Very Limited Self-Indenture

- Debts were cancelled every seven years!!
  - “At the end of **every seven years** you shall grant a remission of debts” (Dt.15:1).



# OT: Very Limited Penal Servitude

- A thief who couldn't repay a theft could become a 'slave' (*ebed*) for a time
  - “If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it...He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft” (Ex.22:1 – 3).
  - Note: There were no prison systems in Old Testament Israel.
  - Note: The U.S. 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment permits penal servitude, and we do use it
    - Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

# OT: Standard Terms of Exit

- Slaves set free **after six years of service**
  - “in the seventh year you shall set him free” (Ex.21:2 – 6; Dt.15:12)
  - Or **in the jubilee year** (Lev.25:39 – 41), whichever happened first

# OT: Standard Terms of Exit

- Slaves set free **after six years of service**
- Or earlier, if **redeemed by family or self**:
  - “One of his brothers may redeem him, or his uncle, or his uncle’s son, may redeem him, or one of his blood relatives from his family may redeem him; or if he prospers, **he may redeem himself**” (Lev.25:48 – 49).
  - This means slaves owned their own wealth.

# OT: Standard Terms of Exit

- Slaves set free **after six years of service**
- Or earlier, if **redeemed by family or self**
- Or bodily harm:
  - “If a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye. And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.” (Ex.21:27 – 28)



# OT: Standard Terms of Exit

- Slaves set free **after six years of service**
- Or earlier, if **redeemed by family or self**
- Or bodily harm
- Or when restitution is paid, in the case of penal servitude.



# OT: Standard Terms of Exit

- Or escape:
  - “You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall live with you in your midst, in the place which he shall choose in one of your towns where it pleases him; you shall not mistreat him” (Dt.23:15 – 16).



# OT: Standard Terms of Exit

- Or escape:
  - Note also there was no police force in Old Testament Israel so running away was easy. (See also the “city of refuge” in Num.35:9 – 34; Josh.20:1 – 9)
  - “A slave could also be freed by running away...This provision is strikingly different from the laws of slavery in the surrounding nations and is explained as due to Israel’s own history of slavery. **It would have the effect of turning slavery into a voluntary institution.**” Raymond Westbrook, editor, *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, 2003, volume 2, page 1006



# OT: Limits on Slavery

- The *ebedim* under the Law of Moses held rights:
  - Right to Sabbath rest, feasts, holy days
    - **Rest from labor** nearly half the time, because of Israel's festival calendar
    - No large plantations or mines in Israel but **only farmland to sustain the household**
    - Master and servant would have worked together in the fields
    - No segregated quarters for indentured servants, **same level of lifestyle as others**
  - Right to their bodies
    - **Absolutely no sex slavery**; God's vision for marriage was retained in all cases
    - **A contract of labor**
    - Kinship rights, marriage rights
  - Personal legal rights relating to physical protection and payments
    - Protection from breach of contract
    - Right to testify in trials
    - Freedom of movement
    - Freedom to own weapons

# OT: Limits on Slavery

- The *ebedim* could accumulate savings, wealth, and property of their own
- Personal wealth was not permitted in other slave systems
  - In those systems, the master owned everything the slave produces, saves, or has

# OT: Limits on Slavery

- What we call “slavery” or “indentured service” reflects the fact that ancient Israel’s primary political and economic institution was the *household*; they did not have
  - apartments or homeless shelters (to house)
  - banks (to lend)
  - corporations (to employ)
  - police (to enforce laws)
  - prisons (to incarcerate)
  - or halfway houses (to rehabilitate)
- *Households on farmlands* served all those functions.

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1. Early Christian Abolition (15 min) + Disc
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# The New Testament

- Context: The church was a voluntary community movement that inherited the institution of slavery from outside itself

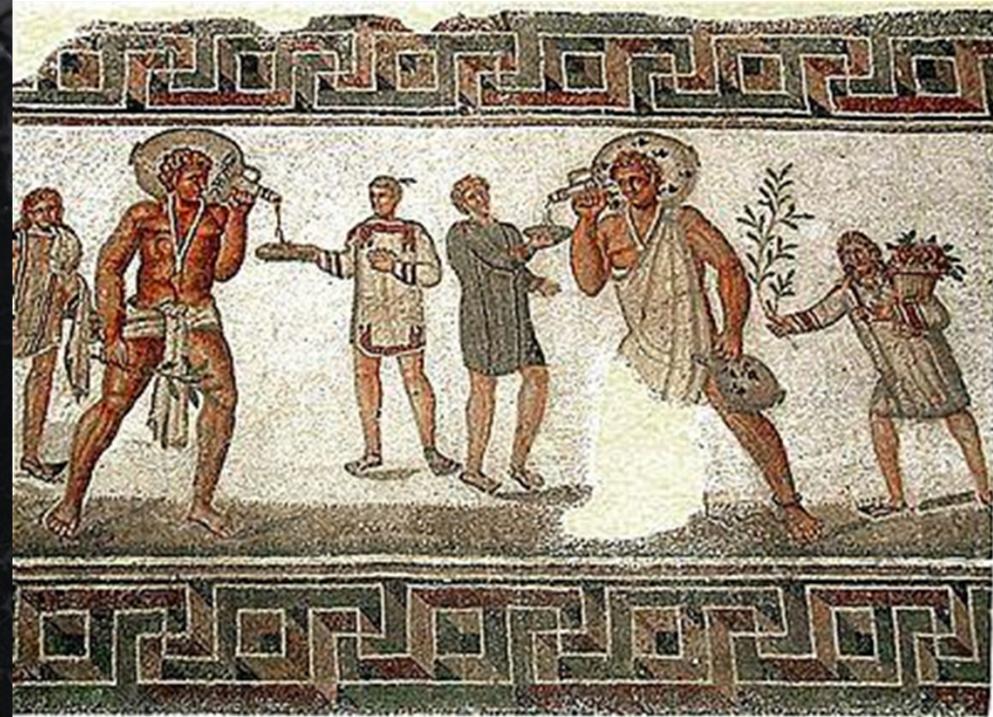
# The New Testament

- Context: Greek elitism
  - First civilization to use mass slavery
  - Plato: “barbarian” slaves vital in the republic for all of the production
  - Aristotle: “From the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule”
  - Plato and Aristotle owned five and fourteen slaves, respectively, as enumerated in their wills



# The New Testament

- Context: Roman slavery
  - Standard sources of slaves: war, birth, debt, etc.
  - Slavery was also a form of career advancement, often voluntarily entered into
  - Manumission was relatively frequent
  - Harboring a fugitive slave punishable by death



# The New Testament

<i>Source of slaves</i>	<i>OT: of Hebrews</i>	<i>OT: of non-Hebrews</i>	<i>New Testament</i>
War captivity	No	Very limited	No
Kidnapping, piracy	No	No	No
Purchase from slave trade	No	No	No
Perpetual involuntary servitude (birth to slaves)	No	No	No
Sale by parents	No	No	No
Indentured servitude: misfortune	Very limited	Limited	Limited
Indentured servitude: debt	Very limited	Limited	Limited
Penal servitude	Very limited	Very limited	Limited
Voluntary servitude	Possible, but limited	Possible past jubilee	Very limited
Political vassalage	No	No	No

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- Jesus offers a new humanity, new creation
  - Slavery was not intended from creation
- No warfare, violence, land acquisition (**no war captives**)
- Giving up land inheritance, all wealth (**including slaves**)
- **No kidnapping, slave trading or forced enslavement**
  - 1 Timothy 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:6, Revelation 18:13
- Bless all humanity (**no racial slavery**)
- Marriage and sexuality (**no sex slavery**)

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- The human body is meant for Jesus' Spirit
  - **You have been bought with a price**; therefore glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:20)
  - **You were bought with a price**; do not become slaves of men (1 Corinthians 7:23)

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- The church as a voluntary, countercultural community
  - Distinct from society and state
    - Christian ethics were for Christians, not non-Christians; evangelism was primary way of influence
    - Christians started applying sub-Christian ethics to non-Christians (e.g. Constantine's laws limiting slavery)
    - No prescribed punishments for crimes, sins
  - Voluntary leaving

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- The Christian household as a platform for Christian mission (Eph, Col, 1 Pet)
  - Households (Matt.10:11 – 14; Luke 10:5 – 9; Acts 16; Rom.16; 1 Cor.1:10; Col.4:15; Philm.2)
    - Meeting space
    - Hospitality
    - Care for the sick and the poor

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- The Christian household as a platform for Christian mission (Eph, Col, 1 Pet)
  - Slaves and masters have the same Christian responsibilities for love, mission, leadership, and gifting (Eph.4:1 – 5:21)
    - Not just locally but globally
    - What if the Spirit gives the gifting of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher to someone who is currently a slave?
    - Can a master separate a husband and wife who are slaves/servants?
    - Can a widowed woman “own” or “manage” male slaves/servants (Greek “douloi”)?
  - Coercion is evil: “give up threatening” (Eph.6:4)
  - Power is redirected; masters become sponsors of Christian mission (Eph.6:4)
  - Slaves had recourse (Matt.18:15 – 20) to confront masters who:
    - Sin
    - Obstruct Christian mission
    - Ask for something immoral

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- The Christian household as a platform for Christian mission
  - Debts: If they were not manumitted, slaves still had to pay off debts, respectfully serving their masters (Eph.6:1 – 3)
  - Social climbing: Desire for upward mobility and material gain were not considered appropriate motivations for anyone (1 Cor.7:17 – 35; 1 Tim.6:2 – 11)
  - Christian leadership: But ministry was valued highly; led to early manumission (Philemon v.10 – 12); early Christian meritocracy
  - Key to understanding ‘slave and master’ relations: *sequencing* of responsibilities, ideas, and texts

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- Christian slaves in non-Christian households
  - Encouraged to respectfully serve
  - To help the household glimpse Jesus (1 Pet.2:18 – 3:6; 1 Tim.6:1; Ti.2:9 – 10)

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- Christians inherited a complex institution by responding in 2 ways:
  - Manumitted slaves, supported in community
    - Condemned many sources of enslavement:

“...Among men no one is a slave by nature. For men are **either** brought under a yoke of slavery by conquest, as when prisoners are taken in war; **or** they are enslaved on account of poverty, as the Egyptians were oppressed by Pharaoh; **or**, by a wise and mysterious dispensation, the worst children are by their fathers' order condemned to serve the wiser and the better [e.g. Esau to Jacob]... In this world, then, it is thus that men are made slaves, but they who have escaped poverty or war, or do not require the tutelage of others, are free.”

Basil of Caesarea (330 – 379 AD), *On the Holy Spirit* 20; importantly, Basil was not discussing a full Christian ethical treatment of slavery's root causes, but explaining why the Holy Spirit is not a “slave/servant” of God on the level of the angels, and goes out of his way to qualify, critique the human institution of slavery

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- Christians inherited a complex institution by responding in 2 ways:
  - Manumitted slaves, supported in community
    - Condemned many sources of enslavement:

“**I acquired** slaves and slave girls.’ [Ecclesiastes 2:7] What is that you say? You condemn a person to slavery whose nature is free and independent, and in doing so you lay down a law in opposition to God, overturning **the natural law established by him...**”

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395 AD), *Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes* condemning King Solomon’s act of purchasing slaves from a slave market

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- Christians inherited a complex institution by responding in 2 ways:
  - Manumitted slaves, supported in community
    - Condemned many sources of enslavement
    - Practiced generosity, inclusion, hospitality, and forgiveness
      - Mitigated indenture for debt and crime
      - Integrated newly freed people
    - Leaned strongly towards voluntary manumission
  - Ignored slavery within the Christian community
    - Embraced the full humanity of the person, with all rights from, and responsibilities to, Jesus

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- Christians did not enslave anyone for three to four centuries
- War captives
  - Augustine (d.430 AD) produced the “just war” theory, trying to define and limit the defensive war
    - A good faith effort?
    - A rationalization?
  - Conflict with Islam starting in the mid 600’s produced slaves by war captivity
    - Middle East, Spain and Portugal, Eastern Europe

# The New Testament: Factors Affecting Slavery

- Christian faith dismantled slavery in:
  - France
  - Hungary
  - England
  - Iceland
  - Scandinavia
  - the Netherlands
  - Some Mediterranean city-states
- The only places in the world where slavery was abolished

# Discussion

- Does the Old Testament support the kind of slavery that existed in US and European colonialism? What are some differences?
- How did Jesus' vision cause early Christians to break from the Greco-Roman practices of slavery?
- What did Christians in the West need to ignore/deny to justify the system of chattel slavery?

# Outline

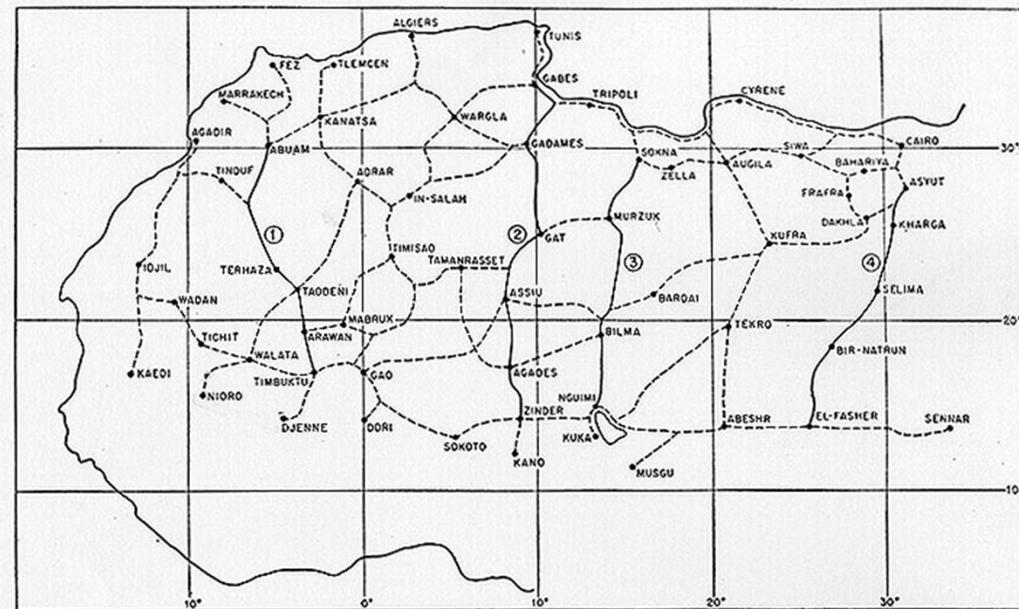
1. Early Christian Abolition (15 min) + Disc
2. Old Testament (15 min)
3. New Testament (10 min) + Disc
4. **Slavery in Colonialism (10 min)**
5. Open Q&A

# Christian Faith: A Moral Foundation?

- Creation Order: God's original vision
  - Genesis 1 – 2 provides the vision of relationship against what we call “slavery” today, and goes far beyond that
  - Genesis 3 – 4 and 11 describe the origins of empire in violation of God's vision
- The Bible leaves open the possibility of applying sub-Christian ethics in public policy and intervention

# The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

- Why did Christians get involved in slavery?
  - To compete with the Ottoman Empire
  - Inherited the Saharan slave trade in West Africa
  - To grow sugar, a semi-addictive substance



Map 4 The trans-Saharan slave trade. From George Peter Murdock, *Africa: Its People and Their Culture History* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1959), p. 128. Copyright © 1959 by McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc. Used with the permission of McGraw-Hill.

# Slavery in Great Britain

- Argumentation
  - Abolitionist: Evangelical Christians demonstrated clarity about the Bible
  - Pro-Slavery: Anglican old money men argued economics, not from the Bible
- Abolition: By emancipating all slaves in 1833, Britain committed economic suicide
- The British Navy blocked slave trading in ports in the Middle East and Africa

# Slavery in the U.S.

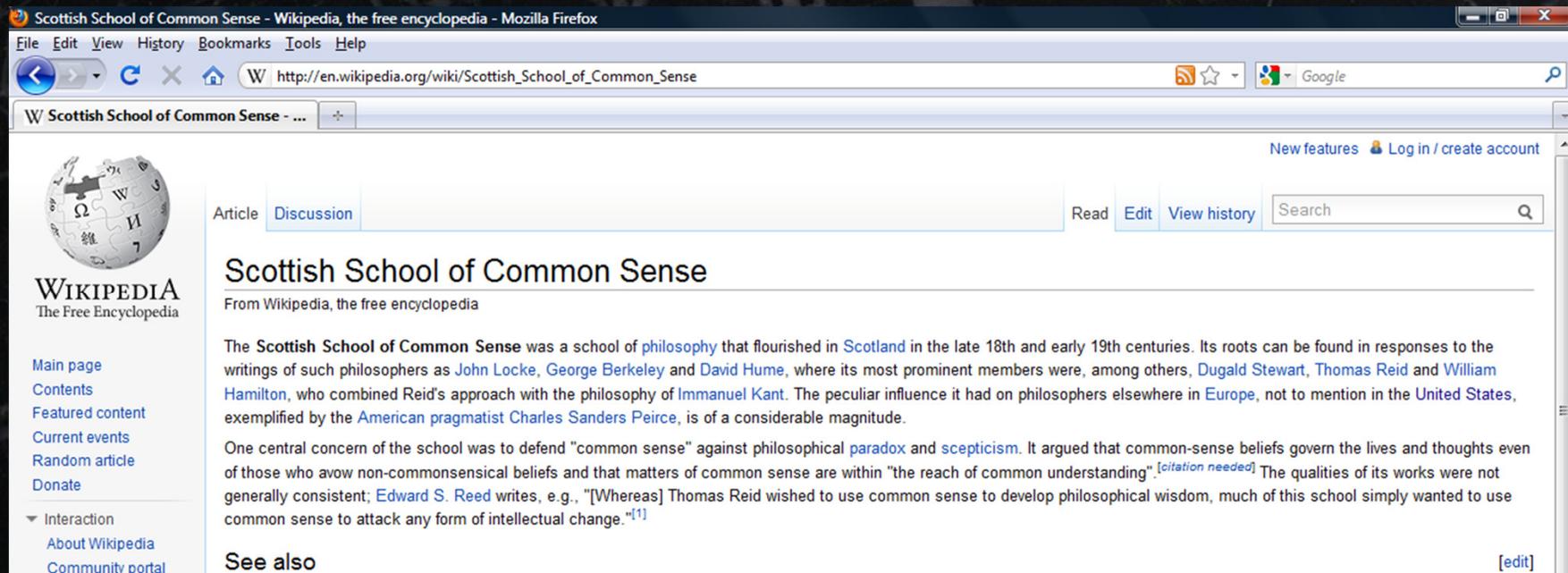
- How did Christians justify slavery in the U.S.? Ignoring or blunting Genesis 1 and 1 Corinthians 6 – 7
  - Non-white people are non-human
  - Non-white people are under “the curse of Ham” or even “the mark of Cain”
  - Non-white people are less civilized, not fit for democracy
  - Non-white people are sub-Christian
  - (Some) white people can have the land

# Slavery in the U.S.

- How did Christians justify slavery in the U.S.? By reinterpreting or blunting Genesis 1 and 1 Corinthians 6 – 7
  - Excuse: “Slavery was evil but the American “founding fathers” were men of their time”
- The larger pattern: capitalism sought cheap land and labor
  - Powerful white men wanted to *practice heresy* by reinterpreting church history and redefining biblical words
    - Slavery abolished on English soil in 1102 AD
    - Somerset case in London in 1772

# Slavery in the U.S.

- How did Christians justify slavery in the U.S.?
  - Words mean what *I say they mean*: fascism or proto-fascism
  - Scottish School of Common Sense
    - Presumption that understanding things should be *simple* (e.g. “slavery back then was the same as slavery now”)



The screenshot shows a Mozilla Firefox browser window displaying the Wikipedia article for the 'Scottish School of Common Sense'. The browser's address bar shows the URL 'http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish\_School\_of\_Common\_Sense'. The article's title is 'Scottish School of Common Sense', and it is categorized under 'Article' and 'Discussion'. The main text of the article discusses the school's philosophy, its roots in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and its influence on philosophers like John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume. It also mentions the school's impact on the American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce and its central concern of defending 'common sense' against philosophical paradox and scepticism. The article includes a quote from Edward S. Reed and a 'See also' section at the bottom.

Scottish School of Common Sense - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

W http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish\_School\_of\_Common\_Sense

W Scottish School of Common Sense - ...

New features Log in / create account

Article Discussion Read Edit View history Search

## Scottish School of Common Sense

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **Scottish School of Common Sense** was a school of [philosophy](#) that flourished in [Scotland](#) in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Its roots can be found in responses to the writings of such philosophers as [John Locke](#), [George Berkeley](#) and [David Hume](#), where its most prominent members were, among others, [Dugald Stewart](#), [Thomas Reid](#) and [William Hamilton](#), who combined Reid's approach with the philosophy of [Immanuel Kant](#). The peculiar influence it had on philosophers elsewhere in [Europe](#), not to mention in the [United States](#), exemplified by the [American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce](#), is of a considerable magnitude.

One central concern of the school was to defend "common sense" against philosophical [paradox](#) and [scepticism](#). It argued that common-sense beliefs govern the lives and thoughts even of those who avow non-commonsensical beliefs and that matters of common sense are within "the reach of common understanding".<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup> The qualities of its works were not generally consistent; [Edward S. Reed](#) writes, e.g., "[Whereas] Thomas Reid wished to use common sense to develop philosophical wisdom, much of this school simply wanted to use common sense to attack any form of intellectual change."<sup>[1]</sup>

**See also**

[edit]

# To Ponder

- Challenge to conservatives:
  - “The Christian Right” often charges “the Left” with changing the meaning of words, like “resurrection,” “love,” “marriage,” etc.
- But the pattern began with “slavery” and:
  - “Salvation” – of the soul, but not the body?
  - “Righteous” – legal standing or piety but not “just”?
  - “Justice” – is retributive, not restorative?
  - “Six days” – another example of bad interpretation, insensitive to historical context?
  - “Israel” – where “biblical Israel” is the “State of Israel” at the expense of the Palestinians?
  - “In the clouds” – not Daniel’s enthronement but “rapture”?

# To Ponder

- Challenge to liberals:
  - Let's not snub our noses at the ancient texts, as if we “have done better” than the Bible since the U.S. Civil War
- The “liberal progressive” Protestants were wrong about “doing better” than Jesus and Paul
  - Began to interpret Scripture moralistically and non-miraculously; e.g. Jesus' resurrection is psychological, not physical
  - Yet “Social Gospel” liberal Protestants did not address the failure of Reconstruction, white-only labor unions, or white supremacy in the New Deal, and only rarely U.S. imperialism
  - Liberals share the blame with conservatives for building the **prison state** Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (2014)

# Slavery and Slave-Like Conditions Today: Legal, Not Just Illegal

- Wage theft in Scripture
  - God condemns it: Isaiah 58:6 – 7; James 5:1 – 6
- Wage theft in the U.S.
  - Stolen wages > burglaries + robberies + shoplifting + auto theft
  - Yet wage theft is not a crime
  - 2.4 million workers lose \$8 billion annually (\$3.3k average) in the 10 most populous states Cooper and Kroeger, “Employers Steal Billions from Workers’ Paychecks Each Year,” *Economic Policy Institute*, May 10, 2017
- Wage stagnation, declining purchasing power (see minimum wage debate), job losses
- Meanwhile billionaires

# Slavery and Slave-Like Conditions Today: Legal, Not Just Illegal

- Debt in Scripture
  - Jewish law's goal: restoration, no interest loans
  - Jesus' teaching: give more freely and broadly
- Debt in the U.S.
  - *Private* indebtedness is huge and growing
  - Far fewer protections from poverty or bankruptcy
    - 2008 – 09: Banks *planned* on repossessing our homes
  - Wealth gap is larger than ever, and growing
    - Wealth gap between blacks and whites today in U.S.: increase of 4 times, from \$20,000 to \$95,000

# Slavery and Slave-Like Conditions Today: Legal, Not Just Illegal

- Penal servitude in Scripture
  - Restorative, not retributive, justice
  - Reintegration is a major priority
- Penal servitude in the U.S.
  - 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Section 1 permits slavery for punishment
  - U.S. corporations use prison labor to assemble computers, make women's lingerie, do telemarketing, etc. for \$0.17 - \$0.25 per hour
  - No benefits, overtime, union laws, sick days, pensions
  - Not much concern to reintegrate returning citizens

# Slavery and Slave-Like Conditions Today: Legal, Not Just Illegal

- Prisons: Incarceration rates
  - U.S. imprisons more people than China, India, and Iran combined
  - California prisons: 19,600 in 1977; 170,000 in 2007, more than France, Great Britain, Germany, Japan, Singapore, and the Netherlands combined
  - We imprison more black men than South Africa did during Apartheid (1993) as a % of black male population

# Slavery and Slave-Like Conditions Today: Legal, Not Just Illegal

- Imprisonment as a new form of Jim Crow
  - Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2010)
  - Some see prisons and prison labor as a way to handle the inner city
  - see Georgia's laws SB 440 (1994) and SB 441 (1995);  
<http://dcor.state.ga.us/sites/default/files/Sentencing%20Legislation.pdf>
- Racial bias
- Culture of prisons, recidivism

# Slavery and Slave-Like Conditions Today: Illegal, Nominally

- Labor trafficking
  - Cobalt from the Congo: child labor; etc.
  - Chocolate from West African cacao plantations
  - Uyghur forced labor in China
  - Sweatshops
  - Are Fair Trade laws effective?
- Sex trafficking
- Needed: “A Third Abolition”

# Slavery and Slave-Like Conditions Today

- Slavery in Islamic societies
  - Prophet Muhammed and slavery (Bukhari 34:351, 72:734; Muslim 3901)
  - Female concubines permitted (Qur'an 4:24; Abu Dawud 2150; Qur'an 23:1, 5 – 6; 33:50)
  - Islamic history:
    - No abolitionist movement in Islam
    - Europeans took over Islamic slave ports in Africa
    - Abolition was initially forced onto Islamic countries by the British (i.e. British Christians)

# Slavery and Slave-Like Conditions Today

- Slavery and abolition as a collision of multiple belief systems
  - Can Atheism/Secularism serve as a moral foundation
    - For trade policy?
    - For activism abroad?

“Secular humanism is a Christian heresy. It is a hollowed out version of Christianity.”

- John Gray, Professor Emeritus of European Thought at London School of Economics

“If you cut the root, you lose the fruit.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche (paraphrase)

# Questions to Ponder

- When Scripture expresses concern about “slavery,” what is it really concerned about?
  - How do people fall into it?
  - Are we equally concerned?
- Can Christians use force? If so, how?
  - Laws by Constantine, Clovis II and Bathilde, etc.
  - British evangelicals used the British Navy to deter slave trading
  - Can we do something similar?

# Questions to Ponder

- How to Process U.S. History?
  - U.S. slavery as one expression of “plantation capitalism”
    - Manifestation of heresies of land, labor, and people
    - Compare with Catholic social teaching, Peter Maurin and The Catholic Worker, etc.
    - Compare with Eastern Orthodox ecological ethics
  - U.S. history includes many attempts to escape historic Christian ethics
    - “A Long Repentance” at [www.anastasiscenterblog.org](http://www.anastasiscenterblog.org)
  - The conflict between liberal vs. evangelical Protestantism in the U.S. flows from:
    - American slavery
    - Protestant instability

# For More Info



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

- On the webpage *Slavery in Belief Systems*:  
[www.anastasiscenter.org/race-slavery-belief-systems](http://www.anastasiscenter.org/race-slavery-belief-systems)
- “Slavery in Christianity, Part 1: Slavery in the Bible, Slavery Today”
- “Slavery in Christianity, Part 2: Abolitionism from the First to Fifteenth Century”
- “Slavery in Islam: From the Seventh to Twenty First Century”

# Outline

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