

Slavery and Christianity: First to Fifteenth Centuries

Mako A. Nagasawa

Last modified: January 19, 2022

Summary

Slavery is a bigger issue today than it has ever been before. UNICEF estimates that 1.2 million people are trafficked *every year* across international borders throughout the world. The U.S. State Department estimates that of this number, approximately 17,500 are trafficked into the U.S. *each year*. How can Christians engage the issue of modern day slavery? Meanwhile, the Western world – including, of course, Western Christians – is haunted by the legacy of a virulent combination of chattel slavery, colonialism, nationalism, racism, and backbreaking plantation labor to develop, among other things, addictive substances (tobacco, sugar) for a global market. The civic and interpersonal challenges of dealing with the aftermath of slavery are also enormous. Appropriately, this raises questions about the complicity of Christians and Christian belief in this particular type of slavery. Sadly, many Western Christians were complicit in this traffic in human flesh.

On a broader global and historical level, however, another pattern emerges that is much more encouraging for Christians to understand about our own tradition. A word first about slavery: Slavery was and is a complex social phenomenon, and surprisingly difficult to define because over time, we have changed the definition of what slavery is. For example, slavery in antiquity was a punishment for certain crimes, for there were no large prison complexes in those times, and by this definition, technically, slavery still legally exists in the United States. After all, many of our prisons, which are large complexes, are now run by private corporations. Even the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution recognizes that slavery could be implemented for a convicted criminal. Slavery also technically exists at Guantanamo Bay, for example, where the U.S. detains terrorists considered too dangerous to release; this corresponds to how war captives were placed into slavery, since earlier civilizations had no maximum security Guantanamo Bay equivalents. Seen in this way, we can say that we have not abolished slavery; while we have abolished its arguably worst aspects, namely forced production-oriented labor, we have also changed the definition of slavery to not include other classical manifestations of the institution. Slavery varied greatly by gender, different terms of entry and exit (e.g. war captive, prison sentence, birth to slave parents, voluntary indenture, etc.), the nature of service (e.g. political-military vassalage, household servant, civil servant, soldier, surrogate mother, sex slave, plantation worker, ship worker, apprentice, etc.), and various rights of slaves and limits of owners, just to name a few aspects.

Nevertheless, despite this complexity, and despite what some have taken to be Paul's naïve "endorsement" of slavery, Christian faith led to the dismantling of slavery in Europe. Bearing in mind that other belief systems always persisted with different definitions of what "humanity" was, that the earliest Christians had to navigate being in non-Christian households and societies and governments, that Christian ethics cannot be and were never simply translated into public policy, that Christians were called by Jesus not to judge non-Christians or hold Christian ethics over non-Christians, that law enforcement and policing even for the most beneficial sub-Christian laws were very challenging issues, and that Christians were not always consistent with the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, nevertheless, "Slavery ended in medieval Europe only because the church extended its sacraments to all slaves and then managed to impose a ban on the enslavement of Christians (and of Jews). Within the context of medieval Europe, that prohibition was effectively a rule of universal abolition"¹ of certain types of slavery.

The presence of abolition and/or slavery in a belief system does not make that belief system true or false. Yet understanding this larger pattern helps us better approach the continued presence of various forms of slavery in the world today. On the one hand, the Christian community needs to understand how "activist" our predecessors in the faith were, and be just as committed today, though in more varied ways. Some did (mistakenly) read Paul's teaching on "slaves and masters" as simply approving of the institution in its entirety, and we must carefully understand those instances; in this paper, I highlight what I regard as critical mistakes made by Christians on this issue in red. I will show in another paper that a careful examination of the relevant passages in Paul and others yields, in fact, a discerning and radical ethic related to the complexity of slavery. Instead, they drew on all the related Scriptures, including Jesus' commands to let go of wealth, and the overall biblical teaching that all human beings are image-bearers of God, and objects of His personal love and redemption. On the other hand, the world at large needs

¹ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005), p.28

to wrestle with the question of how various belief systems have contributed to abolition and/or slavery, not to mention larger issues of poverty, development, conflict resolution, an intellectual foundation for cross-cultural critique, intervention, etc. Muslims need to examine Mohammed's involvement in slavery and slave trading, the Quranic teaching of unlimited female concubinage and sex slavery, and the enslavement of non-Muslims linked to jihad. Atheists need to examine the foundations of Enlightenment racism from (say) Kant, the impact of Social Darwinism, colonialism, the reemergence of production-based slavery in the Soviet gulags (work prisons) on the Marxist model of human nature and in Nazi racial slavery, and what exactly is an atheist basis for announcing universal human dignity and equality, especially for intervening in another culture when that culture says that "what is good" is not what our culture says. And so on.

The Original Challenge: Classical Greco-Roman Attitudes and Policies towards Slavery

- Greece: The combination of democracy, mass slavery, and racism traces back to Athens. Athenian philosophers Plato and Aristotle opposed enslavement of fellow Greeks, but favored mass enslavement of "barbarians" while the Athenians worked on theoretical science, political philosophy, and art. They were the first civilization to use mass slavery – under the justification that the Athenians and the "barbarians" were descended from different ancestors, and hence slaves were inferior by nature. Plato assigned "barbarian" slaves a vital role in his republic doing all of the production. Aristotle said, "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.²
- Roman Empire: At the time of Christ, in the Roman heartland, there were an estimated 2 – 3 million slaves, about one third the population of the Empire.
 - Slaves came from military conquests, birth to slave parents, rescue from infanticide, international trade, piracy and kidnapping, penal servitude, and voluntary servitude.³ Many slaves would have been children or elderly, without the means to live in freedom. From a practical standpoint alone, given the function of slavery in all its forms and its magnitude, it would have been impossible for the Christian community to carry out a categorical command to emancipate slaves.
 - People sometimes chose to become slaves to wealthy masters for the sake of advancement, hopes for sharing in an inheritance or in social prestige, etc. Living conditions could be quite good, sometimes better than the economic situation of free poor people. Emperors used slaves for imperial secretarial and administrative roles. In the cities, slaves performed roles in the immediate household: nurses, tutors, teachers, dishwashers, housecleaners, litter-bearers, cooks, secretaries, gardeners, tailors, hairdressers, butlers. Their incentives to perform were more positive, ranging from advancement to ownership of property to manumission, rather than being negative, like fear of punishment and abuse. Slaves could in fact own other slaves. There were some means of exit of which slaves availed themselves; thus slavery during this period was sometimes used as a form of employment or indentured servitude. Slave concubines were usually freed either after they bore the master a child or at the master's death.⁴
 - In rural areas, however, slaves worked on large estates in agriculture or as miners. The three Roman Servile Wars, where slaves revolted under the late Roman Republic (135 – 132 BC in Sicily, 104 – 100 BC in Sicily, and 73 – 71 BC in mainland Italy), show that Roman slavery had been certainly quite harsh and oppressive before the New Testament period, though perhaps aberrations because of events following the Second Punic War and changes in land ownership. After the Third Servile War, the Roman people "out of sheer fear seem to have begun to treat their slaves less harshly than before."⁵ Also because of the period of peace after Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars from 52 BC, fewer war captives were enslaved, so wealthy Roman agriculturalists began to use fewer slaves and more paid free labor in sharecropping arrangements.⁶ While there were legal

² Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.27.

³ See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.105 – 131 on the enslavement of previously 'free' persons, especially p.111 – 112 for war captives, p.116 for kidnapping and raids by pirates, p.122 – 123 for Romans accepting tribute and tax payment in slaves in the eastern provinces, p.125 for debt enslavement, p.126 for slavery being a punishment for crimes, p.129 – 130 on abandoned children. On enslavement by birth in classical Roman times, see Patterson, p.139 – 141.

⁴ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.230.

⁵ Davis, *Readings in Ancient History*, p.90

⁶ Frank E. Smitha, *From a Republic to Emperor Augustus: Spartacus and Declining Slavery*, 2006.
<http://www.fsmitha.com/h1/ch18.htm>. Retrieved 2006-09-23.

and cultural limitations placed on masters' ability to abuse their slaves – for example, during the reign of Claudius (41 – 54 AD), laws were enacted that made the killing of an old or infirm slave an act of murder⁷ – “of themselves, slaves had no real rights before the law, and no proper means of appeal against their masters. Moreover, their word was of no account. A slave was so entirely devoid of any personal dignity that, when called to testify before a duly appointed court, torture might be applied as a matter of course.”⁸

- o Harboring a fugitive slave was punishable by death. “The same *senatus consultum* also appears to have prescribed a penalty for failure to hand over a fugitive to his master or to the magistrates within 20 days, if found on one's property.”⁹ “At the same time that the privilege of asylum was conferred on the temple, a suit for compensation and penalty was instituted against any private individual who should either help or harbour a runaway. Flight of slaves was an issue to be regulated...The prosecution of persons either for persuading a slave to run away, concealing his whereabouts, or seizing, selling or purchasing him was known to Roman law from the second century BC...It became a *crimen capitale* no longer punished necessarily by a monetary penalty but also by banishment to the mines or crucifixion...”¹⁰
- o Roman law did not recognize marriage among slaves. The Christian community did. Priscilla was a common Roman aristocratic name. Aquila was a common slave name. It is likely that this couple formed an inter-class marriage.
- o Slavery declined again in the latter days of the Roman Empire (nearing 476 AD) as a direct result of military weakness. Agriculture and industry were manned by free, paid laborers. This development probably made slaves more valuable as labor, contributing an economic disincentive to free slaves.¹¹ It is significant that Christians continued to free slaves during this time period, and advocate manumission.

Historic Christian Emancipation of Slaves: Timeline

1st century

- 30 AD: Jesus neither owns slaves nor even his own ancestral Jewish land and other forms of wealth. He teaches all his disciples to do likewise, being radically generous with all wealth (thus including slaves once Christian faith extended beyond the Jewish community) especially for the sake of the poor and the Christian evangelistic mission (e.g. Lk.3:7 – 14; 6:20 – 49; 8:1 – 21; 9:51 – 62; 10:25 – 37; 12:13 – 34; 14:12 – 35; 16:1 – 13; 18:15 – 19:10; 21:1 – 4; 24:46 – 47). In addition, he offers a “new humanity” to all humanity, Jew and Gentile, equalizing all ethnicities (e.g. Lk.4:14 – 30; Gal.3:28; Col.3:11), humanizing each person, and calling each to share in his new humanity ontologically by his Spirit so as to manifest the same character he demonstrated in his earthly ministry.
- 30 AD: Jesus' teaching on marriage and sexuality start to shape the way Christians handle slavery. Jesus' renewal of God's original ideal for marriage from creation as a sacred bond between husband and wife that no one must put asunder (e.g. Mt.19:1 – 12), his condemnation of lust (Mt.5:27 – 32), and the frequent New Testament prohibitions of fornication and adultery forced Christians to place limits on slavery as it intersected with the Christian vision of marriage and sexuality. Masters could not use slaves for sexual purposes like prostitution or fornication or concubinage (the Islamic permission of concubinage made Islamic slavery rather different from that of Christians). Masters could not separate married slaves because whom God joined together, no man could separate (a consideration that was totally violated by slavery in the Americas), even though Roman law did not recognize slave marriages. And masters could only marry their slaves after freeing them; etc. Christian marriage and sexuality contributed to seeing both male and female slaves clearly as human beings who had rights and responsibilities before God.
- 50 AD: Exemplifying the Christian tradition, Paul teaches – especially in 1 Corinthians (composed between 53 – 57 AD) – that the individual human body belongs solely to God, was designed to be His dwelling place (i.e. “temple” in 1 Cor.6:19 – 20), and will be resurrected in glory like Jesus' resurrected

⁷ Suetonius, *Life of Claudius*, 25.2

⁸ David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2009, p.168. See also S. Scott Bartchy, ‘Slavery’ in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Vol.4, Q-Z), edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al., Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1988, p.539 – 46.

⁹ S.R. Llewelyn, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (volume 8). Ancient History Documentary Centre, Macquarie University: 1997, p.26ff.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.35.

¹¹ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.27.

body (1 Cor.15:12 – 57). Hence Paul loosens social relations between people, including marriage and slavery, “to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord” (1 Cor.7:35, see 7:29): “Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that” (1 Cor.7:21). This is absolutely consistent with the overarching question of how we must live if our bodies are the Lord’s. For the same reason that Paul urges Christians to consider singleness as opposed to marriage, while still upholding the goodness of marriage, the practical criterion in 1 Corinthians 7 is discretionary independence (“undistracted devotion”) to serve the Lord, since there may be situations in which being a free but employed person would give a person less discretionary time and energy than being a slave for a supportive master, though the slave’s status may also conflict with any call of God to a new people or geography. Paul’s example in Philemon to free Onesimus reflects that principle, I believe. His teaching about slaves and masters in Ephesians 6:5 – 9 and Colossians 3:22 – 4:1 actually limits the power of the master for as long as the relationship exists.

- Christians condemned abduction and slave trading. The Mosaic Law held a kidnapper and slave trader to the death penalty (Ex.21:16; Dt.24:7), and the New Testament continued to see this as a heinous moral crime (1 Tim.1:10; also, 1 Cor.6:10 and 1 Th.4:6 were invoked concerning abduction and slave-trading because certain forms of slavery fell under the category of “extortion” or “oppression”). Revelation 18:13 condemns slave trading. Thus, the New Testament lays the foundation for evaluating the various sources of slavery.
- The Christian community recognized marriage among slaves, thus recognizing their humanity before God. For example, Priscilla was a common Roman aristocratic name. Aquila was a common slave name. It is likely that this couple formed an inter-class marriage.
- Clement of Rome (30 – 100 AD) observes, “We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds, in order that they might ransom others. Many, too, have surrendered themselves to slavery, that with the price which they received for themselves, they might provide food for others.”¹²
- Polycarp (69 – 155 AD) and Ignatius (~50 – 117 AD), second generation Christian leaders, free their slaves.¹³
- According to Western church tradition, Onesimus, a former runaway slave (who Paul returned to Philemon, writing that Philemon set him free) becomes bishop of Ephesus after Timothy, from 80 AD. According to Eastern Orthodox church tradition, however, this same Onesimus became the third bishop of Byzantium, from 54 – 68 AD. Although one of these traditions is surely confused, it is significant for this purpose that the stigma of slavery was overcome in the claiming of Onesimus as a very significant church leader.

2nd century

- Sometime during the reign of Trajan (98 – 117 AD), a Roman prefect named Hermas received baptism at an Easter festival with his wife and children and twelve hundred and fifty slaves. On that occasion, he gave all his slaves their freedom and generous gifts besides.¹⁴
- 95 – 135 AD: Ovidius, appointed bishop of Braga (in modern day Portugal) under Pope Clement I in 95 AD, emancipates five thousand slaves. He is martyred for his faith in 135 AD.
- 140 AD (or 142 or 146): Pius I, believed to be a former slave,¹⁵ becomes Bishop of Rome.
- 147 AD: Justin Martyr condemns the abandonment of infants because the child might die and, most importantly, he might fall into the wrong hands:

“But as for us, we have been taught that to expose newly-born children is the part of wicked men; and this we have been taught lest we should do any one an injury, and lest we should sin against God, first, because we see that almost all so exposed (not only the girls, but also the males) are brought up to prostitution.”¹⁶

¹² *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, ch.55

¹³ Edward C. Rogers, *Slavery Illegality in All Ages and Nations* (1855), Letter III in p.28 – 29. Unless otherwise mentioned, most of the information in this outline comes from Rogers’ work.

¹⁴ Philip Schaff, ‘Christian Life in Contrast with Pagan Corruption: The Church and Slavery,’ *History of the Christian Church*, Volume II

¹⁵ So believed because the *Muratorian Canon* and the *Liberian Catalogue* identifies Pius as the brother of Hermas, the author of *The Shepherd of Hermas*, who identified himself as a former slave.

¹⁶ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 27. The *First Apology* is thought to have been written between 147 – 161 AD.

3rd century

- 217 AD: Callistus, a former slave, becomes Bishop of Rome (from 217 – 222 AD).
- Several epitaphs in the catacombs mention the fact of manumission of other slaves, exact dates unknown.¹⁷
- Sometime during the reign of Diocletian (284 – 305 AD), a wealthy prefect named Chromatius embraced faith in Christ and emancipated fourteen hundred slaves after they are baptized with himself, because their common status as children of God put an end to their servitude to a man.¹⁸
- Christians in Asia Minor “decried the lawfulness of it, denounced slaveholding as a sin, a violation of the law of nature and religion. They gave fugitive slaves asylum, and openly offered them protection.”¹⁹
- Cyprian (208 – 258 AD), bishop of Carthage condemned a local slaveholder in uncompromising terms, condemning slavery as incompatible with Christianity:

“You, man of a day, expect from your slave obedience. Is he less a man than you? By birth he is your equal. He is endowed with the same organs, with the same reasoning soul, called to the same hopes, subject to the same laws of life in this and in the world to come. You subject him to your dominion. If he, as a man, disregard or forget your claim, what miseries you heap upon him. Impious master, pitiless despot! You spare neither blows nor whips, nor privations; you chastise him with hunger and thirst, you load him with chains, you incarcerate him within black walls; miserable man! While you thus maintain your despotism over a man, you are not willing to recognize the Master and Lord of all men.”²⁰

4th century AD

- Early 300’s AD: Cantius, Cantianus, and Cantiannilla, members of an old Roman family, set all seventy-three of their slaves at liberty at baptism.
- 315 AD: Two years after issuing the Edict of Milan, legalizing Christianity, Constantine imposes the death penalty on those who kidnap and enslave children. This act of Constantine testifies to the likelihood of a vigorous critique by the Christian community of kidnapping and forced enslavement, rooted in both the Old and New Testaments (Ex.21:16; Dt.24:7; 1 Tim.1:10).
- 321, 334 AD: Constantine made it illegal for slaveholders to separate slave families and eased the conditions of manumission so that a slaveholder could simply go to a church service and declare their emancipation before the bishop. This again testifies to the strong concern to defend the humanity of slaves in the Christian community, which Constantine now extended beyond Christians to the entire Roman Empire. Christians then took Easter as an occasion to regularly emancipate slaves. **However, the church did not encourage a change in the civil law on other matters related to slave families. Orlando Patterson writes, “On the whole...the master remained supreme in his power over the marital and familiar lives of his slaves. Throughout Europe an unscrupulous master could always sexually abuse his female slave, married or not; and at no time did the slave father have custody over his child.”**²¹ In theory, as far as the *civil* law is concerned, Patterson is right.²² However, John Chrysostom (presbyter at Antioch from 386 – 398 AD, and then archbishop of Constantinople from 398 – 407 AD) asserted that slave husbands have marital rights to their wives, and slave parents have paternal rights to their children (see below). And in practice, according to Christian *canon* law in the Eastern Orthodox, Assyrian, and Oriental Orthodox Christian communities, and I can only assume the Western European Christian communities as well, sexual relations between master and slave were viewed as fornication and punishable by excommunication. In a later contrast with Islam, the point is significant. “Illustrating this point was the story of the Caliph Mansur [the second Abbasid caliph from 754 – 775 AD], who sent three beautiful Greek slave girls and 3,000 gold pieces to the

¹⁷ Philip Schaff, ‘Christian Life,’ *History of the Christian Church*, Volume II

¹⁸ Philip Schaff, ‘Christian Life,’ *History of the Christian Church*, Volume II

¹⁹ Edward C. Rogers, *Slavery Illegality*

²⁰ Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise V: An Address to Demetrianus* 8

²¹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p.189.

²² I find it regrettable that Christians in the Roman Empire did not seek to change the Roman civil law concerning slave families. Prioritizing the slave family as a family would have elevated the human rights and responsibilities of the slave (before God) over the property rights of the master, and would have unambiguously fallen under Paul’s dictum to masters: ‘Do the same things to them [i.e. that slaves were to do to masters: be obedient...with fear and trembling...in the sincerity of your heart...with good will render service, as to the Lord, not to men], and give up threatening’ (Ephesians 6:9). While the teachings of Jesus and the apostles could not simply be translated into public policy, and while a gradual change did occur to keep unscrupulous masters in check by informal means, nevertheless the church clearly was, from this point in time, in the position to influence law and policy.

physician Georges [ben Gabriel, a Christian who Mansur had abducted from his post as head of the hospital at Gundishapur, in the hopes that Georges would cure him]. Accepting the gift of money, the physician returned the girls with the message that ‘with such I shall not live in the house, for to us, Christians, only one wife is allowed, and I have one in Belafel.’”²³

- 360 AD: Basil the Elder becomes bishop of Caesarea. He affirms that a marriage between slaves has “the solidity” of sacred union between free Christians.²⁴
- 379 AD: Gregory of Nyssa, in a sermon during Lent, unequivocally and indignantly condemns Solomon’s purchasing of slaves.

“You condemn a person to slavery whose nature is free and independent, and you make laws opposed to God and contrary to His natural law. For you have subjected one who was made precisely to be lord of the earth, and whom the Creator intended to be a ruler, to the yoke of slavery, in resistance to and rejection of His divine precept. ...How is it that you disregard the animals which have been subjected to you as slaves under your hand, and that you should act against a free nature, bringing down one who is of the same nature of yourself, to the level of four-footed beasts or inferior creatures...?”²⁵

Gregory condemns forcible enslavement over another person as the grossest possible arrogance. In fact, “since God’s greatest gift to us is the perfect liberty vouchsafed us by Christ’s saving action in time, and since God’s gifts are entirely irrevocable, it lies not even in *God’s* power to enslave men and women.”²⁶ In addition, he says that God has given dominion over the creation to each person, so to possess a slave’s material possessions is contrary to creation.

- Ambrose (337 – 397 AD), bishop of Milan, orders church property to be sold in order to raise funds to purchase and set free slaves: “The Lord will say to us, ‘why are so many unfortunate beings subject to slavery, even death, for want of being redeemed? Men are better worth preserving than metals.’ What have you to reply? Must we deprive the temples of their ornaments? But the Lord will say—‘It is not necessary that the sacred things be clothed in gold.’”
- John Chrysostom (presbyter at Antioch from 386 – 398 AD, and then archbishop of Constantinople from 398 – 407 AD), teaches:
 - Slaves and masters are equally and fully human before God, unlike in pagan law. Slave husbands have marital rights to their wives (and presumably vice versa) and slave parents have parental rights to their children.²⁷ “He who has immoral relations with the wife of a slave is as culpable as he who has the like relations with the wife of the prince: both are adulterers, for it is not the condition of the parties that makes the crime.”²⁸ In other words: full humanity, no sex slavery.
 - Christian masters must not command something against God’s law: “[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 displeasing 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.’”²⁹ This demonstrates that Christians understood how to sequence roles and responsibilities

²³ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), p.83

²⁴ Basil of Caesarea, *Epistle* 199:42

²⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes*

²⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes*; David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, p.178 – 179. Thus, Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.225 is historically incorrect when he says that ‘it was not until the start of the seventh century that we find the first forcefully articulated theological statement that manumission in general was an act of piety’ through the pen of Gregory the Great. Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century and Cyprian in the third provide literary evidence that such statements were being produced much earlier than the seventh century. In addition, the pattern of owners at their baptism freeing slaves existed from the first century, strongly suggesting that there was oral (preached) tradition in the early Christian community of the importance of manumission in general, and the importance of conferring freedom upon the slaves because of the symbolic death of the owner in Christian baptism. Patterson’s treatment of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians on p.227 shows his lack of experience as a biblical exegete.

²⁷ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Ephesians*, 6:9; also *Epistle addressed to the Ephesians*, Homily 22:2.

²⁸ John Chrysostom, *In I Thessalonians*, Homily 5:2; *In II Thessalonians*, Homily 3:2

²⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homily 19 on I Corinthians* 7

in such a way that a person's responsibility to God takes precedence over being asked to do anything immoral while occupying the role of slavery or servitude. **Although he mistakenly thought Paul meant, "remain a slave" in 1 Cor.7:21,** he attests to a widespread understanding that Paul meant, "become free": "Now we are not ignorant that some say, the words, use it rather, are spoken with regard to liberty: interpreting it, if you can become free, become free."

- o Ideally, there would be a society without slaves, and only free workers.³⁰
- 390 – 400 AD: The *Apostolic Constitutions*, a handy summary of the rulings of the early Christian community up until that point, probably compiled in Syria, instruct Christian masters to grant a "lawful marriage" to a male and female slave couple who have previously been unmarried.³¹ It also 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."³²
- 395 AD: Augustine (354 – 430), bishop of Hippo from 395 – 430 AD, saw slavery as the product of sin and as contrary to God's divine plan (*The City of God*). He teaches that Christian law forbids treating humans as property, and encourages freeing slaves. Many bishops at Hippo under Augustine free their slaves as an act of piety. Augustine notes that the Christian community regularly uses 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.³³

5th century

- Early 400's AD: Melania (the Elder), a very wealthy Roman Christian, emancipates eight thousand slaves.³⁴
- Early 400's AD: Acacius, bishop of Amida, in modern day eastern Turkey/western Mesopotamia from 400 – 425 AD, sees seven thousand Persian prisoners being held by Romans in Amida. Apparently moved with compassion, he assembles his fellow clergy and says, "Our God, my brethren, needs neither dishes nor cups; for He neither eats nor drinks, nor is in want of anything. Since then, by the liberality of its faithful members the Church possesses many vessels both of gold and silver, it behooves us to sell them, that by the money thus raised, we may be able to redeem the prisoners and also supply them with food."³⁵ Acacius purchases them from slavery, supports them for a while, and sends them furnished with supplies back to Persia. This is reported to have impressed Sassanid Emperor Bahram V so deeply that he requested to see Acacius personally. "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. The peace treaty contained the remarkable stipulation that freedom of religion was to be granted on both sides of the border, for Zoroastrians in the Byzantine Empire and for Christians in Persia."³⁶ This incident was surely unusual in its magnitude, but probably not in its character.
- Early 400's AD: Isidore of Pelusium (died 449 AD) writes to a slaveholder saying, "I did not think that the man who loves Christ, and knows the grace which makes us all free, would still hold slaves."
- Late 400's AD: Remigius (437 – 533 AD) writes to Clovis, king of France from 481 – 511 AD, the first king of the Franks to unite all the Frankish tribes, "Let the gate of your palace be open to all, that every one may have recourse to you for justice. Employ your great revenues in redeeming slaves."
- Patrick of Ireland (possibly 387 – 493 AD) writes a scathing letter to a Welsh chieftain, Coroticus, condemning his massacre and enslavement of newly baptized Irish Christians in a coastal raid. "15 For Scripture says: Weep with them that weep; and again: If one member be grieved, let all members grieve with it. Hence the Church mourns and laments her sons and daughters whom the sword has not yet slain, but who were removed and carried off to faraway lands, where sin abounds openly, grossly, impudently. There people who were freeborn have been sold, Christians made slaves, and that, too, in the service of the abominable, wicked, and apostate Picts!...19 Where, then, will Coroticus with his criminals, rebels against Christ, where will they see themselves, they who distribute baptised women as prizes-for a miserable temporal kingdom, which will pass away in a moment? As a cloud or smoke that is dispersed by the wind,

³⁰ Paul Allard, *Les esclaves chrétiens* (French Edition, 1974), p.416 – 423

³¹ *Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 8, Section 4, Paragraph 32

³² *Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 4, Section 2, Paragraph 9

³³ Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

³⁴ *Vita Saint Melaniae*, 34 says that the number is too great to count but Palladius, in *Hist. Lausiaca*, 119, counts 8,000.

³⁵ Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, Book VII, Chapter 21

³⁶ Samuel Hugh Moffet, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Volume 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), p.160

so shall the deceitful wicked perish at the presence of the Lord; but the just shall feast with great constancy with Christ, they shall judge nations, and rule over wicked kings for ever and ever. Amen.”³⁷

The Next Challenge: Germanic Kingdoms after the “Fall of Rome” in 476 AD

- Germanic peoples are pushed west into the Roman Empire by the Huns who attacked the Black Sea region at ~370 AD. The Germanic Visigoths sack Rome in 410; the Vandals do so in 455. The Germanic peoples became the new ruling class and took over the administrative machinery of the declining empire. In the resulting cultural shift, slavery was reasserted; slaves were used again for production, and it appears to have been harsher than in classical times. “Though no one really knows how many slaves there were in Europe in, say, the sixth century, they seem to have been plentiful, and their treatment was, if anything, harsher than in classical times. In the legal codes of the various Germanic groups that ruled in place of Roman governors, slaves were equated not with other humans but specifically with livestock.”³⁸ When a master died, the Germanic tribes as often killed as freed his slaves. As the Christian faith spread among these peoples of northern Europe, it abolished the killing of the slaves and endorsed their manumission. This transformation is “easily documented.”³⁹

6th century

- 506 AD: The Council of Agde in southern France commands that slaves made free by their masters should not be oppressed or taken advantage of, and that the church was to care for and protect them. Bishops were commanded to provide resources for those they freed:
 - “7. Concerning slaves of the Church, if any bishop shall reasonably have bestowed liberty freely upon well-deserving cases, it is pleasing that the liberty conferred should be cared for by his successors, with whatever the manumitter conferred on them in granting liberty; yet nevertheless we order him to give them the sum of twenty solidi and to set bounds to their lands, little vineyards, or house. Whatever was given above this the Church will revoke after the death of the manumitter. But little things, or things less useful to the Church, to pilgrims, or to the clergy, we permit to remain for their use, saving the right of the Church.”
 - “29. The Church shall take care of freedmen legitimately freed by their masters if necessity demands it; but if any one presume to plunder them or to oppress them before the hearing of their case, he shall be prevented by the Church.”
- 517 AD: The Council of Epaone declares that excommunication for two years was the penalty for killing a slave. Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury, prescribed a penance of seven years for a mistress who killed her slave in anger.⁴⁰ While decrees like these reflected an incomplete valuation of the life of a slave, it was a step in the right direction.⁴¹
- 529 – 534 AD: Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian, a Christian, issues the *Corpus Juris Civilis* (“Body of Civil Law”) also known as the *Institutes of Justinian*. These laws were a complete revision of past Roman law and formed the basis of Latin jurisprudence and Byzantine law. In it, Justinian says, “Slavery is an institution of the law of nations, against nature, subjecting one man to the dominion of another.”⁴² It should be illegal but is tolerated because of the generals’ practice of taking captives in war, or because they are born to slave parents, or when a man over 20 years of age consents to voluntary enslavement so he can share in the money resulting from his own sale. Justinian rules that if a pregnant woman was free at any

³⁷ Patrick, *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*, 15, 19

³⁸ Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.27

³⁹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.226

⁴⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.192

⁴¹ Patterson notes on p.192, ‘In Rome it was not until the first century A.D. that some restraint was placed on the power of the master to kill his slave, and this was only with regard to the practice of sending one’s slaves to fight with wild beasts. More meaningful curbs came with Antonius in the middle of the second century.’ Compare with the ancient Hebrew law where if the slave died on the same day that he was beaten by his master, the master was charged with murder and executed, on the principle of a life for a life (Exodus 21:20 – 23).

⁴² Justinian, *The Institutes*, Book 1, part 3, #2. I find it regrettable, however, that Justinian criminalized Christian heresies like Arianism, established Jews and Samaritans as second-class citizens, and made the orthodox Christian faith the official religion of the Eastern Roman Empire, making pagans non-citizens; this contributed to a lack of clarity about how to treat Muslims and Africans not under the official jurisdiction of a given state or legal system. It is also notable in this context that Justinian and his wife, Theodora, both quite sincere Christians, reigned as co-emperors, which entitled Theodora to exercise all imperial prerogatives.

moment between conception and delivery, her child is free by birth. He prohibits “unrestrained violence toward slaves,” except when the court granted permission for a specific reason, usually a penalty for criminal activity.⁴³ He made into law the traditional, already widely practiced manumission of concubines and their children at the death of the master, if he did not specify her status in his will.⁴⁴

- 549 AD: The Fifth Council of Orleans forbids taking freed slaves back into custody, and commands that their rights as free men be protected:
 - “7. And because on the suggestion of many we have found for a certainty that those, who were freed from slavery in the churches according to the custom of the country, have been recalled to slavery again on the whim of all kinds of people, we have deemed it impious that those who have been freed from the yoke of servitude in the Church out of consideration for God should be disregarded. Therefore, because of its piety, it is pleasing to the common council that it be observed, that, whatever slaves be released from servitude by free masters, shall remain in that freedom which they then received from their lords. Also liberty of this kind, if it be questioned by any one shall be defended with justice by the churches, except for those faults for which the laws ordered revocation of the liberties conferred on slaves.”
 - The Council also commanded that those who had sold themselves into indentured service for a sum should be permitted to redeem themselves with the same sum. In addition, all children born to them by free men or women were also counted as free: “14. Concerning freemen who sell themselves for money or other things, or who have pledged themselves, it is our pleasure that if they can find the price, as much as was given for them, when the price is given, they shall be restored to their former status without delay, nor shall more be required than was given for them. And meanwhile, if one of them shall have married a free wife, or if one of them, being a woman, shall have taken a freeman as husband, the children who are born of them shall remain free.”
 - However, the Council required churches to return runaway slaves to their masters if the master gave an oath that the slave would not be mistreated. Non-Christian masters had to provide Christian witnesses to support their oath. Once the oath had been given, the slave was required to return to their master, regardless of whether or not the slave wished to go. This contradicted a precedent set by the Law of Moses, which forbade the return of runaway servants to their masters, and commanded that all servants who had left their masters were to be immediately considered free men, and permitted to live where they chose (Deuteronomy 23:15 – 16). Once again the failure of Christians to discern various types of slavery and various responses to it is regrettable.
- Caesarius (468 – 542 AD), bishop of Arles for the last forty years of his life, stripped his church of its expensive silver plate and utensils, in order to purchase Christians who had been enslaved in recent wars, to set them free, saying “Our Lord celebrated his last supper in mean earthen dishes, not in [silver] plate, and we need not scruple to part with his vessels to ransom those he has redeemed with his life”
- Johannes Eleemosynarius (John IV) patriarch of Alexandria from 569 – 579, condemns a slaveholder, saying “Tell me what price can man pay to purchase a man, who was created in the image of God? Hast thou a different soul? Is he not in all things thy equal? There is neither bond nor free; all are one in Christ. We are all equal before Christ. What then is the gold you have paid for a child of God?”
- Gregory the Great (540 – 604 AD), bishop of Rome from 590 – 604 AD, officially declares slavery is a cruel evil, “a great crime”, and commands any bishop who permits it in his diocese to be punished. Speaking of the importance of freeing slaves, he said “a good and salutary thing is done when men, whom nature from the beginning created free, and whom the customs of nations had subjected to the yoke of servitude, are presented again with the freedom in which they were born”. Gregory made generous pronouncements on the freeing of serfs and slaves, encouraging the use of church funds to obtain their freedom and stating that those who had been freed with money would not have to pay it back to the church:

“Since our Redeemer, the Creator of all creatures, wished to assume human flesh, so that by the grace of His divinity He might restore us to our pristine liberty, which has been taken away from us so that we are thereby held captive under the yoke of servitude, it is done wisely if those whom nature brought forth as free men in the beginning, and whom the law of nations placed under the yoke of servitude, are returned in freedom to that state of nature in which they were born by the benefits of manumission. So, moved by consideration of this and by feelings of piety, we make

⁴³ Justinian, *The Institutes*, Book 1, part 8, #2

⁴⁴ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.231

you, Montana and Thomas, serfs of the Holy Roman Church, over which with the help of God we rule, free and Roman citizens from this day, and we free all property held by you in serfdom. The statutes of the holy canons and lawful authority permit that the goods of Holy Church may be used for the redemption of captives. And so because we were taught by you, before we reached the age of eighteen, that a certain holy man named Fabius, Bishop of the church of Firman, used eleven pounds of silver from that same church for your redemption and for the redemption of your father Passivus, your brother and co-bishop, a priest at that time, and also of your mother, from the enemy, and on account of this fact you are obsessed by the fear that what was paid will be required of you after a certain interval of time, we wish to see your fear allayed by this command, that you and your heirs suffer no molestation at any time by reason of any demand for this money, nor shall you be harassed by any questioning, for the spirit of charity demands that what pious zeal expends ought not to be imposed as a burden or affliction on the redeemed.”

However, although Gregory was generous towards Christian serfs and slaves, inconsistently, he sanctioned the enslaving of pagans. This set a terrible precedent.

- 595 AD: A council at Rome under Gregory the Great permits a slave to become a monk without any consent from his master. Previously, the Western church permitted a slave to be raised into the priesthood only with the formal consent of his master. At the same time, councils held in Orleans in 511, 538, 549, while imposing penalties upon the bishop who elevated a slave into priestly office without the master’s consent, nevertheless declared such an ordination to be valid. The council in Rome in 595 appears to have carried Paul’s prerogative in Philemon to an expressed conclusion.
- Ireland experiences the elimination of the slave trade – and probably slavery as well – in the 500’s, although it would reemerge in the 800’s.⁴⁵

7th century

- Maximus the Confessor (580 – 662 AD), a leading theologian and monk, preaches and writes against slavery. “Humankind has brought into being from itself the three greatest, primordial evils, and (to speak simply) the begetters of all vice: ignorance, ...self-love and tyranny, each of which are interdependent and established through one another...God [however]...healed humanity when it was sick...[by emptying] himself, taking the form of a slave (Phil.2:7)...[thus fulfilling] the power of love,...in refashioning the human.”⁴⁶
- c.630 AD: Eligius, bishop of Noyon, wealthy because of his former career as a goldsmith, frees large numbers of slaves by purchasing them with church funds and then giving them their liberty: “Religious men from all parts came to him, foreigners also and monks, and in whatever way he could serve he would either give them the money or share the price of the captives; for he had the greatest enthusiasm for this kind of work. Indeed, whenever he understood that a slave was being offered for sale, he hastened with the utmost speed in his mercy and immediately gave the price and freed the captive. Occasionally he redeemed from captivity at the same time as many as twenty, thirty, or even fifty; sometimes even the whole body of slaves up to a hundred souls, coming from various peoples, and of both sexes, he would free as they left the ship; there were Romans, Gauls, and Britons also, and men of Marseilles, but they were chiefly men of Saxony, who at that time in large numbers like flocks were expelled from their own lands and scattered in different countries.”⁴⁷
- 633 AD: The Fourth Council of Toledo forbids Jews to keep Christian slaves (ordering slaves to be freed from all Jewish masters), required slaves freed by the church to remain Christians, and permitted freed slaves to take holy orders:
 - o “66. By the decree of the most glorious prince this sacred council ordered that Jews should not be allowed to have Christian slaves nor to buy Christian slaves, nor to obtain them by the kindness of any one; for it is not right that the members of Christ should serve the ministers of Anti-Christ.

⁴⁵ Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p.110, 148

⁴⁶ Maximus the Confessor, *Epistle 2*, to John the Cubicularius, written circa 626 AD. See also J. Kameron Carter’s invaluable discussion of Maximus as ‘anticolonialist intellectual’ in *Race: A Theological Account*, p.343 – 369, which has indirect relevance to the subject of slavery but direct relevance to the subject of race, culture, Christian mission, and Christian theology.

⁴⁷ Bruno Krusch, editor, *Monumenta Germaniae Historiae, Scriptores (Hanover, 1902), Tome IV, p. 677; reprinted in Roy C. Cave & Herbert H. Coulson, A Source Book for Medieval Economic History, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1936; reprint ed., New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1965), pp. 292-293.*

But if henceforward Jews presume to have Christian slaves or handmaidens they shall be taken from their domination and shall go free.”

- o “70. Men freed by the Church (since the one who freed them will never die) must never withdraw from the Church’s patronage. Neither, indeed, must their posterity, according to the decrees of former canons. But lest perchance their freedom should not be apparent in their children, and lest their posterity should struggle against their natural state of being free, and remove themselves from the patronage of the Church, it is necessary that these same freedmen as well as their children should make a profession before their bishop, by which they acknowledge that from being slaves of the Church they have been made freedmen. And they must never leave the patronage of the Church, but let them rather, according to its value render submission or obedience to this patronage or protection.”
- o “73. Those who have been so freed by their masters, that the patron requires absolutely no submission from them—those, if they be free from all crime, may freely take clerical orders; for it is known that they are absolved by direct manumission. Those who are manumitted, yet owe some submission to their patron, for the reason that they are held subject by the patron in servitude, are positively not to be promoted to the ecclesiastical order, lest when the master so wishes slaves should be made from clerics.”
- o “74. Concerning the slaves of the Church, it is allowed to make them priests and deacons in parishes; nevertheless, let right living and honest habits commend them; also for that reason let them be previously manumitted and receive the full liberty of their new status, and at length let them succeed to ecclesiastical honors; for it is contrary to religion for those to remain subject to serfdom, who have received the dignity of holy orders. But whatever has been granted to such men through their freedom, or whatever has been theirs by right of inheritance, or conferred by anyone in any manner whatsoever, they may not transfer to other people in any way; but all their goods ought to belong after their death to the Church by which they were manumitted.”
- 635 AD: As recorded by the Nestorian Stele in Chang-an, capital of the Empire of China, the Syrian Christian priest and missionary Alopen arrived in Chang-an. The monument is inscribed with a history of the spread of Christian faith, including its approval by the Prime Minister, Duke Fang Hsien-ling, and Emperor Taitsung. The monument describes Christian belief and the Christian community in China. It includes this description: “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.”⁴⁸
- 649 AD: Clovis II, king of the Franks, frees and marries his British slave Bathilda. Bathilda was a British Christian who had been kidnapped and brought across the Channel. The two had met when Clovis was but a teenager. “When Clovis died in 657, Bathilda ruled as regent until her eldest son came of age. Bathilda used her position to mount a campaign to halt the slave trade and to redeem those in slavery. Upon her death, the church acknowledged Bathilda as a saint.”⁴⁹ She made it illegal to acquire more slaves and declared that any slaves entering the kingdom would be immediately free.⁵⁰ Due to Bathilda’s shrewd action, after another generation or two, slavery was effectively abolished among the Franks. Stark notes that there is considerable evidence of mixed free-slave marriages in Western Europe by the seventh century,⁵¹ which means the effective emancipation of the enslaved spouse, and suggests that the marriage of Clovis and Bathilda became something of a model.
- 650 AD: The Council of Châlon-sur-Saône, in Burgundy in modern day France, forbids the sale of slaves outside the Frankish kingdom.
- 655 AD: The Ninth Council of Toledo in Spain tries to encourage priestly celibacy in the region of Hispania. It ruled that all children of priests would be servants, and technically slaves, of the Church. The ruling does not appear to have been enforced, however.

The Next Challenge: The Expansion of Islam, Jihad, Piracy, and Slavery

⁴⁸ The Nestorian Monument: An Ancient Record of Christianity in China/Translation of the Nestorian Inscription, Wikisource.org;

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Nestorian_Monument:_An_Ancient_Record_of_Christianity_in_China/Translation_of_the_Nestorian_Inscription.

⁴⁹ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.29 - 30

⁵⁰ Jonathan Hill, *What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us? How it Shaped the Modern World* (Downers’ Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), p.176

⁵¹ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.29

- Mohammed (570 – 632 AD) owned, freed, bought, and captured slaves.⁵² The Qur'an forbids enslaving fellow Muslims, so jihads were conducted to acquire new slaves. "The primary source of slaves in the Islamic world has been non-Muslims: Jews, Christians, Hindus and pagans. Most slaves in Islam were non-Muslims who had been captured during jihad warfare."⁵³ "The frequent Arab incursions into the Eurasian steppes during the ninth century, for example, were often motivated by the desire to acquire slaves."⁵⁴
- Barbary pirates along the North African coast, from Spain to Byzantium, seized Christians and enslaved them, until even the nineteenth century, under the guise of jihad. **During the Middle Ages, Christians did retaliate in kind.⁵⁵ The Spanish *Reconquista* and the Crusades, which were theologically problematic in themselves, were responses to Muslim expansion, violence, and enslavement of Christians. This led to war captives being taken into slavery on both sides.**

8th century AD

- 733 AD: Pope Gregory II forbids Christians to be sold to pagans, an act to be punished as equivalent to homicide:

"8. Among other crimes committed in those parts you have mentioned this, that certain of the faithful sell their slaves to the pagans for sacrifices. Which thing, brother, we think should be corrected, and we do not think you should allow it to proceed further; for it is a disgrace and an impiety. To those therefore who have done these things you should mete out the same punishment as for homicide."

- 752, 759 AD: The Councils of Verberie (752) and Compiègne (759) approve the validity of marriage between free persons and slaves, if contracted with full knowledge of the circumstances.
- 755 AD: Lullo, the Archbishop of Mainz, complains to the pope regarding a priest who has sold church serfs into slavery: "But let your Holiness judge what is right and just about these things and not only of these but of all which he did perversely during his life and which are here made clear. For he took the goods and serfs of the church committed to his care, Faegenolph our serf, and his two sons Raegenolph and Amanolph, and his wife Leobthruthe, and her daughter Amalthruthe, and he took them to Saxony and exchanged them there against a horse belonging to a man named Huelp. But Willefrid sent Raegenolph beyond the sea with Enred and gave him together with his mother into slavery."
- Charlemagne (742 – 814), king of the Franks from 768 and Emperor of the Romans from 800, opposes slavery, and many other clergy echoed the past Queen Bathilda. Abbot Smaragde writes to Charlemagne, "Most merciful king, forbid that there should be any slave in your kingdom."⁵⁶ Probably 20% of the population of the Carolingian Empire was enslaved at the time; they became serfs.
- Theodorus Studita (759 – 826 AD), a Byzantine monk and abbot of Stoudios monastery in Constantinople, commands "not to employ those beings, created in the image of God, as slaves."

9th century AD

- **Contact with Islam renews slave trading among the powerful Venetians** but provokes denunciation from Byzantium: "Christian merchants in Venice, much to the indignation of the papacy, carried on in the middle of the eighth century an active trade in slaves with the rapidly expanding Muslim empire, whose growing wealth created a near insatiable demand for this human commodity. At the time, although Venice was under the nominal rule of Byzantium, which prohibited this kind of trade, its enterprising merchants paid no heed. In 847 they even procured slaves in Rome for sale to North Africa, which had become a thriving market for European goods. So flagrant did this traffic in slaves become by the early ninth century that Leo V, the Byzantine emperor, issued a decree forbidding his subjects, and the Venetians in particular, from trading with Egypt and Syria."⁵⁷

⁵² Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammed at Medina* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammed: Prophet and Statesman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁵³ Robert Spencer, 'Slavery, Christianity, and Islam,' *First Things*, February 4, 2008

⁵⁴ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), p.26

⁵⁵ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*, p.27

⁵⁶ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.30

⁵⁷ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*, p.106

- Agobard, Archbishop of Lyons from 816 – 840 AD, opposes slavery in the Frankish Empire.
- 816 AD: The Synod of Chelsea, in Anglo-Saxon England, declares that when a bishop dies, all the English slaves enslaved during his lifetime should be freed and enfranchised.⁵⁸
- Abbot Smaragda of Saint-Mihiel wrote to Charlemagne, “Most merciful king, forbid that there should be any slave in your kingdom.” Soon, no one “doubted that slavery in itself was against divine law.”⁵⁹
- 876 AD: The German Council of Worms rules that masters who have killed their slaves without the knowledge of the judges’ on account of an offence legally punishable by death, should be excommunicated, or given penance for two years:
 - o “38. If any one shall kill his own slave without the knowledge of the judges—a slave who has committed such thing as may be worthy of death—he shall emend the guilt of blood by excommunication or by a penance for two years.” This was not a ruling containing a great deal of Christian charity, but did establish the principle that masters did not have the power of life and death over their slaves, and had to be subject to the judicial ruling. The Council also passed a ruling regarding women who were responsible for the murder or manslaughter of their slaves in a fit of jealousy, and though the penalties do not seem particularly harsh it would depend on the precise nature of the penance inflicted on the guilty woman.
 - o “39. If any woman incensed by a fit of jealousy should beat her slave, so that within three days she [the slave] should die in torment, so that it be uncertain whether she killed her intentionally or by accident, she shall do lawful penance for five years, if it be by chance, but for seven years if she do it intentionally.” Still, this ruling lacked true Christian charity, and should have required the woman to face legal charges of manslaughter or murder.

10th century AD

- 922 AD: The German Christian Council of Koblenz establishes the death penalty for enslaving Christians: “Also the question was put what should be done concerning him who led away a Christian man and then sold him; and the reply of all was that he should be guilty of homicide.”
- After the tenth century, slavery in Europe was only located in the places where Christians and Muslims had extensive interaction with each other. “[Slavery] had essentially disappeared from Europe by the end of the tenth century.”⁶⁰ But “in Spain, Christian and Muslim armies continued to enslave each other’s captives taken in battle, and slave trading involved northern Italian export firms and Muslim buyers persisted into the fifteenth century, in defiance of the church. . . They were purchased from Slavic tribes in the Caucasus (the word “slave” is a corruption of the word “Slav”). A few were kept as a form of luxury goods by very wealthy Italians such as the Medici, but most were exported to Islam – white slaves being “more precious than gold in trading with Egypt.” This residual slave trade was periodically condemned by local clergy and slowly withered away, only to reappear with a vengeance in the New World.”⁶¹

11th century AD

- 1000 AD: Stephen I of Hungary, the first Hungarian Christian king, who reigned from 1000 – 1038 AD and is generally considered to be the founder of the Kingdom of Hungary, declares in his laws that any slave who lives, stays in, or enters the Kingdom of Hungary would be free immediately.
- Saint Wulfstan (1008 – 1095 AD) and Saint Anselm (1033 – 1109 AD) campaigned to remove the last vestiges of slavery in European Christendom.
- 1198 AD: Pope Innocent III approves of the Order of the Holy Trinity for the Ransom of Captives, founded in Paris by John de Matha. The goal of the Order is to ransom Christian slaves held captive by Muslims due to the Crusades or to piracy. Other religious orders dedicated to this task include the order of Montjoie and the Mercedarians.⁶² They raised money to redeem captives, and organized the buying of them back.
- The *Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* says that “slavery was practically non-existent by the eleventh century,” but attributes this to “political and economic factors” as opposed to theological and

⁵⁸ Pelteret, David Anthony Edgell, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England from the Reign of Alfred Until the Twelfth Century* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2001), p.83, 86

⁵⁹ Marc Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages* (University of California Press: Berkeley), p.11

⁶⁰ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.28

⁶¹ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.30

⁶² Charles Moeller, “Order of Trinitarians,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 15 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912); cf. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15045d.htm> (Feb.22, 2013)

religious factors.⁶³ By this time, “no man, no real Christian at any rate, could thereafter legitimately be held as the property of another.”⁶⁴ The few exceptions all involved extensive interactions with Islam in Spain, Slavic parts of the Caucasus (where the word “slave” originates), and very wealthy parts of Italy, because Islam trafficked in white slaves in these regions.

- 1080 AD: William the Conqueror, king of England and duke of Normandy, forbids the slave trade, and provides for the orderly freeing of serfs, who are to be provided for by their lord on their release:
 - “41. Also we forbid any one to sell a Christian into a foreign land and especially to heathens. For let great care be taken lest their souls for which Christ gave His life be sold into damnation.”
 - “15. And we prohibit any one to sell a man out of the country. But if he, who wishes to make his serf free, hand him over to the sheriff by his right hand in full assembly, he must proclaim him quit of the yoke of his servitude by manumission, and show him free ways and gates and give him arms, viz., lance and sword; finally the man is made free.”
- Late in the eleventh century, the Christian faith becomes rooted in the Scandinavian peoples. The church influences the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Since the church takes the position that Christians should not enslave or own other Christians, the fearsome Viking raids in the North Sea and Irish Sea dramatically slow. Raids continue into the 12th century under the kings of Norway, but eventually slavery is outlawed.
- 1089 AD: Pope Urban II, at the Synod of Melfi (1189, can. xii), declares that the wives of priests were to be slaves of the Church. This is once again related to property concerns, especially after priests lost their lives in the Crusades, and to encourage priestly celibacy. These women were reduced to poverty.
- 1097 AD: In the First Crusade, French and Italian Catholics regain Nicaea after the Byzantine Empire lost most of Asia Minor to the Seljuk Turks. They retake Antioch the same year and Jerusalem in 1099. According to standard military and diplomatic convention of the times, the Crusaders kill all inhabitants of cities that refuse to surrender, and inherit many slaves. During the two hundred years of the “Crusader Kingdoms,” the Christians allow Jews and Muslims to continue practicing their faiths.⁶⁵ Since any Muslim slaves who converted and received baptism would have been freed according to long established Christian convention, the crusader lords “defied papal edicts” and “hampered mendicant efforts at converting enslaved Muslims.”⁶⁶ Hindering whatever sincere evangelism could be done under these – admittedly difficult – conditions was untrue to Christian faith.
- Sugar, which we now know to be a semi-addictive substance, began to be developed in the Eastern Mediterranean. Sugar was first grown with great difficulty in India, then Persia, then by the Arabs throughout the Arab Empire, including the Eastern Mediterranean, the Mediterranean islands, and Spain. Cyprus developed sugar in the tenth century, then Sicily under the Arabs (who occupied Sicily from 965 – 1072 AD) developed sugar as well.

12th century AD

- 1102 AD: The London Church Council forbids slavery and the slave trade, which abolishes both throughout England. This decree emancipates 10% of England’s population.⁶⁷
 - “27. Let no one presume for the future to enter into that nefarious business by which they were accustomed hitherto to sell men like brute animals in England.”

⁶³ Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* (ABC-CLIO, 1997), p.xvii. In an earlier section on the same page, Rodriguez underestimates the impact of Christianity upon Roman slavery.

⁶⁴ Marc Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979), p.30 cited in Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.30

⁶⁵ Rodney Stark, *God’s Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), p.171 – 172 says ‘Although, as noted, there were enclaves of Muslims who continued to rob and attack Christians, most Muslims in the kingdom were peasants who reportedly were quite content under Christian rule. For one thing, there were no land-hungry Christians eager to confiscate their fields or animals. For another, taxes were lower in the kingdom than in neighboring Muslim countries. Fully as important, the Christian rulers tolerated the Muslims’ religion and made no effort to convert them. (So much for modern claims that the crusaders went in search of converts and new religious ‘markets.’) Finally, the Christians ‘administered justice fairly.’ Thus, a Muslim pilgrim who passed through the kingdom while returning from Mecca to Spain wrote that Muslims ‘live in great comfort under the Franks; may Allah preserve us from such a temptation...[Muslims] are masters of their dwellings, and govern themselves as they wish. This is the case in all the territory occupied by the Franks.’

⁶⁶ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*, p.29

⁶⁷ England’s *Domesday Book of 1086*, the oldest public record in England, indicates that 10 percent of the population was enslaved at that time.

- 1117 AD: Iceland abolishes slavery.⁶⁸
- 1120 AD: Bernard of Clairvaux, in a letter to Peter the Venerable, opposes the church practice of keeping serfs, which he sees as worldly and ungodly: “But what will you [Peter the Venerable] have to say about secular possessions which are held by you after the manner of secular persons, since in this respect you seem to differ from them in no way? For towns, villas, serfs, servants, and handmaidens, and, what is worse, the gain arising from toll duties, and practically all of this gain you accept without distinction, retain illegally, and guard in every way against those who would strive against your practice.”
- 1120 AD: The Council of Nablus in the Kingdom of Jerusalem forbade sexual relations between crusaders in the “holy land” and their female slaves, who were Muslims. If a man raped his own slave, he would be castrated. If he raped someone else’s slave, he would be castrated and exiled from the kingdom. The Council of Nablus was a council of ecclesiastic and secular lords in the Kingdom of Jerusalem that established the first written laws for the kingdom.
- 1171 AD: In Ireland a Christian synod at Armagh condemns the Irish involvement in the trade of English slaves, and orders all English slaves to be freed:

“When these things were done the clergy of all Ireland were called to Armagh, and upon the arrival of foreigners in the island after more negotiation and deliberation the opinion of all was as follows: On account of the sins of the people, especially because at one time they were accustomed to buy Englishmen both from merchants, thieves, and pirates, here and there, and to reduce them to servitude, this trouble had come upon them by the severity of divine vengeance, so that they themselves were in turn reduced by the same people to servitude. For the English people hitherto throughout the whole of their kingdom to the common injury of their people, had become accustomed to selling their sons and relatives in Ireland, to expose their children for sale as slaves, rather than suffer any need or want. Wherefore, it may be believed, just as they were sellers and buyers once, so now they deserve the yoke of servitude for such an enormity. And so it is decreed in the said council, and declared with the public consent of all, that wherever the English are throughout the island they shall be freed from the bond of slavery, and shall receive the liberty they formerly had.”

Edward Roger continues, “During the Medieval era there was no organized slave trade, but laws of serfdom and vassalage reduced many people to the effective position of slaves to despotic lords. Few rulers were prepared to reform society, since the feudal system supported the aristocracy, and unfortunately many Christian leaders were equally to blame for enjoying the fruit of feudalism with no thought for those who laboured to support it.” However, serfs owned their own persons, families, land, and property; they could sell surplus crops at market, and could purchase their freedom from their manorial lord. Ongoing Christian concern for the poor from the standpoint of policy – not just in the actions of individuals or small communities – continued in the form of the condemnation of usury, the debates about just prices and just wages, the role of the trade guilds, the rights of serfs, etc.

13th century AD

- In the early 13th century, Pope Gregory IX incorporates four just titles for holding slaves into Canon Law: slaves captured in war; slavery as a punishment for a crime; persons selling themselves into slavery presumably for indebtedness, **including a father selling his child into slavery; and being born to a mother who is a slave.**⁶⁹
- In the mid 13th century, theologian Thomas Aquinas accepts but shifts the Aristotelian view of slavery. He placed slavery in opposition to natural law, since in the state of original innocence it would not have existed. Hence, he removed any justification for slavery by ethnicity or religion. He accepted slavery as a punishment for crime, and the institution of slavery as a general consequence for sin.⁷⁰
- 1214 AD: The city of Korcula in modern day Croatia formally abolishes slavery.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ruth Halcomb, ‘Iceland – So Near and Yet So Remote’: <http://liveabroad.com/iceland>

⁶⁹ Ambe J. Njoh, *Tradition, Culture and Development in Africa* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), p.31

⁷⁰ Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.330

⁷¹ *Statute of the Town of Korcula 1214*, which derives from Slav common law; cf. “Razvitak hrvatskih otoka,” *Gradevinar* 52 (2000) 6, p.365 (in Croatian); <http://www.casopis-gradjevinar.hr/assets/Uploads/JCE-52-2000-06-08.pdf>

- 1256 AD: The city of Bologna places all slaves and feudal serfs within the city under ecclesiastical jurisdiction and grants them liberty, on explicitly Christian grounds, using public money.⁷² This is called the *Legge del Paradiso* or *Liber Paradiso* (Heaven Book) issued by the Comune di Bologna.
- 1274 AD: Landslova (Land's Law) in Norway mentions only former slaves, which indicates that Norway emancipated slaves and/or abolished slavery sometime before this.⁷³
- 1287 AD: Alfons III reconquers the Spanish island of Menorca, landing the Muslim Moors into slavery or offering them for ransom.
- "According to the terms of certain thirteenth-century capitulations in Iberia, fugitive Muslim slaves of the Vall de Uxo (moros de la Vall) could not be held captive once they reached their native communities in Spain."⁷⁴

14th century AD

- 1315 AD: French king Louis X condemns slavery and unreasonable vassalage, insisting his kingdom will be a dominion of free men: "As all men are by nature free born, and as this kingdom is called the Kingdom of Franks [freemen], it shall be so in reality. It is therefore decreed that enfranchisements shall be granted throughout the whole kingdom upon just and reasonable conditions." This effectively made any slave setting foot on French soil free.
- 1335 AD: Sweden (which included Finland at this time) makes slavery illegal.
- The crown of Aragon continued the development of sugar in Sicily, following the Normans and the French there. Due to the difficulty of growing and harvesting sugar, they used the now-recognizable combination of slaves, relatively large land plantations, and well-developed long-range trade. In relatively small but telling numbers, "From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, Christian Spain once again relied on this trading system [from the Black Sea region throughout the Mediterranean] to increase its slave population. The typical slave in Spain came from the Black Sea slave trade: Greece, Sardinia, Russia, the Crimea, and especially from among the Turks, Armenians, and Balkan peoples. There were also slaves from Africa and the Canary Islands."⁷⁵

The Early Modern Period

- 1416 AD: The Republic of Ragusa (now the city Dubrovnik in Croatia) abolishes slavery and slave trading.
- 1435 AD: Pope Eugene IV rebukes the Spanish for colonizing the Canary Islands and enslaving its people to produce sugar. In his letter *Sicut Dudum* to Bishop Ferdinand, he wrote, "...They have deprived the natives of their property or turned it to their own use, and have subjected some of the inhabitants of said islands to perpetual slavery, sold them to other persons and committed other various illicit and evil deeds against them... We order and command all and each of the faithful of each sex that, within the space of fifteen days of the publication of these letters in the place where they live, that they restore to their earlier liberty all and each person of either sex who were once residents of said Canary Islands...who have been made subject to slavery. These people are to be totally and perpetually free and are to be let go without the exaction or reception of any money..." Those who did not obey were excommunicated.
- 1588 AD: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth abolishes slavery.
- 1591: On April 18, 1591, Pope Gregory XIV issues Bulla Cum Sicuti, declaring that all slaves in the Philippines, who were natives enslaved by Europeans, were free. Slaveholders who disobeyed the order would be excommunicated. He also orders Catholics in the Philippines to make reparations to the freed persons.
- 1593: In England, in "1593, William Harrison not only denied the existence of English bondsmen but claimed that "such is the privilege of our countrie by the especiall grace of God, and bountie of our princes, that if any come hither from other realms, so soone as they set foot on land they become so free of condition as their masters, whereby all note of servile bondage is utterlie removed from them."⁷⁶

⁷² John T. Noonan, Jr. *A Church That Can and Cannot Change* (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), p.50 – 52.

⁷³ John Roach and Jürgen Thomanek, *Police and Public Order in Europe* (Taylor & Francis, 1985), p.256

⁷⁴ Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.23

⁷⁵ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.152.

⁷⁶ Seymour Drescher, *Abolition*, p.22

- France: “Across the English Channel, the “freedom principle” was invoked by Continental jurists with equal pride...In 1495, a recaptured black slave told his captors that he had been convinced by other slaves that if he reached French territory, a few days of residence would confer freedom. He offered this testimony in a Spanish court because he had been informed that such freedom was irreversible, even if he returned to Spain...By 1500, the French juridical tradition and the French courts had nationalized earlier urban freedom principles. France, too, could contain no slaves. The French jurist Jean Bodin treated it as a matter of historical record that when slaves reached his country, they were free...In Europe, he claimed, especially in France, slavery had once existed and then vanished.”⁷⁷
- The northern Netherlands boasted similar legal traditions. When a Portuguese ship with 130 slaves aboard was brought into the Dutch harbor of Middleburg in 1596, the town council decided to prohibit the sale of its cargo and to release the captives “into their natural liberty.”⁷⁸

Slavery had once been the worldwide norm. Freedom in northwestern Europe was in fact the “peculiar institution.” The tragic betrayal of this trajectory by Western Christians is explored further in another paper. Significantly, New World slavery and theories of race began in Portugal and Spain, where Christians had long-standing military conflict with Islam, were most influenced by Islamic views, and felt the most direct competition with Islam over trade routes to India. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire had effectively encircled European Christians and blocked them from the East. They sacked and conquered Constantinople in 1453 AD, one of many victories against Christian nation after Christian nation. As the strongest military power in the region, they restricted, regulated, and taxed almost all of Europe’s interaction – including trade – with the East, and profited from whatever trade did happen, making Europeans fear that they were funding future jihads. This sent Portugal and Spain searching for trade routes to the East around the Ottoman Empire. This is the context in which sanction from Pope Nicholas V (1447 – 1455 AD) gave Portugal the right to reduce conquered Muslims and pagans to slaves, and then sanctioned the purchase of African slaves from “the infidel” Muslim.

- The key crop was sugar. During the early fifteenth century, the Portuguese kidnapped people from the Canary Islands to work sugar plantations of the Azores and Cape Verde Islands.⁷⁹ The Portuguese and the Spanish both looked to Sicily as a model to follow in the Iberian peninsula and in their colonies, and in 1420 Prince Henry of Portugal called upon Sicily for sugar cane plants and experienced sugar growers.
- “The Portuguese had established a slave market at Arguin in northern Africa in 1448 shortly after they rounded the bulge of Cape Verde, and it is possible that Arguin supplied the first black slaves taken to Europe and America. In any case, on Cape Verde itself the Portuguese founded San Iago, a slave market from where slaves were taken to Lisbon and Spain. Portugal also had a slave base in the Kongo kingdom under the king of the Kongo, Afonso I, who converted to Christianity after becoming king in 1506. King Afonso wrote a letter to the king of Portugal attempting to stop the enslavement of his people, but his plea fell on deaf ears. Thus between 1513 and 1516 just under 3,000 slaves were transported to Lisbon and over 370 to Spanish ports. The impact of the voyages of Columbus on the slave trade, however, was considerable and tragic. On his third voyage of 1498 to the Caribbean, for example, Columbus spoke of the economic value of introducing African slaves to replace Indian labor, saying it could all be done in the name of Christianity.”⁸⁰ As a young man, Columbus was trained in the Madeira sugar trade. He became romantically involved with Beatriz de Bobadilla y Ossorio, governor of Gomera of the Canary Islands, who gave him sugar cane plantings; these plantings were the first sugar canes in the Caribbean in 1493. Europeans took sugar canes to Santo Domingo, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. In the 1530’s, the sugar crop was firmly established in Brazil.
- In 1527 AD, Estevan, the first identified Muslim in North America, lands in Florida as a Moroccan guide to the Spaniards. During the ensuing years of the slave trade, as many as 20% of West African slaves brought to North America are Muslim.⁸¹ West African Muslims and non-Muslims had a long history of enslaving one another, and selling slaves to Muslim traders on the trans-Saharan slave route. The Islamic West African states on the west coast of Africa at this time, with whom Portugal started to trade – Mali (1235 –

⁷⁷ Seymour Drescher, *Abolition*, p.23 – 24; cf. Peabody, *There Are No Slaves*, ch.1

⁷⁸ Seymour Drescher, *Abolition*, p.23

⁷⁹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.116 – 117

⁸⁰ Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.2

⁸¹ http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/timeline/p_1.html

1645 AD), Segou (1712 – 1861), and Songhay (1275 – 1591 AD) – already consisted of large slave populations. Approximately one third of their populations were slaves. The fact that Europeans could step into West Africa and immediately procure a vast quantity of slaves testifies to the well-developed system already put in place by Muslims, though of course it does not at all excuse the Europeans of the horrific sin of enslaving Africans. The global competition for plantation products like sugar, cloves, and cotton would also swell the Arab Muslim slave trade especially on the East Coast of Africa during the 1800's.⁸²

⁸² Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1989). For a summary of Islamic slavery from Mohammed to the present, see Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*, or my paper, *Slavery in Islam*.