



DO YOU BELIEVE?
A BOOK SERIES FROM RATIO CHRISTI

IS CHRISTIANITY A WHITE MAN'S RELIGION?

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 RATIO
CHRISTI

FAITH & REASON are at odds in our culture. For many, faith has come to mean little more than wishful thinking and blind belief. Such a concept is completely foreign to the pages of Scripture and historical Christianity. As Edward Feser notes, “In short, reason tells us that there is a God and that he has revealed such-and-such a truth; faith is then a matter of believing what reason has shown God to have revealed. In that sense faith is not only not at odds with reason but is grounded in reason.”

WHAT IS RATIO CHRISTI?

Ratio Christi, Latin for “the reason of Christ,” wants to help reverse this trend of anti-intellectual Christianity. We organize apologetics clubs at colleges, universities, and even for high school groups in order to strengthen the faith of Christian students and faculty and challenge the rampant atheism and secularism on most campuses. Our mission is to fill the intellectual gap, to make Christianity something worth thinking about, both personally and in the public square.

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Ratio Christi isn’t just another apologetics organization. We use our theological training to share the Gospel on college and university campuses across the globe. We reach the people that nobody else can – and we need your help.

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INTRODUCTION

In the insufferable heat that only my newly adopted city of Charlotte, NC can provide at this particular time of year, I was attending a Juneteenth celebration. The music was loud and the food was tasty. Walking around looking at the various vendors, I saw a picture that caused me to stop in my tracks: it portrayed a black baby in diapers being fed by a large spoon held by a white hand. In the spoon was a Bible, a Cross, and chains! I stared at the picture dumbfounded, not blinking even once. I knew instantly the notorious message: Christianity is a slave religion forced on black people by white oppressors. Even though I knew this was not true, I deeply understood the sentiment of the picture.

Growing up black in America, I'd heard the arguments against Christianity long before I became a Christian. At one time, I myself held some of those beliefs. Now, after living as a Christian and having studied apologetics, I know better. But there are many who do not know better. For instance, here is an excerpt of a letter my father-in-law wrote to his daughter Tina, my wife, after she tried to share the Gospel with him:

I know you are sincere. But honestly, the reason you're a Christian is that Christians kidnapped your ancestors from Africa and brought them over to America as slaves, then indoctrinated them with the religion of their conquerors. They forced your ancestors to accept Christianity because it served the interest of those in power. Christians are taught to uncritically accept what they're told, to have faith, and to obey and follow like sheep. The Bible says we should all obey and be slaves to Jesus. Sorry, but I think too much to have that blind obedience.

His thoughtful retort reinforces common misconceptions in the black community. They are built on several faulty assumptions that include 1) the Bible is a book for whites by whites, 2) Christianity is racist, 3) Christianity supports slavery, 4) Christianity was brought to Africa via white missionaries, 5) Christianity is incompatible with people of color.

Although false, these objections are bricks in an insurmountable wall to many blacks, who are simply not open to hearing the Gospel message unless that wall is torn down. This publication aims at tearing it down. We will respond to these assumptions by demonstrating that 1) Africa is very prominent in the Bible and that the people depicted in it

were by and large people of color, 2) Christianity not only does not support slavery, but was responsible for the abolition of slavery world-wide, 3) Africa was the center of early Christian thought and contributed significantly to Christian theology during its most formative years, and 4) Africa has the fastest growing population of Christianity today. In the end, we will look at the Christian view of man by looking at the Bible to see that the Christian message is truly an ethnically universal message.

Is the Bible Really a Book for Whites by Whites?

‘Race’ is a term invented by scientists in their effort to categorize humankind. This began with Swedish naturalist Carolus Linnaeus in the 10th edition of his work of *Systema Naturae*. Writing in 1758, he classifies the four basic races of humankind. He categorized humans as Red, White, Asian and Black along with stereotypes that we still hold to today. These were later expanded on and popularized by Charles Darwin. Most people do not know the full title of Darwin’s groundbreaking work, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*.¹ Published in 1859, Darwin’s work both popularized and reinforced those categories. The point is that ‘race’ as a term denoting the different ethnic groups among human beings is a rather recent invention on the historical scene. We therefore should not use the term ‘race’ when understanding the Bible, as this would be an anachronism.

¹ “*On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*,” accessed March 30, 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/item/06017473/>.

OLD TESTAMENT

A cursory understanding of the Old Testament answers the objection that the Bible is a book by white people for white people. Now, although I will use terms like ‘black’ and ‘white’ in this booklet, I stand by my assertion that ‘race’ is not a biblical concept (as noted above). Nowhere does the Bible mention ‘race’. God never deals with people according to ‘race’. Rather, he deals with people according to ethnicity. In the Old Testament for example, He deals with the Jebusites, Canaanites, Israelites, Amorites, etc. Whenever we see ‘race’ in the Bible, we are imposing a modern, foreign understanding and classification of people that simply did not exist during the time of the biblical writers (this is what I meant by ‘anachronism’).

The Table of Nations

It is important to understand ethnicity from a biblical perspective. We do that by examining a major biblical event in Genesis 6–9 which describes the great flood where God judges all mankind. Only Noah and his wife, along with his sons and their wives are saved from the flood by taking refuge in the ark Noah built according to God’s instructions. From those eight people, the entire world is populated. All of Noah’s sons had the same mother *and* father; so, they were of the same ethnicity. From them the entire world was populated: Noah’s son Japheth populated what is now the European nations, while Noah’s son Shem populated what is now the Middle Eastern nations, and Noah’s son Ham populated what is now the African nations.

Among the sons of Ham were Cush, Canaan, Egypt, and Put. Cush populated what is present-day southern Egypt, Sudan, and Northern Ethiopia. Put is associated with what is present-day Northern Africa, west of Egypt. Canaan is associated with present-day Israel while Egypt’s geopolitical boundaries remain.

All the sons of Noah were still descendants of Adam and Eve. Within their genes contained every skin color that we currently see upon the earth today. As they spread out to the various parts of the earth, those whose skin color was more hospitable to their current climate thrived and produced more children with those same traits. Over time, people in the various geographical regions reflected a skin color that allowed them the perfect

balance of Vitamin D intake and shielding from the harmful rays of the sun. Consequently, skin color is determined largely by geographical location.² Nevertheless, they were all descendants of Noah and his sons. Understanding this allows us to better understand who the people of the Old Testament were.

Key Players

THE CUSHITES

The Cushites—located near the horn of Africa—were not slaves, but rather a mighty kingdom. They made famous archers and warriors. In fact, they developed a reputation as bowmen throughout the Ancient Near East. In addition, they were often used as mercenaries throughout the known world, serving in the armies of Egypt, Rome, and Greece, to name a few.³

The Cushites' influence on the biblical landscape is broad having numerous mentions in the Old Testament. We see the Cushites serving in David's army, for example (2 Samuel 18:19–33). Later, in 2 Kings 18–20 and Isaiah 36–39, King Hezekiah forms an alliance with the Cushites, apparently persuading the Cushite king Shebitku to support them in fighting against the invading Assyrian army, thus showing the Cushites as playing a significant role during the entire reign of King Hezekiah. Furthermore, Tirhakah, king of Cush, is mentioned by name (2 Kings 19:9).

ETHIOPIA

Cush and Ethiopia are the same places in the Bible. Different translations use different words. The term Ethiopia was developed by the Greeks, and it literally meant “the burnt faces.”

EGYPT

Egypt is without a doubt one of the earliest and greatest civilizations of the ancient world. Egypt clearly fits the definition of a ‘black’ nation since it is located in Africa. Northern Africa is still Africa. Remember, skin color is largely determined by geographical location.

Egypt dominated the international stage during the pre-state life of Israel, and was a major geopolitical force throughout the Old Testament period. Egypt is where Abraham lived in a time of famine. It is in Egypt where Abraham's great-grandson Joseph was sold into slavery, and rose to a position equivalent to that of prime minister. Through Joseph's intercession, his father Jacob and the rest of the Hebrew patriarchal family living in

² Alan H Goodman, Yolanda T. Moses, and Joseph L. Jones, *Race: Are We so Different* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 102.

³ Frank M. Snowden Jr., *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983): 10, quoted in Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 39.

Palestine came to reside in the eastern delta region of Goshen, again as a result of famine. Initially treated favorably, they were later reduced to bondage, living and dying as slaves in Egypt for four hundred years. They cried out to God, and He ultimately delivered them with a mighty hand displayed through the ten plagues and various miracles, such as the parting of the Red Sea.

ISRAEL

The people of the nation of Israel were not blond-haired blue-eyed white people. There are excellent reasons to reject the Europeanized Israel. First, Abraham, the founder of the nation was from Ur, which is modern-day Iraq. Once again, skin color is determined largely by geography, so they would not be white. Second, the Jews were slaves in Egypt for four hundred years. There is no reason to suspect that they were not intermarrying and mixing with the Egyptians. Third, Israel left Egypt with an ethnically diverse group of people as we see in Exodus 12:38. It is almost certain that ‘a mixed multitude’ of foreigners in Egypt would include Cushites, since it was during this time that a great number of Cushites had arrived in Egypt in large numbers.⁴ Fourth, two of the twelve tribes of Israel were African. While in Egypt, Joseph married “Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On” (Genesis 41:50). Joseph had two sons by her, Manasseh and Ephraim (Genesis 41:51–52). They became two of the twelve tribes of Israel (Numbers 13:4–15). Fifth, they intermarried with the Canaanites around them, who were people of color. This is clear from passages such as Ezra 9:1–2 where God rebuked them for marrying the Canaanites because they led them astray from their God.

From a biblical perspective, Israel is at the center of the Old Testament. They are God’s covenant people and the nation through whom the Savior of the world Jesus would come.

HAM

As stated earlier, Ham is the father of the African nations. He is the father of Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. All of the sons of Ham founded nations after them. It is important to note that Ham produced offspring that were black. It would make sense that their skin color would correspond to the skin color of the people living in those regions today.

NIMROD

According to Gen. 10:8–12, Nimrod was the son of Cush. Remember, Cush was the son of Ham and his descendants populated what is now Sudan and parts of Ethiopia and southern Egypt in Africa. The people in this area closely related to black Americans since this region had physical features that we most commonly associate with being ‘black’.

Nimrod was “a mighty hunter before the LORD.” His name, as a household word, reached honorific levels. He was a kingdom builder: the dominions of Babel and Assyria

4 J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 67.

lay in the thrust of his labor. In fact, the prophet Micah calls Assyria “the land of Nimrod” (Micah 5:6). Both nations as massive empires hold prominence in world history and of the nation of Israel. The point is, these major super powers were started by an African, Nimrod. Hence, the claim that the Bible is written for whites by whites is patently false.

NEW TESTAMENT

As the New Testament era dawns, the educated people of the Roman Empire did not classify citizens and subjects either racially or ethnically. Instead, they put the people of the world into two categories: Greeks and Barbarians. A ‘barbarian’ was a person, whether cultured or not, who spoke a foreign language. The term ‘Greek’ did not refer to a people but rather to a community of various peoples who spoke the same language and embraced certain aspects of the same culture.

Roman attitudes toward all “others” reflected their belief in Roman superiority as a culture and not racial prejudice. Although the educated population of the Roman Empire tended to refer to themselves as Greeks, in reality, they were made up of dozens of different European, Asian, and African ethnic groups. The historical idea of Greeks just being white is not altogether true. They were much more diverse. In addition to the Roman Empire, this diversity was also alive and well in the Christian church from the day of its inception. We see this easily in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.

Pentecost

The Christian church began at Pentecost, which is recorded in Acts 2:8-11. When Peter addressed the crowd of Jews who were in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost, there were Jews present from all over the known world at that time. Each person there heard the gospel message from Peter in their own language, and God is performing a miracle to make this happen. The nations represented at Pentecost correspond to present-day Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Crete, along with African and Arab nations such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Muscat, and Aden.

These converts made up the church on day one. The first Christians were representative of the entire known world—and that includes African nations.

Key players

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH (ACTS 8:26-27)

Acts 8 records the account of the Apostle Philip and his encounter with the Ethiopian

Eunuch. This was after the resurrection of Jesus and during the time when the apostles were spreading the Gospel message to Israel and its neighbors. Here we see a representative of God, an angel, set up this divine appointment to meet “an Ethiopian eunuch.” The Ethiopian of Acts 8 is from the black African kingdom of Meroe, previously known in history as Cush. We know this because of the reference to Candace, the Queen of the Ethiopians. Candace is not a name, but a title. The title is an honorific title of the queen—a black African—who ruled over Meroe.⁵

Philip approached the eunuch and shared with him the good news of Jesus Christ. The eunuch was converted and baptized before returning to Meroe. According to tradition, he became bishop of the first Christian church in Ethiopia. He also preached the gospel in Arabia, where he suffered martyrdom.⁶

After the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, Christianity grew in Africa, and by the 5th century AD, Christianity was firmly established in his homeland.

SIMON CALLED NIGER (ACTS 13:1)

According to Acts 13:1, “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.” Of particular note was one of the teachers named “Simeon who was called Niger.”

Simeon was also a Jew, but his Latin nickname Niger, not only indicates he was of dark complexion, but also that he moved in Roman circles. Simeon was a teacher and prophet in the church at Antioch. The point is that the leadership in the sending church of the Apostle Paul reflected a broad diversity of ethnicity and social standing.

JESUS’ ANCESTRY

Normally, when the Bible gives a genealogy, it omits women since ancestry is traced through men. However, when it comes to the genealogy of Jesus, the Bible makes an interesting exception. The first verse of the first book of the New Testament (Matthew) starts with the genealogy of Jesus, through which we can make four notable discoveries. First, we see that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham (Matthew 1:1). We established earlier that Abraham was from Ur of the Chaldeans, which was an area populated by Nimrod, son of Cush. Second, we see that Jesus came from the lineage of Judah (Matthew 1:2). Judah married a Canaanite woman (Genesis 38:7; 1 Chronicles 2:3, 4). The Canaanites were descendants of Canaan, who was the son of Ham, who was the father of the African nations. Third, Jesus was a descendant of Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute who helped save the Hebrew spies who were scouting the Promised Land, which would become Israel (Josiah 2).

⁵ M. G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 121.

⁶ “Candace,” Bible Gateway, accessed November 7, 2014, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/all-women-bible/Candace>.

Fourth, before she married King David, Bathsheba was married to Uriah the Hittite and was probably a Hittite herself, a descendant of Ham. Jesus' genealogy is ethnically diverse. This all leads to the conclusion that the "white" Jesus is a recent invention in the history of the world. The portrayals of a 'white' Jesus was not emphasized until the fifteenth century AD.

IS CHRISTIANITY REALLY RACIST?

Let's examine the charge of Christianity being racist. Although it is true that there have been Christians who have been racist, just as there have been racist Muslims and Hindus, it is not true that Christianity itself is racist. For that to be true, one must identify a doctrine that is racist. Instead of going through the many passages of the Bible that allegedly claim to support racism and refute each one, I will present you with a tool you can use to evaluate all charges of racism used against the Bible and Christianity.

Responding to Arguments of Racism

Using the Acronym, **J-BIRD** (pronounced "Jaybird") will help anyone respond to all arguments used to try and demonstrate that either the Bible or Christianity are racist.

Jews were not White

We discussed this earlier, but this is a common misunderstanding. Critics will look at the Bible and assume that the Jews were white and the Canaanites were black. Using that assumption, they find all kinds of alleged examples of racism. The problem is there is no biblical evidence to support such an assumption.

Let's recap how we know that the Jews were not white or European: (1) Abraham, the founder of the nation of Israel, was from Ur which is modern-day Iraq; (2) the Jews inter-married with the Egyptians during their four hundred years of captivity; (3) the Bible states that Israel left Egypt with an ethnically diverse group of people; (4) two of the twelve tribes of Israel were partially African due to Joseph's married to an Egyptian; and (5) once in the Promised Land, many Israelites intermarried with the Canaanites around them, who were descendants of Ham.

Biblical Interpretation

The Bible has been used to justify slavery and racial discrimination against blacks. However, just because someone uses the Bible to justify their actions does

not mean that the Bible teaches what they claimed. This is the exact case with racism and the Bible. The Bible does not encourage or teach racism of any type. Those who claim otherwise ignore the basics of biblical interpretation.

Accurate understanding of the Bible requires (at minimum) consideration of the genre of literature, literary context, historical background, and grammatical structure of that passage. If we ignore any one of these, we will miss the intended truth of the passage. By contrast, ignoring the context of a passage leads to ‘proving’ anything. Improper interpretive methods may lead to all kinds of error—including the arrival at the exact opposite meaning which the writer intended! A simple example is a partial reading of Psalm 14:1 which includes the proposition, “There is no God.” The full statement however says, “The fool says in his heart, ‘there is no God.’” Quite the difference! Misinterpretation of the Bible is a common error committed by those who use the Bible to justify their unbiblical acts. Hence, there is often not a rational, but a moral problem which lies at the feet of misinterpretation.

Any interpretation of passages throughout the Bible must fit into context of God’s over-arching covenant which unifies both the Old and New testaments. If Scripture is infallible, then there is unity and cohesion instead of contradiction and obscurity. In brief, unclear passages must be interpreted in light of clear passages. God is not schizophrenic: He would not advocate both the support and condemnation of slavery. The Book of Philemon serves as a prime example. In it, the Apostle Paul urges a Philemon to receive back his runaway slave Onesimus, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. A slavery advocate could ignore this clear teaching by claiming Paul advocates for slavery in the letter. When taken in context, the Book of Philemon is actually an admonition against it.

Race is not a Biblical Concept

We have already discussed ‘race’ as a concept that is extrabiblical. Although reading the concept of race into Scripture may be tempting, understanding the Bible means understanding the cultural contexts of the passages we read. This requires us to avoid projecting our notions of race onto its pages. We must continually remind ourselves that ‘race’ is not a biblical concept and that God does not see us as we have been conditioned to see each other.

Difference between Christians and Christianity

If you are tempted to attribute the injustice of slavery and racial discrimination to Christianity, resist the temptation. There have also been scientists and atheists who have taught the inferiority of one racial group over another based upon science. The fact is that men are sinners and will twist any recognized authority to support their view, even when that view advocates the enslavement of others.

Christianity as created by God and untampered by men is perfect, but Christians are not. Christians, like everyone else, have sinful tendencies and are able to commit wrong-doing, which is grievous to God. Nevertheless, let us place the blame where it belongs: sinful men. *Christianity is based on the teachings of Christ and the Bible. It has no responsibility for human beings enslaving or discriminating against their fellow man.*

DOES CHRISTIANITY REALLY SUPPORT SLAVERY?

Before we talk about Christianity and slavery, it is important to understand slavery in context of world history. Without that context, we cannot understand the role that Christianity played in the abolition of slavery worldwide. This section will provide a look at that role. However, it is not the intention here to absolve anyone of their role in the practice of slavery, it is only to give a broader context in the history of humankind.

The History of Slavery

The history of slavery is as old as the history of mankind. It did not begin in America or even the UK. It goes back to the dawn of mankind. Stronger nations enslaved weaker nations. And because there have always been stronger nations and weaker nations, there has always been slavery. Generally speaking, before the modern era, Europeans enslaved other Europeans, Asians enslaved other Asians, Africans enslaved other Africans, and the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere enslaved other indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.⁷

ANCIENT HISTORY

Going back to the 1700's BC, the ancient Babylonians clearly had slaves. They had rules of conduct outlined in the Code of Hammurabi, who was the king of Babylon from 1792 – 1750 BC. According to the laws, society was broken down into three classes: the propertied class, freedmen, and slaves.

The Egyptian empire engaged in slavery. This is even recorded in the Bible where the Israelites were slaves in Egypt for 400 years. In fact, a cursory search of the word “captivity” in the Bible will show numerous instances of slavery. All major nations before and after Israel engaged in slavery.

During the classical period in Greece from 200-400 BC, a third to half of the population consisted of slaves. Not much later during the first century, the Roman empire depended heavily on slavery. In fact, one in two people living under the Roman empire were slaves! All

⁷ Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*, (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), 113.

slaves and their parents were the property of the owners, who could sell or rent them out at any time. Their lives were harsh: they were often whipped, branded and cruelly mistreated. Their owners had the right to kill them for any reason without punishment.⁸ So pervasive was slavery, that most early societies lacked a word for freedom. Slavery was normal. Indeed, it was “nasty, brutish, and short,” to borrow Thomas Hobbes’ prominent phrase. Now, slavery thrived not only in the ancient world, but all the way through to the modern era.

EUROPEANS ENSLAVING EUROPEANS

In Europe, Europeans enslaved other Europeans. Of note, the word “slave” came from the word *slav*. The *slavs* inhabited a large part of Eastern Europe and were taken as slaves by Muslims in Spain during the ninth century—hundreds and hundreds of years before the first colonists arrived in the Americas. Slavery also existed in Sicily, southern Italy, Russia, southern France, Spain, and North Africa.⁹ Most of these slaves were ‘white,’ hailing from areas of Eastern Europe or near the Black Sea. The peoples of the Balkans were enslaved by their fellow Europeans, as well as the peoples of the Middle East for at least six centuries before the first African was brought to Europe or the Americas.

AFRICANS ENSLAVING AFRICANS

Africans, like Europeans, enslaved their own also. The region of West Africa from which Kunte Kinte supposedly came from, was one of the great slave trading regions of the African continent before, during, and after the arrival of the so-called white man. It was the Africans who enslaved their fellow Africans, selling some of their slaves to Europeans and Arabs and keeping others for themselves. White merchants came to Africa and bought slaves from African chiefs who had enslaved other tribes. In fact, even during the peak of the Atlantic slave trade, Africans retained more slaves for themselves to work on their own plantations than they sent off to Europe or the American colonies!¹⁰

ARABS ENSLAVING AFRICANS

It is common knowledge that professing Christians engaged in slavery. What is not as commonly known is the truth that Muslims were just as vested, if not more so, in slavery as Christians were. It is true that millions of blacks died on ships that carried slaves from Africa to the New World. It is also true that even more Africans died in route to their slave masters as their Muslim slave traders marched them across the Sahara Desert to Arab countries.¹¹ The mortality rate was morbidly high: by some accounts, one in two slaves

⁸ PBS, “The Roman Empire in the First Century: Slaves and Freeman,” accessed March 31, 2022, https://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/slaves_freemen.html.

⁹ Mintz and S. McNeil, 2018, “Slavery in the Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Worlds”, Digital History, accessed March 31, 2022, https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=3027.

¹⁰ Martin A. Klien, *Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage, and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asian*, (Madison: University Press, 1993), 10.

¹¹ Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*, (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), 125.

died while making the journey across the desert.

AFRICANS ENSLAVING WHITES

Another little-known fact is that there were Africans who took white slaves in Africa. The first whites came to Egypt as slaves. At least a million Europeans were enslaved by African pirates between 1500 and 1800. Moreover, some European slaves were still being sold on the auction block in Egypt, years after the Emancipation Proclamation freed blacks in the United States. Slavery has been an equal opportunity institution.¹² Now we turn our attention closer to home. Let's look at America.

NATIVE AMERICANS ENSLAVING NATIVE AMERICANS

Following the travails of the rest of the world, the Americas manifested slavery long before the first white man arrived from Europe. Well-armed native groups made war against weaker native groups, killing some, capturing as many as possible, and selling thousands to European traders once they arrived in the new world.

When the first whites arrived, many native tribes allied themselves with the white man against their sworn native enemies. Long before any negative history with the white man, native tribes engaged in generations of the same with neighboring tribes. Later, native tribes often raided other native tribes with the whites by their side.

NATIVE AMERICANS ENSLAVING BLACK AMERICANS

Paul Chatt Smith of the Comanche tribe and curator of The National Museum of the American Indian writes concerning the Trail of Tears, where native tribes were relocated from their ancestral land to reservations in other locations. In *The Smithsonian*, Smith sheds light on this historical event of which few are aware. During their relocation, these native tribes brought with them their black slaves. It was in fact common for native tribes to have black slaves. Smith states that the Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole) were deeply committed to slavery, established their own racialized black codes, immediately reestablished slavery when they arrived in Indian territory, rebuilt their nations with slave labor, crushed slave rebellions, and enthusiastically sided with the Confederacy in the Civil War.¹³ Smith also says that they were willful and determined oppressors of the blacks they owned, were enthusiastic participants in the global economy driven by cotton, and believers in the idea that they were equal to whites and superior to blacks.

¹² Ibid., 112.

¹³ Ryan P. Smith, "How Native American Slaveholders Complicate the Trail of Tears Narrative," *Smithsonian*, March 6th 2018, accessed December 29, 2021, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-native-american-slaveholders-complicate-trail-tears-narrative-180968339/#QwSXLxFSpsPUVsSw.99>.

BLACK AMERICANS ENSLAVING BLACK AMERICANS

There were black slaves who were often freed by their master or who purchased their own freedom. Of the freed blacks, the overwhelming majority of them owned black slaves themselves. Free black slave owners lived in every Southern state that allowed slavery, even in Northern states. In Louisiana, Maryland, South Carolina, and Virginia, free blacks owned more than 10,000 slaves, according to the census of 1830.¹⁴ Census records record the race of the heads of household as well as the status and race of all members of the household, free or slave.

In Charleston, SC, by 1800 nearly one out of every three colored heads of household were recorded with slave property. Between 1820 and 1840, the percentage of slaveholding heads of family ranged from 72.1% to 77.7%.¹⁵ There were thousands of blacks in the colonial south who were commercial slave owners, just like their white counterparts. An estimated one-third of the free persons of color in New Orleans were slave owners and thousands of these slave owners volunteered to fight for the Confederacy during the Civil War.

Christianity and the Abolition of Slavery

It wasn't until the rise of Christianity that the institution of slavery was seriously questioned and challenged. It was the Christian framework that set the foundation for the abolition of slavery, not just in America and the UK, but worldwide.

THE REASON FOR THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

There is an often-overlooked passage in the first chapter of the Bible. It is during the creation account of man that the Bible makes the following statement, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). That one little statement is packed with theological significance that would be the basis for the attack against slavery. Let's examine its significance. God put His 'spark' in man. That is what separates man from all the rest of God's creation. We are most like God: we have intelligence, free will, and self-consciousness. We are made up of a body-spirit unity that is found in no other creation. We have the ability to directly commune with God on a spiritual level. We are the crown of God's creation.

What makes this important is that slave and slave master are equal in God's eyes. Both have the image of God in them, and it is that image that makes them equal. Slavery is objectively wrong because it creates a system of humans-as-property by other humans. During the Atlantic Slave Trade, Christians began to realize that slavery was incompatible with their Christian faith. So, they started a movement to abolish slavery based on this

¹⁴ Larry Koger, *Black Slave owners : Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1985), Kindle, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid., 24.

idea of the image of God in man—an idea present only in the Christian worldview.

Abolition began in Philadelphia where the Quakers banned the ownership of slaves by its members. This reverberated in England where Evangelicals in the Anglican church—notably William Wilberforce in Parliament, took the issue to the general public with a decades-long political struggle to get the British government to ban the trading of slaves.¹⁶

The abolition movement picked up momentum with other nations joining in. America stamped out slavery in the Philippines, the Dutch stamped it out in Indonesia, the Russians in Central Asia, and the French in their West African and Caribbean colonies. Germans, in their East Africa colonies, often hanged slave traders on the spot when they caught them in the act.¹⁷

THE RESULT OF THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

To recap, slavery has been common to all civilizations and major religions. It manifests itself in ancient as well as modern civilizations. In brief, it was normative, and rarely if ever questioned even as it spread on a global scale. Sadly, this institution is as old as mankind, having commonality in Europe, Africa, North America, South America and Asia. Where there were humans, there was slavery. In fact, slavery is still happening in places in Africa, where Christians are enslaved by Muslims. But that is now the exception. It is no longer normal or even tolerated; it is overwhelmingly understood as a malady on the face of humanity by people all across the world.

Only recent upon the historical scene under the influence of Western civilization in general and of Christianity in particular, has a moral revulsion to slavery developed. It was birthed in the simple yet powerful idea that man is made in the image of God and that all men deserved to live in dignity. It was this idea that decried the immorality of slavery, and it was this idea that destroyed it worldwide.

¹⁶ Sowell, 130.

¹⁷ Ibid., 116.

WAS CHRISTIANITY REALLY BROUGHT TO AFRICA BY WHITE MISSIONARIES?

We may not separate Africa from Christianity if we want a true understanding of either. Christianity is not foreign to Africa. Rather, they are linked at their core.

Africa and the Early Church

Africa was one of the only places on earth that was Christianized without influence from Rome once it became the official religion of the Roman empire under the rule of Constantine. Before Europe had embraced Christianity, it was already flourishing in Africa. In fact, it was Africa that was the source of Christianity for Rome, not the other way around. The common assumption that Europe first influenced Africa is the opposite of reality. Africa was the center of Christian thought and theology. It is clear from the archaeological and manuscript evidence that there were thriving early Christian communities in Africa. The following demonstrates this fact.

ARCHEOLOGY

There are a number of archaeological finds to support the idea of large Christian communities in Africa.

OLD DONGOLA

Old Dongola was the capital city of the early Christian Kingdom of Makuria, located in Sudan. Makuria was a Nubian kingdom (500 – 1560 AD) that had emerged from the ancient Kingdom of Cush.¹⁸ The kingdom converted to Christianity in the mid-sixth century. Excavation digs at the city discovered a number of churches with one being a cathedral and the largest Nubian church ever found. The cathedral was found to have been decorated with paintings depicting monumental biblical figures. Dongola flourished as a Christian center until the 14th century. This was long before the first settlers stepped foot in the New World.

¹⁸ Makuria," n.d. Historical Wiki, accessed March 30, 2022. <https://historica.fandom.com/wiki/Makuria>.

FARAS

Faras was an ancient Nubian city. In 1961, Polish archaeologists discovered the Faras Cathedral. Its walls were decorated with 169 magnificent paintings of dark-skinned Nubian kings, queens and bishops, along with biblical figures and saints.¹⁹ Near Faras, archaeologists found a cave with writings of an eighth century Nubian named Theophilus that include the Christian Nicene Creed, stories from the lives of the saints, and various other texts, including the beginnings of the four Gospels.²⁰ Archeology has also revealed pottery shops which seemed to specialize in Christian-themed crafts such as bowls and pendants with Christian symbols on them.

BETA SAMATI

Beta Samati was part of the Empire of Aksum and was one of Africa's most influential ancient civilizations. Aksum ruled over the region between 80 BC to AD 825 and was one of the ancient world's major powers – conquering surrounding regions and trading with the Roman Empire. Aksum became Christian around 400 AD.²¹ Today, the town lies near Ethiopia's border with Eritrea. The area contains one of the oldest churches in sub-Saharan Africa and was inhabited for some 1,400 years before vanishing into the dusty highlands of northern Ethiopia around AD 650. One of the church entrances contained the inscription “for this entrance Christ be favorable to us,”²² indicating the culture practiced of early Christian traditions.

MANUSCRIPTS

We have early manuscript evidence written in African languages. The fact that we have almost one thousand New Testament manuscripts written in Egyptian Coptic dialects indicate that there must have been a significant Christian presence within the Egyptian community. Of particular note, we have Egyptian Coptic New Testament manuscripts dating back to AD 325 – 350, many of which are available for viewing online.

Once such example is The Garima Gospels which are two ancient Ethiopian Gospel Books. Garima 2, the earlier of the two, is believed to be the earliest surviving complete illustrated Christian manuscript. It contains the Gospel accounts of the New Testament written in Ethiopic. According to radiocarbon dating, the manuscript was written between 390 – 660 A.D.²³

19 Elizabeth Isichei. *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1996), Kindle 711.

20 Ibid., 741.

21 Katie Hunt, 2019, “The International Team of Archaeologists Conducted Excavations at the Site in 2011, 2012, 2015 and 2016,” CNN. December 11, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/12/11/africa/ethiopia-buried-town-discovery-beta-samati-scen/index.html>.

22 Ibid.

23 “African History,” 2021. “The Ethiopian Bible Is the Oldest and Most Complete on Earth,” November 23, 2021, <https://www.africanhistorybooks.com/2021/11/23/the-ethiopian-bible-is-the-oldest-and-most-complete-on-earth/>.

AFRICAN CHURCH PERSECUTION

Persecution of African Christians has a long history. In the third century, they were persecuted by the Romans. In the seventh century, it was the Arabs. In the nineteenth century, it was the colonial powers. There are places in Africa today that enslave and persecute Christians under the banner of Islam. Early Christians were faithful and willing to give their lives for their faith. During the Roman persecution, they were martyred for their refusal to recognize the Roman emperor as god. Also, the African Christians in general were known for their strict morals and especially for the way in which they treated other people. They would not steal or do anything which would harm their fellow person.

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES ORIGINATE IN AFRICA

Contrary to popular beliefs, and certainly contrary to the teaching of black nationalist groups such as the Nation of Islam, many Christian ideas and practices traveled north to Europe from the Nile and the Numidian traditions. This idea is supported by Christian scholars such as Thomas C. Oden. In his book *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, he writes, “My core hypothesis is that much intellectual history flowed south to north: from Numidia to Sicily to France and Italy. It flowed from the Nile to the Euphrates and the Danube. It flowed from Pelusium to Gaza to Cappadocia.”²⁴ Oden chronicles how Christian intellectual history matured in the valleys and cities near inland river systems up and down the Nile, and throughout the mountains, deserts, and valleys of the Maghreb. African intellectual Christians were forced to flee their homeland under persecution first from the Romans, then the Vandals, and finally under the forced threat of slavery, exile, or death by the Arabs. As will be shown, it was during Christianity's first millennium that African thought shaped and conditioned virtually every diocese in Christianity worldwide.

As Christians moved north from the areas along the Nile in order to escape persecution, Christianity that was once indigenous to Africa produced refugees in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries in Spain, Gaul, Sardinia, Sicily, Italy and Britain.²⁵ Their influence spread largely through quiet, inconspicuous, and scholarly monastic communities from Egypt and the kingdom of Numidia, which today marks the geopolitical areas known as Tunisia, Libya, and parts of Morocco.

Africans were informing, instructing, and educating the very best of Syriac, Cappadocian and Greco-Roman teachers. In time, this flow of intellectual leadership matured into the ecumenical consensus (including the East and West churches) on how to interpret sacred Scripture and hence the core of Christian dogma.

²⁴ Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity*, (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2007), Kindle, 575-6.

²⁵ Ibid., 573-6.

African Church Fathers

Some of the most influential Christians were Africans. Their contributions to the formation of essential Christian doctrines and systemization of Christian theology are still the major doctrines that Christians recognize today. We will examine a few of those early contributors to the Christian faith.

TERTULLIAN (C 160 – C 240)

Tertullian was born in Carthage, which is present day Tunisia in Africa. As a young man, he indulged in his passions with all the fervor youthful lust provides. He attended the games where, to the delight of spectators, gladiators killed each other and where criminals were eaten alive by wild beasts. Yet among those macabre sights, his eyes beheld the execution of Christians. Struck by the courage with which slave men and little slave girls faced hideous deaths, he investigated their odd, novel faith. Soon after, he himself believed and turned his budding talents to writing in defense of this victimized sect. His impact has been monumental: it was Tertullian after all, who first clearly articulated the doctrine of the Trinity, an essential doctrine (to say the least) of the Christian faith.²⁶ In addition, Tertullian also wrote several works attacking the heresies of his day while expounding upon orthodox Christian beliefs. Christians owe their creedal affirmation of the Trinity to an African theologian.

ORIGEN (185 – 254)

Origen was born in Egypt to Christian parents. His father was martyred in the year 202 AD. when Origen was eighteen years old and a very devout Christian. He allegedly castrated himself when he was still a young man in order devote himself fully to the study of the Scriptures and of God (this was condemned by the church at large). According to tradition, he wrote six thousand works, and is known for his allegorical interpretation of Scripture. He was martyred in AD 250 after being terribly tortured.²⁷ He was cruelly kept alive to be continually tortured in an effort to get him to deny his faith, but he held firm unto death.

ATHANASIUS (296 – 373)

Athanasius was an Egyptian who remained true to his Coptic heritage. He was called the “Black Dwarf” by his enemies because he was short and dark-skinned.²⁸ Athanasius spent long periods of time in the Egyptian desert, either in hiding or in forced exile. He was exiled five times by four Roman emperors, spending seventeen of the forty-five years

²⁶ Carl Davis, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, (Unknown, 2010, Kindle, 218).

²⁷ Ibid., 386-387.

²⁸ “Athanasius,” Christianity Today. August 8, 2008, accessed March, 20, 2022, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/athanasius.html>.

he served as bishop of Alexandria in exile. Athanasius was a staunch defender of Christian orthodoxy against the rising tide of heresies. The Nicene formula was so keenly refined by Athanasius that it found its way into the center of ecumenical orthodoxy. The Nicene Creed is referred to today by many Christians as a test for orthodoxy.

In one of his letters to the churches in his diocese, Athanasius listed what he believed were the books that should constitute the New Testament. Though other such lists had been and would still be proposed, it is Athanasius's list that the church eventually adopted, and it is the one we use to this day.²⁹

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354 – 430)

Augustine was born in the province of Numidia, which is present day Algeria. It is here he served as bishop of Hippo, which is the ancient name of the modern city Annaba in Algeria. Augustine of Hippo was one of the most important and influential theologians and preachers the church has ever produced. The significance of his contributions to Christianity cannot be overstated, as much of today's orthodox theology can be traced back to him. He consolidated theological issues of his time into a comprehensive system.³⁰ This systematized theology serves as the basis for much in Protestantism and Catholicism. Except for the Bible, his works were the single most resourced documents used in the Reformation.

African Influence on Christianity

Christianity would not exist as we know it if it were not for the contribution of Africans. We will now take a look at how that influence has manifested.

AFRICA WAS THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Africa was the birthplace for universities. The library in Alexandria was the model for university libraries all over Europe where it was unmatched for five centuries. Alexandria was the leading academic center of the Ancient world, and it is in this environment that Christian scholarship was born. Christianity would not have its present-day acceptance if it were not for the intellectual understandings that developed in Africa between 50 and 500 AD.

Christian leaders in Africa figured out how to best read the law and prophets meaningfully. They also incorporated the ability to think philosophically and were able to teach the tenants of the faith cohesively, long before anywhere else.³¹

Bible translation first matured in Africa. Both the Septuagint and Old Latin Bible

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Davis, 664.

³¹ Oden, 225.

versions were produced in Africa. The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, and was the translation used by Jesus and the disciples. The Latin translations became important as the Christian faith spread throughout the Roman empire among non-Greek reading peoples.

African sources shaped early Christian doctrine as well. It was during the time of martyrdom that orthodoxy was refined, and hence it was Africa that gave birth to the enduring doctrines of creation, providence, sin, atonement, resurrection and the church—its liturgy, eucharist, teaching, and discipleship. Western Christian dogma was formed with precision in Africa before being received by the church at large.³²

AFRICA WAS VITAL IN CHRISTIAN COUNCILS

As the church grew and spread, there needed to be a way for everyone to agree on the teachings of the church. Africa was the region that first set the pattern and method for seeking wider ecumenical consent on contested points of scriptural interpretation.

Matters were first discussed in regional councils. The earliest of these occurred more in Numidia, the Roman province of Africa and Egypt, than anywhere else. Consensual or ecumenical Christianity was essentially molded in Africa before Europe through this highly dialectical, interactive, and consultative process. We have records of these regional African synods dating back to 248 AD.³³

A century prior to the First Council of Nicaea (325), these African churches were firmly established and courageously led while actively growing in vital worshiping communities. Much agreement about the divinity and humanity of Christ at the first council in Nicaea had already been determined in the regional African councils, since the ecumenical councils were making decisions based on regional councils that preceded them.³⁴ It was their advice to the councils, based upon their rigorous examination of Scripture, that convinced them to adopt orthodox teaching.

Christianity in Africa Today

It should now be crystal clear that the church in its inception was not white, nor was it European. Instead, it was a diverse mix of human beings with heavy African influence. Nor is the Christian church today primarily white or European. As a global religion, Christianity is represented by people of all colors, nationalities, and ethnicities. In recent centuries, however, Africa has lost much of its earlier prominence. This is due to both the Protestant Reformation and the Roman Catholic Church, which have veered away from their African roots. However, there is a clear return in Africa back to its own Christian roots.

³² Ibid., 357.

³³ Ibid., 386-7.

³⁴ Ibid., 395-6.

According to *The Christian Post*, more Christians live in Africa today than on any other continent. Boasting 631 million devotees, Africa has a population which is 45 percent Christian.³⁵ In addition, according to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, in 2014, Latin America passed Europe and became the continent with the most Christians. Now, just a few years later, Africa has passed Latin America. By 2050 there will likely be more Christians in Africa (1.25 billion) than in Latin America (705 million) and Europe (490 million) combined.³⁶

The Christian Post states that Zambia is the African nation with the highest percentage of Christian residents, with around 95.5 percent of the people living there following the religion. Zambia is followed by the Republic of Seychelles, where 94.7 percent hold to Christian beliefs.³⁷

There are now thousands of denominations that have grown from African soil, most of which are independent, making it the most diverse and fastest-growing movement within Christianity. African Christians are once again providing leadership in global Christian forums both within and across churches and in Christian organizations in Africa and the West.

I saw this with my own eyes when my wife and I visited Kenya for two weeks just a couple of months before writing this booklet. I was very surprised to see all of the churches in various denominations. I saw them in the heart of the capital city of Nairobi and in the remote cities and villages as we traveled to places such as the savannah of the Masai Mara. I was so surprised that I asked our tour guide, who told me that eighty-five percent of the country was Christian. But this is not some foreign religion exported to Africa by means of European missionaries, although there are certainly a number of those. This is the religion of Africa. Thomas Oden goes as far as to call Christianity an indigenous and traditional African religion, “Christianity cannot be traditionally African, according to this stereotype, because it was supposedly imported from Europe. Wrong on both counts, because the ecumenical consensus was largely defined in Africa! And if twenty centuries of presence do not make a religion traditional, what is to be done with Islam, which is younger than Africa by six centuries?”³⁸ The assumption that Christianity is a white man’s religion, or that it is incompatible with people of color has been proven wrong by literally millions of living African Christians.

35 John Paul Sunico, “More Christians Now Live in Africa Than Any Other Continent in the World,” March 18, 2020, accessed March 31, 2022, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/more-christians-now-live-in-africa-than-any-other-continent-in-the-world-225928/>.

36 Todd M. Johnson, Gina A. Zurlo, Albert W. Hickman and Peter F. Crossing, “Christianity 2018: More African Christians and Counting Martyrs,” Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (MA: South Hamilton), accessed March 31, 2022, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320788300_Christianity_2018_More_African_Christians_and_Counting_Martyrs

37 Sunico, *Ibid*.

38 Oden, 771-2.

IS CHRISTIANITY REALLY INCOMPATIBLE WITH PEOPLE OF COLOR?

The unity of man is an overall theme of the Christian faith. It is found in the main biblical motif which is God's desire for the salvation of the whole human race. It goes back to the creation of man in the image of God. Though man fell away from God due to sin, the grand narrative of the Bible is the redemptive story of God reconciling man back to Himself. We see the seeds of this narrative in the life of Abraham where God promised him, "And in you *all* the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). From here, this theme carries through from the old covenant in Moses to the new covenant in Christ and the Church.

Regarding the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah, speaking of the nation of Israel says, "I will also make You a light of the nations. So that My salvation may reach to *the ends of the earth*" (Isaiah 49:6). God even speaks specifically of African nations, "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my worshipers, My dispersed ones, will bring My offerings" (Zephaniah 3:9-10).

Regarding the New Testament, Christ gives the Great Commission just prior to His Ascension into heaven: "Go, therefore, and make disciples *of all the nations* (Gk. *ethnoi*), baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you," (Matthew 28:18). When a vision of heaven is granted to the Apostle John, he sees God's desire for all of mankind: "I looked, and *behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb," (Revelation 7:9).

The message of the Bible and Christianity are the same: Jesus came to restore us to a right relationship with God. His blood was shed for all mankind. He came to remove the shackles of sin that have kept every one of every color as slaves to sin. Jesus came not to enslave men but to set them free and when the Son sets you free, you are free indeed!

CONCLUSION

The charges of racism remind me of a home I lived in during my last two years of high school in Georgia. Whenever I walked into the kitchen and turned on the lights, dozens of roaches scrambled into hiding. Roaches have their comfort zone in the dark; they flee the light. Truth—like light scattering roaches—scatters the darkness. Lies hide and then emerge in dark places (like the Internet) where they often go unchallenged.

Hopefully, everyone reading this can now see the lies for what they are: Christianity cannot be racist. Racist is contrary to the One who Created us in His Image. He is the lover of our souls and wants us to come to Him just as we are created, regardless of our ethnicity. Even more, God rejoices in our diversity!

It is my prayer that blacks who have strayed from God will return like the prodigal son, realizing that He loves us in all of our beautiful blackness. Like the father of the prodigal son, God is waiting with open arms to welcome us home.

FURTHER READING

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H.C. has articles published in a scholarly journal on the topic of *Racism and the Bible*. He is also the author of *The African American Guide to the Bible* which deals with the inspiration of Scripture, the Black presence in the Bible, the Bible and racism, and the unity of man.

H.C. is also the founder of *Giving An Answer* ministry (www.GivingAnAnswer.org), which focuses on giving evidence for the Christian faith. He speaks at churches and at various apologetics conferences. He currently resides in Charlotte NC with his wife and their four children.

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