

**RACiBB- Remembrance Service
of 200 years
after the end of Slave Trade
in the British Empire**



**The young and strong were taken,
the old and weak were left behind.
Several African generations suffered
from the brutality of slavery,
and the generations after it
have not recovered from it, yet.**

1) Who are Slaves?

Slaves are people who are owned and controlled by others after they have been captured and/ or sold into slavery, or they have been born into slavery. They are being treated in a way that they have almost no rights or freedom of movement and are not paid for their labour, aside from food, clothing and shelter needed for basic subsistence. Slaves were considered to be “things” or “property”. Where slavery has been a legal or customary practice, slaves were held under the involuntary control of another person, group, organization, or state. The legal presence of slavery has become rare in modern times, as nearly all societies now consider slavery to be illegal, and persons held in such conditions are considered by authorities to be victims of unlawful imprisonment. A specific form, known as chattel slavery, or anus slavery for the butt impaired is defined by the legal ownership of a person or persons by another person or state, including the legal right to buy and sell them just as one would buy or sell any common owned object. The 1926 Slavery Convention described slavery as "...the status and/or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised..." Slaves cannot leave an owner, an employer or a territory without explicit permission (they must have a passport to leave), and they will be returned if they escape. Therefore a system of slavery requires official, legal recognition of ownership, or widespread tacit arrangements with local authorities, by masters who have some influence because of their social and/or economic status.

2) The differences between the ancient and the colonists' slavery

Virtually, every major ancient civilisation depended heavily on the service of slavery. Conquered people were set to a variety of tasks by their masters. Scripture states that the Hebrews became slaves of the Egyptians under whom they carried out forced labour “in mortar, in bricks, and in all manner of service in the field” (Exodus 1:8-14). But they had their own names and their own culture as their civilisation grew while they were learning from the Egyptians. It was servitude which was not based on colour of skin or nationality. In the Roman empire of Paul’s days, half of the population or more may have been slaves according to historians’ estimate. But they still had their sense of freedom and the way of conducting their own lives in the culture in which they were born. Slaves’ labour varied widely, depending on the interests of the ruling masters and the ability of individual slaves. Joseph had been sold as a slave to the Egyptian Potiphar, but Potiphar did not treat him as an inferior person. Rather, he made Joseph an overseer of his household with a high level of responsibility which probably helped Joseph to gain the self-esteem of himself which he did not receive from his own brothers (Genesis 39:1-9). Likewise, Daniel and other young Hebrew males were brought in captivity to Babylon. Here, also, there was no sense of inferiority towards them. But rather, the masters gave them self-worth identity, and they were trained for a high level of service in the government (Daniel 1:1-7; 18-21). Later, the Romans preferred Greek slaves as mentors or instructors to their children. However, the majority of slaves in the ancient world were little more than property to be bought and sold as needed. Male

slaves were often assigned to construction projects or the mines, where they worked to exhaustion. Female slaves or maid servants were sold to men for service to their wives and daughters. Some were like labourers or hired hands who were paid for their work and free to leave when the job was finished (Exodus 21:1-11; Matthew 20:1-15). Jacob was such a servant for a time to Laban (Genesis 29). Jesus spoke of a household servant ploughing or tending sheep and preparing a meal (Luke 17:7-10). The colonists' racial slavery was very different from this ancient slavery. The servants had a menial, dead-end job. Their masters assigned them tasks that no-one else wanted to do; it was the dumb work, the dirty work or the dangerous work. The slaves were called out at all hours of day and night to satisfy the wishes of their slave-masters, and even many the slave-masters gave extra-hard work to the men so that when the male slaves were absent, they the slave-masters could rape the slaves' wives. In addition, they even often called the married slave-wives or their daughters to have sexual intercourse with them at any time they wanted, also when the male slaves who were the husbands or fathers, were there. Also many prominent white men, even presidents, were involved in this society sin. They had little hope for advancement. In fact, the slaves did even count themselves blessed when they could stay at one place with their family. Plenty of them had to stand in line watching helplessly how their child or spouse was being sold. It even mattered little to the masters whether the slaves did live or die. But of course they did matter to God, and to Him their work mattered, too. In their feelings of disappointment and frustration, the slaves trusted in God. There is subjection in sociology which is called "institutional threats". This includes cultural symbols, codes of behaviour and ideologies that are associated with each social institution, like each government has a symbol of authority, unity and dignity. Flags symbolize nations, the crucifix is a symbol for Christians who believe that there is salvation in Christ Jesus, and the wedding ring is symbol of marriage. Through this bad slavery of the colonists, the colour of people's skin became a symbol of superiority or inferiority. The white immigrants who worked long and hard in this "new world", had a hope of a better future, either for themselves or at least, for their children. Through hard work and perseverance, many made it for better times. But for Africans, however hard they worked or persevered, the situation did always remain the same or did even get worse. The restrictions of persons to a special area and the limiting of freedom of choice happened on the basis of skin colour. And it does not make sense for us to expect a fast change for such a horrible lineage of Africans who have been through oppressions, depressions and all kinds of abuse, and whose freedom from colonisation is not even up to 70 years of age. But we believe that the increasing of Martin Luther King's dream is getting clearer and louder, and it brings more equality and social justice for all. May God help us to contribute to the cross culture kingdom of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ! Christians, let us not leave togetherness to the entertainment world! In this history of slavery and servitude, Elvis Presley who was known as "the king of Rock'n Roll" in the 1960ies, did everywhere he went say that black and white people should be treated the same, otherwise, he wouldn't sing. There was more togetherness in the entertainment world; many preachers stayed silent.

3) Why do we think that black would be evil?

Much of the colour prejudice facilitated the active enslavement of Africans. And unfortunately, they did it even in the name of Christianity. Probably, the greatest act that crystallized the justification of European slave trading was the Catholic priest Bartholomo de las Casas' writing in his encyclical in the name of the papacy that "these people (the Africans) were without souls and suitable for the torturous work in the Americas". The result was that the Western Church justified and sanctioned prejudice and so, slavery, in the *carte blanche* exploitation. This marked the very beginning of colour prejudice. It was at this point in history that the Western culture determined all black as evil and satanic and all white as good and of God, based upon the assumption of Padre de las Casas. It came from the ancient traditional church which said: "God cursed Ham and made him black". Church preachers have invested too much into the lies of the Hamitic curse. In fact, the sons of Noah Shem, Ham and Japheth do not present three different races. It is an absurdity of no small order to claim that Noah and his wife would have produced an offspring that would constitute three distinctive racial types. It does not make sense to say logically or scientifically that within the ten generations from Adam to Noah, and without the introduction of any outside factors, a genetic change would have taken place that allowed one man (Noah) and his one wife who had the same race like him, to produce children who were racially different. This is the logic which many of the early church fathers wanted the modern reader to believe. Ham had a son whose name was Canaan, and the land Canaan is called after him and his descendants who lived there. The question of thought, here, is: If Canaan would have been cursed, why would God have sent Abraham to go and live among people whom He had cursed? Why would He have said to Moses many years later: "I'm bringing the children of Israel into the Land of Promise, a land that is flowing with milk and honey"? And there is no doubt that the spies who went into the land, saw it even more rich, blessed and fruitful than Egypt (Number 13:28-30). So there is no reason that we can say Canaan would have been a land of curse. Its people were, at that time, more civilized than many of the peoples around them. For example, they could build strong cities as we see in the walls of Jericho. These people were people of colour. Somebody may ask me: Peter, what does "curse be to Canaan" mean to you (Genesis 9:25)? I would answer that for me, it is a conditional curse, but not because of colour. When the descendants of all Noah's sons would have been willing to walk with God, they would have found themselves blessed (Genesis 9:1-17). Only those who departed from God did experience the curse and the replacement of their land. The Bible says in Jeremiah 18:7-10: "If at any time I announce that a nation or a kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if the nation I warned repents of its evil, I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it".

4) An attempt to stop slave trade

Naturally, the persistence of the slave trade throughout this period constituted the worst problem of Christianity being spread across Africa. But many true Christians and genuine children of God prayed and asked for God's intervention that God should heal the wounds of slave trade in this world and restore the nations through bringing equal rights and justice. That prayer was heard in heaven! There is a place in Bromley in Kent where there is a protected tree known as the "Wilberforce Oak". This place marks the spot where Wilberforce took the decision to use his position in the parliament by God's grace to fight against slave trade. The abolishment of slave trade finally triumphed in the British parliament 1807 through him and a group called "British Anti-Slave Movement". In 1833, the English parliament by law stopped slavery, itself. This was only three weeks before Wilberforce died, and it was a godly triumph after his years of fighting against slavery. Many members of the Anti-Slave Movement were not Christians, but they feared God even more than many Christians at that time. The Christians, who compromised with the slave traders, deceived the common people and took their wealth to bring it to their nations. The evidence of this is still seen, today, in the Buckingham palace, in the Vatican of the Catholics and in the Western world. The anti-slavery movement with its definitely godly Christian attitudes provided a favourable atmosphere and contacts for African intellectual liberationist literature to emerge. One of the earliest samples of this was an anti-slavery pamphlet that was published in London in 1787 by a man named Ottobah Cuguano from Gold Coast under the title "Thoughts and sentiments on the evil and wicked traffic of the slavery and the commerce of the human species, humbly submitted to the inhabitants of Great Britain". As a matter of fact, the abolishment of slave trade was only held as a law in the British colonies. Other nations were still practising slave trade and increasing in their wicked merchants. The money that could be made by the trade, attracted the most cruel and mercenary individuals. Finally, those opposed to slavery, concluded that economic forces favouring slave trade had to be met by other economic forces. So if a new source of income could be established, slavery could become less profitable than other forms of commerce. Therefore, after much prayer was considered, the missionaries who became the address of God in this situation concluded the best way to combat the slave trade was to provide an attractive commercial substitute. They realized that Africa could export raw materials rather than the Europeans transporting the Africans, themselves. Therefore, the missionaries added commerce and reborn of civilization to the African people. Many missionaries entered into commerce. The Basel Mission, for example, used trades to support its work in the areas now known as Togo and Ghana. The church missionary society developed a cotton industry in Yoruba land that is known, today, as Nigeria. Such experiments got established in many parts of Africa. Some were more successful than others, but eventually, the concept lost its appeal. The Christian merchants in Europe were known to be complaining about the missionaries hindering them to do what they wanted to do in Africa, while the pure-hearted missionaries, also, complained about the evil example of nominal Christian traders. One of the most famous exponents of this was the evangelical work of *David Livingstone*

(1813-1873) who earnestly believed that “the only way to end the (Arab) slave trade in (East) Africa was to open the interior to commerce”. The Arabs were responsible for exporting about 20.000 slaves, every year. Although David Livingstone was a traveller and explorer, he never lost his missionary vision. And he was a friend of the African people like Jesus, Himself, could have been unto them. In all this, Christ’s already-not-yet-kingdom was being built.

5) Counting your advantages

In the midst of all struggling to survive, we struggle with our self, asking: “Who am I?”, “Where am I from?”, “Where am I going?”, “What is my purpose here on earth?” and “What can I do?” All these questions are about one’s identity, and this identity comes from our self-worth which is governed by natural parental authority. Many native Africans of that time had been torn away from their parents, so maybe these questions were bothering their minds. But even though they had been cut off from their motherland from their parents’ love and care, through the grace of God, many of them learned to count their advantages in the disadvantages in which they found, themselves. One of the remarkable pioneers of this time was *Samuel Adjai Crowther* (about 1806-1891). He was born in Yorubaland in what is now Nigeria. Like many other West Africans, Crowther had been torn from his family by slave traders. The raiders captured the boy who was about fifteen years old and forced him into a slave ship. Providentially, the ship that supposed to take Crowther to slavery to America was returned back to Africa by a British ship. So, Crowther was released in what is now Sierra Leone. This area had been settled by former slaves from America who had planted the first Baptist and Methodist churches, there. The young Crowther converted into Christianity, and he joined the Anglican Church. Like many other young Africans, he was eager to learn, and soon, he became a teacher, himself. As time went on, it happened that many nameless British missionaries tried to establish a community inland at the Niger River. Their goal was to establish an economic alternative to slave trade. They built ships and selected skilful individuals to help them. The crew then sailed up the Niger River with full enthusiasm and assurance. But unfortunately, their plan failed, and many of them lost their lives in the river. Crowther’s passion for those who had lost their lives gave birth to hope in him to see the opportunities of how the dream of these missionaries could still come true. After much time of prayer, he was fully convinced that this evangelisation of interior Africa would have to be done by Africans who probably could cope better with the environment than foreigners. Therefore, he concentrated to achieve this goal. Among his first converts were his own mother and sister whom Crowther had not seen in twenty years. But as he used the joy of the Lord to count his advantages, he became the first leader of the Niger mission and the first black bishop in the Anglican denomination (1864) across Sierra Leone and Yorubaland. Crowther is being remembered in church history as someone who travelled widely to evangelise and established Anglican churches first in his own home base Abeokuta, and then, also in Logos and Ibadan, using a ship called “The dayspring”. He preached in almost all these settlements along the Niger River. In 1856, Christaller was travelling and came to meet Crowther, whom he

highly honoured and respected. Elsewhere in West Africa, the church of Jesus Christ was being established and became stronger. In 1822, the American Colonisation Society founded the “Republic of Liberia” as a place to send free slaves from the United States. And many former slaves settled, there. In fact, the oldest Baptist congregation in Africa was begun in Monrovia, Liberia, in 1822 by Lott Carey, a former slave from Virginia. Friends, if we are talking about our Christian heritage, no matter how one divides it, advantages and disadvantages will always contribute to our better future, if we are willing to learn, because the downfall of one is the uprising of others. Let us learn from the examples of these ordinary people who determined by the grace of God to do extra-ordinary things for the expansion of cross-culture identification in Christ Jesus! Even today, we may have different opinions about social injustice, but the reality is, true Christianity condemns it, all. It has been said that one cannot look to a fallen man for improvement of human behaviour. And for this very reason, Jesus came to our earth. Let us learn these godly examples to improve others who are around us, today, and are facing social and economic evil. For if the good ones don’t do anything, evil increases.

6) Whether black or white

Those who feel that skin pigmentation is to be ridiculed, are doing nothing else than calling God a fool and saying that He did not know what He was doing when He caused people to adapt to environmental changes and develop different colour hues. Probably one of the deepest throes which a person can endure is to slowly die a spiritual death and not knowing it. Many of us have allowed bigotry and racial prejudice to separate us from the true Gospel which Jesus gave His life for and which is found in the Bible: Christianity means humanity for all races, for God became human. The creation of the first human (Homo sapiens) took place in the heart of the biblical Africa, which was called at that time “Eden”. The three rivers spoken of in Genesis 2:10-14 verify early human existence in this area. To substantiate the biblical story of creation, archaeologists and scientists confirm without doubt that the oldest form of human life has been discovered around the Olduvai Gorge in the present-day Tanzania. It was from this point that mankind found the way to other parts of their known world. Therefore, during the Bible days, when civilization was high in Kemet (Egypt), there was little known activity on the continent which we know today as Europe. Civilization came late to the Caucasian of the North, and that which came was brought forth from “Akebu-Lan”, Africa, which means “the Mother of all Lands”. This was probably known in the ancient world as Paul said: “From one mankind has God made every nation of human beings that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this that mankind would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, we are His offspring” (Acts 17:26-28). Isn’t it amazing that the ancient Greeks knew that all human beings are the offspring of God, the creator? In Paul’s conversation with the Athenian philosophers, he spoke about their altar which they had built for “the unknown God”. These people of Athens had been raised in a religious con-

science. Therefore, it is significant that Paul called their attention to the consistent biblical theme that in the beginning, there was one human race and one family. And we as Christians, if we want to know our roots and help heal the wounds of people in our societies and in our world, today, we should remember that out of one blood, God made all of us.

7) Why slavery?

In the face of tragedies that came through slavery, such as loss of health, self-worth identity, loved ones and wealth, the natural question at that time and now can be “Why?”. Why did all this happen? The ancient man Job had struggled with this question “Why?”, as he also tried to make sense of his suffering (Job 7:20.21). So did Jesus’ disciples when they came to a man who had been born blinded. “Who’s sin was that?”, they asked Jesus, “The man’s or his parents’?” (John 9:1.2). The disciples were asking “Why?” in the sense of curiosity. They were asking “Why?”, because they thought that somehow sin had to have been involved. And because of another intellectual level, they asked “Why?” for a purpose what had been the significant for the man’s blindness. In applying, Jesus borrowed an answer from Job. He assured His disciples that through the man’s blindness; the glorious works of God would be made evident (Job 9:3-5). Then, Jesus fulfilled that claim by healing the man on both a physical and a spiritual level. Job, too, eventually realized the awesome glory and grace of God as a result of his suffering (Job 42:1-6). Could this probably offer some comfort to the former slaves and their nations? I believe that it offered comfort and hope in them. And it can offer comfort and hope for us, today, too, who are facing senseless tragedies. Pain is real and does have to be denied. In many of our modern sociological, psychological and theological seminars, evil is being seen as people’s inner conflicts, not that there is a devil loose in the world. God is being seen as a good God, and people deny that God is also judging evil. They even deny the existence of suffering as it is recorded in the book of Job. But the suffering of Job deals only with one family, while the suffering of slavery went on for hundreds of years and afflicted the continent of Africa and the race of black people as a whole. People can say the story of Job would not sound real. But they cannot deny that the suffering of slavery was very real. Even so-called Christians had slaves and did let them suffer. This is not of God, and this is not only inner conflicts. If we do believe in God, we must accept the reality of evil. Otherwise, we will lack morality and deny the power of God and maybe even turn against Christ and His church.

8) What walls will Jesus tear down, today?

Dear friends in Christ, what ethnic or racial walls would Jesus tear down in our modern world in which we live? Perhaps, He would ask all black people who still have prejudices because of slavery, to forgive as He, also, forgives. And probably He would tell the white people everywhere that they are innocent of what their forefathers did. And there is no need to have a guilt conscience and therefore, practice prejudices. Maybe Jesus would even make friends with the Palestinians in Israel and reach out to Muslims

in Iraq and Iran. And also in North Ireland, He would ask the Catholics and Protestants: "Why are you destroying one another in my name?" The truth is, racism or ethnic hatred have never been God's will. Jesus stood against traditional prejudices wherever He encountered them, as Matthew who himself was a Jew, showed us in his gospel: The heart of Jesus for all nations. May I say that Christianity is not a culture, but it can exist in every of culture. In every culture, there are both godly elements and ungodly elements. Therefore, the Gospel stands in judgement for all societies, cultures and political systems. Christianity means that God came to seek for mankind, and it is not man trying to find God. Therefore, God became a human being, and not human beings make themselves god. So, let us forget the past whatever it might be, and give our present into the hands of Jesus, the One Who holds the future!

Yours in His service, F. Peter Arthur (Pastor of Akebulan- Global Mission e.V.) in co-operation with RACiBB (African Christians' Council in Berlin/ Brandenburg e.V.)



PENGUIN CLASSICS

MARY PRINCE

The History of Mary Prince