Religion, Slavery and African Diaspora: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the interplay between African traditional religion, Islam, and Christianity in shaping slavery and the African diaspora, highlighting a shift from humane master-slave relationships to dehumanization during medieval Christian Europe, culminating in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Through historical texts, it observes that slavery predates Christianity and Islam, with universal prevalence and local variations before its abolition. Both religions initially set guidelines for master-slave relationships rather than opposing slavery outright, with Islam fostering relatively harmonious relationships with sub-Saharan African slaves from the 9th century AD, unlike medieval Christianity, which, from the 15th century AD, enabled exploitative practices and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The study concludes that Islam's humane attitudes curtailed the formation of an African diaspora within the Muslim world, while European Christians' exploitative actions established the African diaspora in Europe and the Americas, perpetuating systemic racism against the Black race.

Keywords: Christianity, Africa, Slaves, Dehumanization and Islam

Introduction

The Negroes are the aborigines of the African continent. They first inhabited the Saharan region, which was very fertile land, when they began agricultural activities in about 10,000 BC, as the Sahara then turned to savanna as it received increased rainfall (Beck & Black, 1997:95). Within this period, till about 4000 BC, when the Sahara began to desiccate, the autochthones of Africa established contact with people in other parts of the world. In so doing, there was frequent knowledge sharing, which in turn helped in the enhancement of their cosmology and agricultural activities. Indeed, the unfortunate desiccation of the Sahara frustrated the development. With the desertification of the Sahara, the inhabitants deserted the large area and scattered into different areas on the continent searching for a conducive environment for agriculture; thus, many moved east into the Nile Valley with the belief of continuing their agricultural activities with the water of the River Nile, and others moved south, and there they were blessed with many rivers and good rainfall that aided their agricultural activities.

Further, the Sahara desert, which engulfed about 31% of the total area of the African continent, did a great disservice to those African aborigines that moved south as a result of the barrier it created. The Sahara Desert alienated them seriously from their kith and kin that moved east and settled in the Nile Valley as well as other parts of the world for thousands of years, thereby forcing them into autarky development, which indeed retarded their level of development vis-à-vis other parts of the world when they re-established major contact from about the 9th century AD. Although one can claim here that the desertification of the Sahara was a blessing in disguise, as it actually helped in preserving the originality of the Black race, which is now in abeyance among many of those that resettled in the Nile Valley and continued their relationship with other parts of the world ever since about 10,000 BC.

These Africans south of the Sahara, who had maintained the originality of the Black race, are the people of Africa that this study concentrates on. The sub-Saharan African people are predominantly of the Black skin race before their major reestablishment of contact in the 9th century AD. Although research had suggested that there were skeletal contacts that existed between sub-Saharan Africa and other races before the 9th century AD, especially those that existed close to the Red Sea and River Nile, which emptied into the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. According to Beck & Black, the Arab people through the Red Sea had penetrated into sub-Sahara Africa in about 1000 BC, a development that led to the establishment of the Kingdom of Aksum, in the area presently known as Eritrea and Ethiopia (Beck & Black, 1999:199). In the same vein, Hall and Kirk had observed that, shortly after 1500 BC, when iron was discovered in Anatolia, it spread up to the Nile "River beyond the frontier of the Egyptian Kingdom; through the Phoenician and Greek traders, it came to their settlements along the North African Coast, and from the Greek and Persian traders, it entered into Ethiopia (Hall and Kirk, 2005:281). Although it is noted that in about the 2nd century BC, the knowledge of iron had been known in West Africa by the Nok people in the northern part of Nigeria, and possibly this iron knowledge came into West Africa from the East African route via Ethiopia.

Interestingly, Anene's study on slavery and slave trade had suggested that, through these skeletal contacts between sub-Saharan African people and other parts of the world, slave trading activities that involved the movement of Black slaves into other parts of the world had existed before the 9th century AD. In his world,

> The first Africans to be sold out of Africa must have been the Nubians who lived South of Egypt. From Egypt, they were sold to Europe and the middle East; hence the constant reference in the literature of Greece and Rome to Ethiopian slaves. During the Carthaginian period in North Africa vast numbers of slaves were employed in the cultivation of estates, and labour requirements stimulated trade in slaves between North Africa and the Sudan. The extent of the Negros slave trade is not clear but detailed studies of cemeteries have yielded many skulls of a negroid character. The Carthaginian armies included many Negroes. Carthaginian demands for slaves from the Sudan were to initiate the tragic traffic which lasted till the end of the nineteenth century. The best known centre for the Carthaginian traffic was the Fezzan which linked the territories north and south of the sahara. The North African littoral was progressively littered with slaves markets to supply the domestic needs of Greece and Rome (Anene & Brown, 1966: 96).

The above assertion is clear that before the 9th century AD, when sub-Saharan Africa's major contact with the wider world began, there were pockets of her contact with other parts of the world that equally recorded pockets of trade transactions, even on slaves from sub-Saharan Africa. However, the above assertion did not suggest that there were internal slave trading activities in sub-Saharan Africa that necessitated the slave trade interaction between sub-Saharan African people and the wider world before the 9th century AD.

The study intends to make a clarification concerning the slavery institution that existed in sub-Saharan Africa before her contact with the wider world. Contrary to what some scholars had suggested, the knowledge of buying and selling ves, i.e., the commodification of slaves, was alien to the people of sub-Saharan Africa, not until their contact with the wider world. However, like Anene, it had equally pointed out that slavery was in no way peculiar to African communities, and the retention of captives in battle was a recognised practice all over the world before modern times, and ancient records of the Assyrians, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Hebrews, Persians, Indians, and Chinese, among others, made references to slaves and the types of labour on which they were usually employed (Anene & Brown, 1066:92). The study also made further observations on the mode of slave acquisition outside sub-Saharan Africa in the earlier time and stated that the Greek and Roman people had a strong slavery institution on which their economy depended and that most of the Greek slaves were captives of the Greek pirates operating within the Mediterranean and who were later sold into slavery. In a similar note, Beck and Black had observed that Greek slaves were brought to Rome, and many of them became tutors of children of Roman aristocracy. Also, they had equally noted about the internal slavery trading exercise in Rome, as they stated thus, "Wars

in the 2nd century draw many small cultivators into military service for long periods of time. Some never returned, and their wives or widows could not always resist the temptation to sell out to prosperous purchasers (Beck and Black, 1999:118-119).

These assertions had clearly shown that the institution of slavery had developed very well in other parts of the world before the 9th century AD. However, the fact that due to the prevailing circumstances at that time in the socio-economic and political activities of these great empires and civilisations, the need for slaves was a continuum till they established contact with sub-Saharan Africa at different times. The establishment of contact with the sub-Saharan African people introduced the act of buying and selling of slaves into that part of the world. This is to say that the system of buying and selling of slaves was externally induced on the people of sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, no scholarly work had convincingly documented that the system of buying and selling slaves was part of the activities in sub-Saharan Africa before their contact with the wider world. As noted, their contact with the wider world varies from minor to major. Even before the major trans-Saharan trade, which started in about the 8th and 9th centuries AD, there had been a minor existence of contact between the Berber inhabitants of the Maghrib through the Tuareg nomadic pastoralists and sub-Saharan African people. This contact had existed for a long time and led to the establishment of the city of Auodaghost in about the 5th century BC. Their contact had been noted to be violent in most cases, leading to war captives being taken. ken. And these captives probably formed parts of the Black slaves traded in the Mediterranean communities in about the 5th century BC with the Roman Carthage as household slaves for their exotic appearance (en.m.wikipedia.org.trans-saharan trade).

Further, these minor contacts between the wider world and the sub-Saharan African people predated the establishment of the famous Ghana Empire and the Shonahona-speaking empire of the Great Zimbabwe. The establishment of these great empires underscores the beginning of stable agricultural societies, control of trade routes with permanent village settlements, and complex social organisation in sub-Saharan Africa. However, this period could be the departure point for internal slavery activities in sub-Saharan Africa, for domestic exercise and for commercial purposes with the wider world. As Bansahhad observed, slavery was necessitated by economic incentives related to land for cultivation, military purposes, and administrative duties (Bansah, 2020). As the people of sub-Saharan Africa became more sedentary, there became a need for specialisation and slaves to perform some duties. The sophistication of sub-Saharan African communities following their contacts with people of the wider world revolutionised the area in line with the spirits of their visitors. The demand for slaves by these traders rejigged the original slavery institution in the area, and its commercialisation heightened the slavery activities and gave impetus to the trans-Sahara slave trade through the long-distance trade. With the establishment of long-distance trade, the act of buying and selling began internally with standby foreign buyers that moved the slaves into their countries where they were needed for various economic purposes. According to Hopkins, "long-distance trade in West Africa involved re-exports and multilateral relations and was equally as complicated, protracted, and risky as the better-known triangular trade…" (Hopkins, 1973:60). The trade, as he further observed, tended to cater to the needs of

relatively high-income groups because only prosperous consumers could afford to pay prices that took account of the scarcity value of items that were unavailable locally. The establishment of long-distance trade in sub-Saharan Africa opened the area to sophisticated trade with the wider world and contributed to the creation of societal classification. However, classification creates the instrumentality for slavery, and the high demand of slaves by their foreign trading partners transformed the slavery institution.

Indeed, by the period of major contact with the wider world, the sub-Saharan African slavery system had been enhanced, and it underscores the records of slavery activities in the earliest empires in the area, such as Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and Kanem Bornu, among others. As Antwi observed, "the West African Kingdom of Ghana had already traded in slaves before it fell to the Muslims in the eleventh century" (Antwi, 2018). However, the coming of the Arabs into sub-Saharan Africa stimulated the slave trade. The links between West Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East were multiplied and sustained by caravans that dominated the Sahara trade. Slaves were the greatest inducement for camel-men to risk the hazard of the trans-Saharan journey, and a large quantity of slaves were demanded; thus, skyrocketed the activities of slavery in the region till her contact with the Europeans in the 15th century, which itself began a new trajectory on the slavery activities in the region and which form a main focus of this study. Interestingly, the Arab Islamic religion added to the increment of the slavery activities in sub-Saharan Africa, and so did the European Christian religion from the 15th century, and the activities of the purveyors of these religions in Africa alienated Africa's traditional worldview on slavery due to their inordinate need for African slaves for their socio-economic and political gains in their home countries; hence, their relationships with African slaves in their different countries orchestrated Africans in the diaspora from antiquity.

Traditional African Religion and Slavery

Before the establishment of Christianity and Islam, the sub-Saharan African people, like other parts of the world, had established an indigenous religion known as African traditional religion. The religion has two fundamentally different types of divinity: the one creator God, who is usually remote from daily religious life, and the many lesser gods and spirits made by the creator god, who are constantly involved in everyday religious experience (Andah, 1988:91).

This fact is crucial to African traditional religion and helped in the explanation of the African concept of the supernatural, ideas about man, society, and nature, and together, they give meaning and significance to African life. However, Opoku, in his study, had identified the root of these ideas in African culture when he observed that, "the unseen is as much a part of reality as that which is seen; in other words, the spiritual is as much a part of reality as the material, and there is a complementary relationship between the two with the spiritual being more powerful than the material" (Opoku, 1978:8). This assertion underscores the purpose of religion in Africa, which is to order our relationship with our fellow men and with our environment, both spiritual and physical, with the aim of creating a harmonious relationship between man, the spirit world, nature, and society (Opoku, 1978:13). In essence, religion binds man to the unseen powers and helps him

form right relations with these nonhuman powers; it also binds him to his fellow human beings and acts as a cement holding our societies together and provides the necessary support and stability for our society. Indeed, religion rounds up the totality of African culture, and the culture of a society is the way of life of its members: the collection of ideas and habits that they learn, share, and transmit from generation to generation (Linton, 1936).

As noted, in African traditional religion, there is a strong relationship between man and the spirits, and in that relationship, the spirits were regarded as more powerful, and so, they are worshipped so as to gain their benevolence in man's day-to-day activities in the physical world. Wariboko agreed to this claim and equally noted that another quest for religion is explanation, prediction, and control of these worldly events, with an emphasis on manipulation of gods for these worldly benefits of prosperity, health, and children (Wariboko, 2007: 100). The above assertions underscore the fact that in African cosmology, the spiritual controls and determines the affairs of the physical, and man is equally seen as possessing both the biological (material) being as well as a spiritual (immaterial) being, with only the material part that dies while the spiritual (the soul) continues to exist. This belief that a community of the dead exists alongside the community of the living and that there is a mutually beneficial partnership between them influences so much of man's relationship with his fellow man, and this will help in explaining the nature of the slavery institution in sub-Sahara Africa.

The foregoing is a clear testimony that African cosmology values life, thus holding man with dignity. In what had been mistakenly regarded as a slavery system in sub-Saharan Africa. Pawnship and adhesion, the victims were not treated as chattel slaves but as servants that could possibly become parts of the family of their master; thus, they were treated with dignity as servants. A slave is owned, and he subjected his will to his master, but a servant could not be owned perpetually. The servant only performs services for the master at an agreement (Antwi, 2018). The pawnship that existed in sub-Saharan Africa, the victim is a form of collateral for a loan collected by the person or the parents. The services rendered by the victim cover the interest of the said loan, and when the loan is paid back to the lender, the victim ends the service and returns to their home, while for adhesion, the victim seeks protection. It is a voluntary engagement, where the victim voluntarily seeks protection from a person he feels can give him such protection, and the victim in return serves the man. It is a symbiotic relationship where each gets what it wants, and in the contrary, for example, at the demise of the man providing security, if the person seeking protection feels he is not getting it any longer from the man's family, he can move to someone else, and so, he could not be regarded as a slave. And this was why Imbua (2012) noted that, "increasingly, scholars have come to support the view that the word slavery should not be applied to what existed in Africa before the trans-systems.

In the same vein, war captives are a universal practice from the time of old till the present. In sub-Saharan Africa, most communities had a war god, responsible for their success and even failure on the battlefield. As noted, in African cosmology there is a strong relationship between the spiritual world and the physical world, and the spiritual world has the upper hand in that relationship, as it is believed that the spiritual world controls the physical world, and so, during

war with a neighbouring community, the war deity plays a pivotal role, as it is being consulted and promises made for success in the battleground. When the warriors returned victoriously, they kept to their promise to the deity, which they believed led them victoriously, and most of the promise is the sacrifice of war captives to the deity, a mark of appreciation and gratitude to the spiritual world for their benevolence. Also, some war captives are kept in the community for special purposes, and this is done after due consultation with the community deities and oaths taken by the war captives for a strong allegiance to the community. Anene agreed to this assertion when he noted that

> Captives of war from other groups could be sold, could be sacrificed, and could be eaten. Those who were absorbed into the economic life of a family did not have a very bad time. They worked for their masters but also were given their own piece of land. They often became so linked with the families of their masters that there was hardly any difference in the manner of their living and that of their master. In some cases they could marry free-born women…(Anene, 1966).

The issue here is that war captives are owned by the community that captured them during battle and were treated as such, without their contract and consent, and so, they are classified as slaves. When the sub-Saharan African people had not established contact with the wider world, these slaves, as noted, some were sacrificed, and others were kept to serve the ruler of the community, the warlords, and even the priests of the community deities.

However, when sub-Saharan African people began contact with the wider world, a development that introduced the idea of buying and selling, i.e., the commodification of slaves in the area, the war captives, because they were slaves, began the involuntary journey outside of sub-Saharan Africa, as they turned into articles of trade, since there was a demand for them. Ryder's assertion supported this claim, as he observed thus:

> On the African side the first people to become involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade were the Ijo near the mouths of the "slave rivers". Their economy, when they first came into contact with the Portuguese, depended upon an exchange of the fish they caught and the salt they manufactured for the food stuffs which they were unable to produce for themselves in the delta swamps. Inter village rivalry over fishing grounds often led to fighting, and it may be that prisoners taken in such encounters provided the first slave cargoes (Ryder, 1980).

Interestingly, the gradual increase in the demand for the slaves equally increased the degree of intercommunity or village rivalries, with the aim of acquiring slaves for sale. The lucrative nature of the trade vis-à-vis the enticing gifts from the foreign traders to the potentates of different entrepot communities rejigged the trade and thus encouraged the development of other means of

acquiring slaves for sale in sub-Saharan Africa, which ab initio were not means of slave acquisition.

The foregoing explanations show clearly that traditional African religion did not abhor slavery but inculcate a deep empathy feeling that characterised the nature of their interactions with one another. This explains the intuitive nature of African people, thus, their relations with their slaves (war captives). As noted, not all the war captives were sacrificed to the gods; those of them that were kept for domestic activities were well treated to the level of integration into the community, and their children were treated as freeborn. In the case of killing war captives, it was not only in Africa that such experiences were known before modern times, either for sacrifice or otherwise. In the Bible, King Agog of Amalek was a war captive in Israel during the reign of King Saul but was killed by Prophet Samuel (1st Samuel chapter 4 v 8-32). In the same vein, there are records of sanguinary deities in the Inca and Aztec civilisations that involved human sacrifices (Igbokwe & Okonkwo, 2011:13). Against this backdrop, the killing of war captives could be said to be a universal practice before the modern era and not a practice that should be used as one of the reasons to justify the cruel treatment of African slaves by the Europeans, as Dabzel erroneously noted when he observed that "exportation of slaves from Africa provided a safety valve to better life for enslaved Africans who would have become victims of human sacrifice" (Uya, 1987: 57).

Islam and Slavery Institution

The institution of slavery preceded Islam in Arabia. The Arab people had developed a well-organised slavery institution long before prophet Muhammed. The best confirmation of this claim is the references to slaves in the Qur'an, often by the euphemism, "those whom your right hands possess, and as well, the reference to a few slaves who fought in the Jihad led by prophet Muhammed in Mecca, and notably among the earliest slaves was Abyssinian freedman, Bilal, who happened to be the first Muezzin in Islam (Hunwick, 1978). As noted, Arab people had established contact with sub-Saharan African people long before the 9th century AD, especially with those at the coastal banks of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, and this underscores the presence of the Negroes in Arabia and other Asian areas before Islam, and undoubtedly, they contributed to the development of the areas, as some of them were recognised as outstanding Arabic poets of the pre-Islamic era; among them were Shanfara and Antara (Hunwick, 1978). Nevertheless, the contributions of these Negro people to the development of Arabia in the pre-Islamic epoch clearly show that the social conditions of the slaves were not in a worrisome state, as they had opportunities for integration into the different households they found themselves in, as well as the communities, and this was the situation of the slavery institution in the area when Islam was established.

Islam accepted the existence of slavery; thus, the Qur'an expressly permitted the faithful to possess slaves, a development the economic structure of Islamic society came to depend heavily on. As historian Lovejoy observes, "Islamic societies institutionalised slavery in ways that reinforced their economic systems while offering slaves a potential avenue for integration through conversion. (Lovejoy, 2011:27). The injunctions of the Qur'an with regard to slaves were such as

to mitigate its effects and to provide considerable encouragement for manumission. Kind treatment of slaves is enjoined along with parents, kinsmen, and orphans in a single verse. The freeing of a slave is an act of piety that God will reward, and owners of slaves are enjoined to enter into contracts of manumission (Mukataba) with them. The freeing of slaves is one of the seven purposes to which the public alms (Sadaqa) may be put, and manslaughter as well as renege may be atoned for by freeing a slave. These injunctions were further empowered by the actions and sayings attributed to the prophet that, "Fear God concerning your slaves. Feed them with what you eat and clothe them with what you wear, and do not give them work beyond their capacity. Those whom you like, keep, and those whom you dislike, sell. Do not cause pain to God's creation. He caused you to own them, and had He so wished, He would have made them own you" (Hunwick, 1978).

Furthermore, the Islamic laws as elaborated by jurists in the early centuries of Islam equally took full cognisance of the slavery institution. They recognised no distinctions of colour; slaves were acquired from any parts of the world, and they had legal rights and disabilities. Technically the master owned both the slave and what the slaves possessed, but if a contract of manumission had been entered into, the slave was allowed to earn money to purchase his freedom, also to pay a marriage dowry. A slave could marry with his master's permission; a male could only marry a slave woman, the children being the property of the woman's owner, though she could not be separated from them while they were under seven. A slave girl could marry a free man, including her master, but it was usually to free her first (Hunwick, 1978).

Also, the only juridical reason for enslaving a person was that he/she was an unbeliever, and if he/she later converted to a Muslim, he/she would remain a slave, but a freeborn Muslim could not be enslaved. A slave who committed a crime is punished likewise to a freeborn. A slave's punishment for adultery or false accusation of unchastity was half the number of lashes of a free man, but for apostasy and theft, the punishments for slave and free were the same (Hunwick, 1978).

Indeed, the robust principles of Islam on the welfare of slaves were strictly adhered to by many of its adherents, thus helping so much to sustain the fair conditions of slaves in the Arab world and equally doing much to alleviate the conditions of slaves in other Muslim societies, as well as placing the slaves as a valuable piece of personal property, so much so that a man's personal honour would be blemished if his slave ran away because of ill treatment, and the worst, if it were proved before a judge (Hunwick, 1978). However, with the enhancement of the trans-Saharan slave trade following the Islamic expansion into North Africa, with its rejig of the socio-political atmosphere that reinforced significantly on the trade with sub-Sahara Africa, many Negro slaves made their way into Muslim world and beyond, but the praiseworthy precepts and avenue for integration which the Islamic religion provided helped to alleviate the conditions of slaves in Muslim society, thus, created the enabling environment for smooth integration of the slaves into their new home with attendant contributions to the development of the society that had accepted them with little or no prejudice ever since, a fact that had contributed to the enhancement of Islamic religion in the sub-Sahara Africa.

Christianity and Slavery Institution

The founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, was a Jew, and Jewish religion, Judaism, in the records in the Torah and other Old Testament books, which contain historical accounts of the Jewish people, references about slavery abound. According to Antwi, in Genesis 24:35, slaves were counted as part of Abraham's wealth, and Exodus 21:11 attests that slaves could be sold in Israel (Antwi, 2018). In the same vein, Smith equally observed that the Old Testament did sanction slavery, and God said, "Both thy bondmen and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be in your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen forever" (Smith, 2023). Also, in Galatians 3:28, it is stated that, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.". In 1 Peter 2:18 it is stated that, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward.".

Nevertheless, according to Antwi (2018), Israel is referred to as a slave in the land of Egypt, and the good treatment of slaves by Israel was influenced by its personal experience of slavery in Egypt, and equally that the slaves in Israel were mostly purchased slaves, debt slaves, and captives of war, with the rights of the slaves enshrined in their legal codes in the sacred scriptures. Accordingly, the gospel book of Matthew, 7:12, noted how Christians should relate to their fellow human beings as it observed that, "therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophet. Also, Ephesians 6:8 added to this understanding as it noted that, "knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he bond or free.". Colossians 4:1 also noted that, "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a master in heaven.".

The foregoing clearly shows that slavery was practiced in ancient Israel till the period of Jesus Christ, but with laws that encouraged a cordial relationship between slaves and their masters, and the teachings and parables of Jesus Christ and later his apostles enhanced a more robust cordial relationship between slaves and their masters, a development that integrated many slaves into their masters households, thus, their contributions to the growth of their master's family and Israel at large. Nevertheless, the law frowned seriously on the act of a man kidnapping his fellow human being and selling the victim into slavery, as noted in Exodus 21:16, which observed that, "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death," and this law helped in providing direction and sanity in the slavery institution in Israel, especially as it concerns the purchase of slaves, thus with attendant socio-economic benefits.

Indeed, the system of slavery in Israel as recorded in the Bible differed considerably from the version of slavery that existed from the trans-Atlantic slave trade and equally condemned the kind of slavery abuses experienced in the trans-Atlantic slavery system, as slaves in Israel enjoyed considerable rights. However, Antwi (2018) elaborated extensively on this assertion as he noted

that slaves in Israel did not enjoy equal rights with free persons, but they were recognised as human beings and were protected by the customs and laws of the land, and the slaves were not excluded from socio-religious activities, as well as the celebration of the Sabbath, the Passover, and other festivals, as long as they were circumcised. They enjoyed some rights with regard to their relationship with their masters, and it was forbidden to beat a slave to death, as this was meant to ensure their human security and protection from dehumanisation and exploitation. It was legislated that the slaves were to be set free in the seventh year, and piercing a slave ear, a mark of perpetual enslavement, was done with the consent of the slave.

With Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in about AD 390 and the secession of the western part of the Roman Empire in about AD 476, a new trajectory began as countries like Britain, Portugal, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, among others, began to emerge. The emergence of these nations, now referred to as European countries, and their enhancement in science and technology necessitated the Doctrine of Discovery. However, the doctrine emerged from a series of 15th-century papal bulls, which are official decrees by the pope that carry the full weight of his ecclesial office. The doctrine is a set of legal principles that governed the European colonising powers, particularly regarding the administration of indigenous land (Smith, 2023). On June 18, 1453, Pope Nicholas v issued the papal bull and which became official decree of the pope granting permission to King Alfonso v of Portugal to invade, search of, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens (Muslims) and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ whosesoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, countries, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit (Smith, 2023).

Interestingly, this official decree of the Pope spurred Portugal and later other European countries into discovery expeditions to other parts of the world in the 15th century and beyond, leading to their discovery of sub-Saharan Africa, the New World (Americas), among others. The discovery of these other parts of the world set in motion the development of a relationship between Christian European adherents and the people of these areas, which was influenced highly by the doctrine of discovery. However, this doctrine created a religious, political, and legal justification for colonisation and seizure of land not inhabited by Christians that included sanctions, enforcements, authorisations, expulsions, admonishments, excommunications, denunciations, and expressions of territorial sovereignty for Christian monarchs supported by the Catholic Church (Smith, 2023). The discovery of the Americas through Columbus Voyages and European colonization of the area, and dehumanization of the arborigines through the encomienda system and arduous force plantation labour, which contributed to their death in large numbers, thus, scarcity of man power in the plantations, hence, the need for alternative labour force, and concomitant enhancement of European raid on the inhabitants of sub-sahara Africa from the 15th century, thus, the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, that later snowball as the highest ever known forceful migration of a race from one continent to the other, and the migrants (African slaves) experiencing the most heinous crimes of humanity against humanity, a situation that alienated them from full integration

into the culture of their new home, thus, retaining aspects of their African identity which they passed on from one generation to the other.

However, the retention of their Black consciousness vis-à-vis the preservation of African culture by the Negro slaves outside Africa from antiquity to the modern period underscores the contemporary knowledge of this historic African diaspora.

Religion and African Diaspora

The different religions, as discussed, did not abhor slavery but guided against the dehumanisation of slaves by their faithful. For Islamic adherents, many who acquired and owned slaves adhered strictly to the injunctions from the Qur'an and the founding leaders on the right attitude toward their slaves; hence, this fact played a major role in the cordial relationship that existed between slaves and their owners as well as with the general public in their new home, thus enhancing their quick and perfect integration into the Islamic society. Consequently, the situation helped to whittle down the generational slavery syndrome and the preservation of the slave culture in the Islamic world, particularly by African slaves as witnessed in the Americas; hence, the obliteration of the African diaspora from antiquity in the Muslim world, in spite of about 10 million Negro slaves that went into that area.

Furthermore, for the Christian religion, many of its adherents in Europe failed to adhere to the Biblical injunctions on the fair treatment of slaves, particularly during the trans-Atlantic slave trade; rather, the European slave dealers in Africa co-opted Christian theology to legitimise their raid on Africa and dehumanisation of their African slaves. The doctrine of the 'curse of Ham' was emphasised to justify racial hierarchies, with proponents suggesting that slavery was divinely ordained (Macauley, 2018:127).

In essence, the manipulation of the Bible by the European slave dealers in Africa and their supporters was borne out of the fact that Christian leaders in Europe, when these most heinous crimes of humanity against humanity began, authorised it. Saito (1985) agreed to this claim when he observed that,

> When Prince Henry was presented with twelve black moors by Goncalvez, he was very much delighted with it and "sent a special embassy to the Pope, explaining his plans for further raid and even conquest; and the Pope, welcoming this new crusade, granted to all those who shall be engaged in the said war, complete forgiveness of all their sins.

Indeed, the support from the church leaders during the early beginning of this raid on Africa emboldened the European slave dealers, thus, the manipulation of the Bible to support the course. With their successful projection of the "Curse of Ham" doctrine, which suggests that Ham was born a Negro, following the meaning of his name as "black or hot', thus, his descendants, Africans, by the reason of the curse, were providentially ordained to serve the whites as slaves. The strong

moral convictions from the doctrine of the curse of Ham' (Genesis 9:20-25) and other Biblical accounts such as 1st Timothy 6:1, which reads, 'Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And (Titus 2:9-10), which equally reads, "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters and to please them well in all things; not answering again, not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adore the doctrine of God our saviour in all things," interestingly, convinced many of the church leaders to even participate in one way or another in those slavery activities in Africa. Bansah (2020) elaborated on this when he observed that

> It was ascertained during the field work that the Portuguese and the Dutch earlier sent chaplains to the Gold Coast as early as the 15th century. These priest chaplains attended to the religious and spiritual needs of the colonialists. Those designated "Boat Chaplains" were believed to have offered prayers for the slaves before they were made to embark on the trans-Atlantic journey. They also accompanied the slave ships to perform requiem rites for the captives who died during the trans-Atlantic Voyage before their bodies were thrown into the sea.

Further, Bansah (2020) had equally documented facts on the ownership of slaves by church leaders. He noted that the Church of England owned plantations in Barbados and equally bought and transported slaves from Africa to the Caribbean to work on their Codrington sugarcane-producing farms. He further observed that the Church of England did not only object to the abolition of the slave trade; they received a compensation claim of about £8,823 85 9d for the loss of slave labour when parliament passed the Compensation Act in 1833 to compensate former slave owners. He equally pointed out eminent church leaders that participated in the slave trading activities, such as the then Bishop of Exeter, Quaker–Christian figures, the Barclay Brothers (David and Alexander), Robert King, the Anglican deacon, Thomas Clarkson, who was celebrated for torturing and abusing Africans on the plantations, and others.

Nevertheless, the direct participation of some church leaders in the trade gave a strong signal of religious legitimatization of the trade that played a pioneering role in the development of racism, which had been a continuum. However, the successful involvement of Christianity in the enslavement of African people romanticised the exercise, with the claim that European enslavement of Africa was to bring salvation to "heathen" lands, a dummy used to sustain systemic oppression of African people. As Mbiti (1990:54) observes, "the gospel was often preached with one hand, while chains were fastened with the other.".

The weaponization of Christian religion on the enslavement of African people during the Atlantic slave trade underscores the heinous crimes against the African slaves by their European owners on their plantations, especially in the Americas. The chattel slavery that African slaves were meant to be explains their usage by their European owners as beasts of burden, hence their subjection to hard labour in the plantation from dawn to dusk, with little food for sustenance and under harsh supervision. This mindset invoked by Christianity on African slaves, alongside the economic

realities of that period, underpinned the trajectory of generational slavery that besieged the African slaves in Europe and the Americas; hence, the express permission of their European owners for their reproduction of their kind for uninterrupted manpower labour in the plantations due to wear and tear.

Indeed, the tapestry of generational slavery in the Americas alienated the African slaves from their European owners of the plantations, thus eluding their integration and enhancing African nostalgia in them. This situation encouraged the preservation of their African culture in the area, particularly their traditional religions for their spiritual solace. However, the planting of their culture in their new home gave them an identity that mirrored their existence to the world, hence the knowledge of Africans in the diaspora from antiquity.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis explores the intricate relationship between African traditional religion, Christianity, and Islam in the context of slavery. It argues that the dynamics of this relationship, particularly the interactions between Muslims in the Muslim world, especially in Asia, and their slaves, predominantly Negro slaves, undermined the preservation and propagation of African culture in Asia. This led to the full integration of African slaves into the cultural fabric of their new environments, effectively erasing traces of their existence and contributions. Consequently, the historical and cultural knowledge of Africans in the Asian diaspora remains scant from antiquity.

In contrast, the relationship between Christian Europeans and African slaves during the trans-Atlantic slave trade was deeply influenced by the theological and social perspectives of the time. Church leaders played a pivotal role, as highlighted by Ajayi (1965), who observed that "Christianity was by then already reflecting the increasingly individualised society of Western Europe; more and more aspects of life were being regulated by ideas and beliefs outside the purview of religion. The European conception of religion became limited in the sense that it was seen as a personal and not a communal affair and that it was confined to only a special area of a man's life" (p. 2). This shift, coupled with entrenched racial ideologies, fostered heinous acts of racism and perpetuated the generational subjugation of African slaves in Europe and the Americas. Unlike their counterparts in Asia, these slaves retained and propagated their cultural heritage, laying the foundations for the African diaspora in these regions.

The brutality of European slave traders and owners during the trans-Atlantic slave trade solidified Europe's sense of superiority, culminating in the conquest and colonization of Africa and other parts of the world. This superiority complex has left enduring scars on the global Negro population, manifesting in systemic injustices such as apartheid in South Africa and the civil rights struggles in the United States. Racism, a pernicious legacy of this era, continues to inflict profound harm on humanity, particularly on people of African descent. Recognizing its historical complicity, the Church has sought to atone for its role. As Bansah (2020) notes, "Howbeit, in 2006, about two hundred years after the abolition of the colonial slave trade, the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Rowan Williams openly apologized on behalf of the Church of England for its role in the Africa

slavery saga." This acknowledgment must propel the Church to lead ongoing efforts to dismantle racism and address the injustices rooted in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, ensuring its apology translates into genuine and sustained action for reconciliation and healing.

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