

**INFLUENCE OF CATHOLIC
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES ON
THE EMANCIPATION OF
SLAVES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649316175

Influence of Catholic Christian doctrines on the emancipation of slaves by Anonymous

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ANONYMOUS

**INFLUENCE OF CATHOLIC
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES ON
THE EMANCIPATION OF
SLAVES**

INFLUENCE
OF
Catholic Christian Doctrines
ON THE
EMANCIPATION OF SLAVES.

BY A MEMBER
Of the Sodality of the B. V. Mary, Church of the
Most Holy Redeemer.
EAST BOSTON.



BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY PATRICK DONAHOE.
1863.

110. j. 248.

INFLUENCE OF CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES ON THE EMANCIPATION OF SLAVES.

SKETCH OF SOCIETY IN THE EARLY AGES OF CHRISTIANITY.

ALTHOUGH the Church has ever attached the greatest importance to the propagation of truth, although convinced that to destroy the shapeless mass of immorality and degradation that met her sight, her first care should be to expose error to the dissolving fire of true doctrines, she has not confined herself to this; but descending to real life, and following a system full of wisdom and prudence, she has acted in such a manner as to enable humanity to taste the precious fruit which the doctrines of the Redeemer produce even in temporal things. The Church has been not only a *great and fruitful school, but a regenerative association also*; she has not diffused her general doctrines by throwing them abroad at hazard, merely hoping that they would fructify with time; she has developed them in all their relations, applied them to all subjects, inoculated laws and manners with them, and realized them in institutions which afford silent but eloquent instructions to future generations. Previous to her being established by her divine Author, nowhere was the dignity of man acknowledged, slavery reigned everywhere; degraded woman was dishonored by the corruption of manners, and debased by the tyranny of man. The feelings of humanity were trodden under foot, infants abandoned, the sick

and aged were neglected, barbarity and cruelty were carried to the highest pitch of atrocity in the prevailing laws of war; in fine, on the summit of the social edifice was seen an odious tyranny, sustained by military force, and looking down with an eye of contempt on the unfortunate nations that lay in fetters at its feet.

In such a state of things it certainly was no slight task to remove error, to reform and improve manners, abolish slavery, correct the vices of legislation, impose a check on power, and make it harmonize with the public interest, give new life to individuals, and reorganize family and society; and yet nothing less than this has been done by the Catholic Church.

In confirmation of this historic truth, let us view the subject, which of all others, in our day and country, is of general interest and discussion, the subject of **SLAVERY**; inviting those who feel interest to know more fully the harmonizing effects of Christian civilization, to consult the work of Balmes, to whose untiring labor and erudition the subjoined compilation of proofs and observations are justly acknowledged.

When our Blessed Saviour commissioned his apostles to evangelize the nations, the number of slaves was immense; slavery was deeply rooted in laws, manners, ideas, and interests, individual and social; a fatal system, no doubt, but the eradication of which all at once, it would have been rash to attempt, as its roots had penetrated deeply and spread widely in the bowels of the land. In a census of Athens there were reckoned 20,000 citizens and 40,000 slaves; in the Peloponnesian war no less than 20,000 passed over to the enemy. This we learn from Thucydides. The same author tells us, that at Chio the number of slaves was very considerable, and that their defection, when they passed over to the Athenians, reduced their masters to great extremities. In general, the number of slaves was so very great everywhere that the public safety was often compromised thereby. Therefore it was necessary to take precautions

to prevent their acting in concert. "It is necessary," says Plato (*Dial. 6, de Leg.*) "that slaves should not be of the same country, and that they should differ as much as possible in manners and desires; for experience has many times shown, in the frequent defections which have been witnessed, among the Messenians, and in other cities that had a great number of slaves of the same language, that great evils result from it." Aristotle, in his *Government*, (b. i: c. 5) gives various rules as to the manner in which slaves ought to be treated; it is remarkable that he is of the same opinion as Plato, for he says; "That there should not be many slaves of the same country." He tells us in his *Politics* (b. ii: c. 7) "That the Thessalians were reduced to great embarrassments on account of the number of their Penestes, a sort of slave; the same thing happened to the Spartans on account of the Helotes. The Penestes have often rebelled in Thessaly; and the Spartans, during their reverses, have been menaced by the plots of the Helotes." This was a difficulty which required the serious attention of politicians. They did not know how to prevent the inconveniences induced by this immense multitude of slaves. Aristotle laments the difficulty there was in finding the best way of treating them; and we see that it was the subject of grave cares. I will transcribe his own words: "In truth," he says, "the manner in which this class of men ought to be treated is a thing difficult and full of embarrassment; for if they are treated mildly, they become insolent, and wish to become equal to their masters; if they are treated harshly, they conceive hatred, and conspire."

At Rome, the multitude of slaves was such that when, at a certain period, it was proposed to give them a distinctive dress, the Senate opposed the measure, fearing that if they knew their own numbers the public safety would be endangered; and certainly this precaution was not vain, for already, a long time before, the slaves had caused great commotions in Italy. Plato,

in support of the advice just quoted, states, "that the slaves had frequently devastated Italy with piracy and robbery." In more recent times, Spartacus, at the head of an army of slaves, was the terror of that country for some time, and engaged the best generals of Rome. The number of slaves had reached such an excess, that many masters reckoned them by hundreds. When the Prefect of Rome, Pedanius Secundus, was assassinated, four hundred slaves who belonged to him were put to death (*Tac. Ann.* b. xiv). Pudentilla, the wife of Apulcius, had so many that she gave four hundred to her son. They became a matter of pomp, and the Romans vied with each other in their number. When asked this question, *Quod pascit servos?* How many slaves does he keep? according to the expression of Juvenal, (*Sat.* iii: v. 140,) they wished to be able to show a great number. The thing had reached such a pass that, according to Pliny, the cortege of a family resembled an army.

It was not only in Greece and Italy that this abundance of slaves was found; at Tyre, they arose against their masters, and, by their immense numbers, they were able to massacre them all. If we turn our eyes towards barbarous nations, without speaking of some of the best known, we learn from Herodotus that the Scythians, on their return from Media, found their slaves in rebellion, and were compelled to abandon their country to them. Cæsar, in his Commentaries (*de Bello Gall.* lib. vi.), bears witness to the multitude of slaves in Gaul. As their number was, everywhere, so considerable, it is clear that it was quite impossible to preach freedom to them without setting the world on fire. Society itself, indeed, thus endangered, would have been put on its guard against principles favoring liberty; it would have regarded the attempt with prejudice and suspicion, and the chains of servitude, instead of being loosened, would have been the more firmly riveted. Out of this immense mass of rude, savage men, set at liberty

without preparation, it was impossible for social organization to arise ; for social organization is not the creation of a moment, especially with such elements as these ; and in this case, since it would have been necessary to choose between slavery and the annihilation of social order, the instinct of preservation, which animates society as well as all beings, would undoubtedly have brought about the continuation of slavery where it still existed, and its reestablishment where it had been destroyed. Those who complain that Christianity did not accomplish the work of abolishing slavery with sufficient promptitude, should remember that, even supposing a sudden or very rapid emancipation possible, and to say nothing of the bloody revolutions which would necessarily have been the result, the mere force of circumstances, by the insurmountable difficulties which it would have raised, would have rendered such a measure absolutely useless. Let us lay aside all social and political considerations, and apply ourselves to the economical question. First, it was necessary to change all the relations of property. The slaves played a principal part therein ; they cultivated the land, and worked as mechanics ; in a word, among them was distributed all that is called labor ; and the distribution being made on the supposition of slavery, to take away this would have made a disruption, the ultimate consequences of which could not be estimated. I will suppose that violent spoliations had taken place, that a repartition or equalization of property had been attempted, that lands had been distributed to the emancipated, and that the richest proprietors had been compelled to hold the pickaxe and the plough ; I will suppose all these absurdities and mad dreams to be realized, and I say that this would have been no remedy ; for we must not forget that the production of the means of subsistence must be in proportion to the wants of those they are intended to support, and that this proportion would have been destroyed by the abolition of slavery. The production was regulated, not exactly according to the number of the indi-

viduals who then existed, but on the supposition that the majority were slaves; now we know that the wants of a freeman are greater than those of a slave.

If, at the present time, after eighteen centuries, when ideas have been corrected, manners softened, laws ameliorated; when nations and governments have been taught by experience; when so many public establishments for the relief of indigence have been founded; when so many systems have been tried for the division of labor; when riches are distributed in a more equitable manner; if it is still so difficult to prevent a great number of men from becoming the victims of dreadful misery, if that is the terrible evil, which, like a fatal nightmare, torments society, what would have been the effect of a universal emancipation, at the beginning of Christianity, at a time when slaves were not considered by the law as *persons*, but as *things*; when their conjugal union was not looked upon as marriage; when their children were property, and subject to the same rules as the progeny of animals; when, in fine, the unhappy slave was ill-treated, tormented, sold, or put to death, according to the caprices of his master? Is it not evident that the cure of such evils was the work of ages? Do not humanity and political and social economy unanimously tell us this? If mad attempts had been made, the slaves themselves would have been the first to protest against them; they would have adhered to a servitude which at least secured to them food and shelter; they would have rejected a liberty which was inconsistent even with their existence. Such is the order of nature: man, above all, requires wherewith to live; and the means of subsistence being wanting, liberty itself would cease to please him. It is not necessary to allude to the individual examples of this, which we have in abundance; entire nations have given signal proofs of this truth. When misery is excessive, it is difficult for it not to bring with it degradation, stifle the most generous sentiments, and take away the magic of the words independence and