

Territorial Slavery

Up to now we have discussed one type of slavery, i.e., household slavery. But it was mentioned in chapter one that slavery is of two kinds, the second being the Territorial Slavery or subjugation of one nation by another.

Though the household slavery is now supposed to be abolished, the territorial slavery is still very much alive. With a heart full of sorrow one notes the systematic destruction of human lives and human dignity perpetuated by the Christian civilization in almost all parts of the world.

Red Indians were the original inhabitants of the New World. Where are they now? They were gradually pushed out from their own lands and have been forced to live in less fertile rather unproductive patches of U.S.A. Aborigines of Australia were subjected to the same treatment. Red Indians and Aborigines both were hunted like buffaloes and now their number is nearing the extinction point. Dr. Eric Williams quotes a story of the Indian chieftain, Hatuey, who doomed to die for resisting the invaders, staunchly refused to accept the Christian faith as the gateway to salvation when he learned that his executioners, too, hope to get to Heaven. [1](#)

Even more tragic is the fate of the Africans in Southern Africa. Portuguese, armed with the Pope's decree to "reduce the infidels to servitude" are tenaciously keeping Angola and Mozambique under the yoke of Territorial Slavery.

It is really astonishing to note that Pope Paul VI often issues statements on political problems of the world; but has never seen it fit to advise Portugal to negotiate with its "subjects" in Africa and elsewhere. Instead the Popes have maintained special relations with Portugal and Spain, the two Roman Catholic nations which stubbornly refuse to free their African colonies. In July 1970, Pope Paul VI received some leaders of freedom fighters of Portuguese African colonies. This audience infuriated Portugal, which issued a protest; Vatican nervously issued an explanation. Commenting upon it, the following letter entitled "Pope's Note A Comfort" was published in the *Standard Dar es-Salaam* (Tanzania), by 'A Black Roman Catholic':

"The news item 'Pope's note comforts Portugal' (*Standard*, July 11) refers. I quote the relevant

sentences:

A Vatican note said that Pope had received them (i.e., the leaders of liberation movements of Africa under Portuguese rule) as Catholics and Christians, without reference to their political functions. He reminded them to the Church's teaching that peaceful means should always be used even in seeking what one considers to be one's right.

“The earlier news that the Holy Father had received the said leaders had perturbed me much. Now this clarification has put my anxiety to rest. Let me explain why. It was the Roman Catholic Church which established Western colonialism by dividing all the newly discovered lands and countries into two halves: giving the Spaniards the Western half (like Americas), and granting Portugal the Eastern half (like Africa and India).

“Portugal's colonies in Africa are firmly founded on that important Papal decree. When I read earlier that Pope Paul VI had received the leaders of the Liberation movements, I was surprised how it was possible. According to our beliefs of the Papal infallibility, Pope Paul VI is bound to carry on and justify whatever was decreed by his Holy predecessors. Therefore, according to my thinking he should not have encouraged those leaders.

“Now his clarification has comforted me a lot spiritually. Now I may sleep in peace with a sure knowledge that my Church has not condemned itself by implying that previous Popes were wrong in establishing and supporting the 'enlightenment' of this black continent under Portuguese Imperialism.

“Also, his advice to these so called 'victims of colonialism' to remain peaceful (i.e., to disband freedom-fighter units and beg Portugal to grant them Uhuru) is the same old wine in a new bottle. It reminds me of the invocations of priests of the Roman Catholic Church at the time of sailings of the slave-ships from Portuguese ports for West Indies. They always prayed to the Almighty to ensure the safety of the ships and always admonished the black slaves to behave gently and obediently. Of course, they did not think it necessary to advise the masters of the slaves to think of them as human beings. I am glad that my Church has not changed during all these long centuries.”

South Africa's policy of Apartheid is universally condemned by UNO and elsewhere. But the Churches had always toed the line. It is only after the “change of wind” in Africa and rapid emergence of independent African nations that the Churches have realised the need to oppose the nefarious system which denies the original inhabitants of the country the right to work, walk, sit, ride, earn or sleep in their own land. And even when all other Churches, forced by the political necessity, have shown their opposition to this type of slavery, the Dutch Reformed Church still supports that inhuman system.

Rhodesia is following in the foot-steps of South Africa. A common African joke in these parts of the world describes an African telling a European: “When you came, you had the Bible and we had the land. Now we have the Bible and you have the land.”

Apart from this blatant subjugation, there are other disguises in which the territorial slavery shows its face. Like a chameleon, it changes its colour according to the environment. Naked colonialism has now been replaced by neo-colonialism; but it still amounts to the same subjugation of nations and peoples by the superpowers through more subtle or not so subtle methods. We have seen what happened to the League of Nations. It has been replaced by the UNO, but when the weak nations cry and appeal for justice, diplomatic pressure is exercised and their just demands for their basic rights are shelved, or postponed. There is political blackmail, and the colour of the skin is still a deciding factor. In fact the governing nations or those who are powerful and well-equipped with instruments and means of wholesale destruction and annihilation, still hold their sway.

This type of slavery is practised today not only by Christo-capitalist nations but by communists also; and it will continue so long as human society remains divided into the strong and the weak or until the existence of Omnipotent and All-powerful God is recognised and His Sovereignty over the world is fully believed in and accepted.

Even now when the 20th century is marching towards its close and the Americans pride themselves on their achievements, the “Negro” question is in the forefront and still unsolved. Despairingly, O.A. Sherrard says, “Slavery has existed from the beginning and will last in one form or another as long as men lust after power. It has resulted in more misery, more murder, more degradation, more sadness, suffering and sin than any other human institution. It crushes individuals; it blights communities; it sours all human intercourse, for its sign-manual is fear...

It has dealt viciously with the past, and perhaps more viciously with the present; for in modern forms slavery if less obvious is more widespread and its fear more pervasive. The fear of a servile rising among its satellites haunts the Soviet Presidium; the fear of a servile fate heightens the tension between East and West; the fear of a servile revenge broods in South Africa and overshadows the States; the fear of servile indignities, brain-washing, torture and sudden death, crows vast multitudes throughout the world.”²

But we do not share this pessimistic view. We realise that the problem is gigantic, but we also know that Islam is the Religion sent by Allah, the Omnipotent. Islam, 1400 years ago brought three-sided program for eradication of slavery:

Blocking the ways of acquiring new slaves, emancipation, and restoration of the human dignity to the slaves. And the fact is that though Bani Umayyah sabotaged the first side of that program by re-introducing slavery by purchase, they could not minimise the impact of the other two programs. And the slaves in the Muslim world regained their lost human dignity.

A system which has shown its worth and which achieved success in fields where other systems have utterly failed, will surely achieve the total eradication of every type of division, segregation, inequality and inequity if it is given chance. Ameer Ali writes, “It remains for the Moslems [*sic*] to show the falseness of

the aspersions cast on the memory of the great and noble Prophet [by the traducers and enemies of Islam], by proclaiming in explicit terms that slavery, [bondage in any shape and the difference of race and colour are] reprobated by their faith and discountenanced by their code.”³ And we are sure that Islam will be given opportunity by Allah to establish full and complete justice in the world.

The Shi'ite Imams, the Divine Guides, carried on the work of the Holy Prophet and instilled in their followers the true spirit of Islam. They, by their own examples and through sermons, preserved the original Islam for their followers.

And the last divine Imam, Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi (peace be upon him), the Awaited One, is to re-appear when this world will become full of injustice, tyranny and dishonesty. When the Awaited One comes out from Occultation, he will fill this world with complete justice, honesty and mercy. We believe in a better world and we know that whatever the disguise of slavery at the time of re-appearance of the Twelfth Imam, the Awaited One, it is bound to disappear, vacating its place to universal brotherhood and human dignity.

¹. Williams, op. cit., p. 8.

². Sherrard, op. cit., pp. 188-189.

³. Ameer Ali, Spirit of Islam, p. 267

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/slavery-islamic-and-christian-perspectives-sayyid-saeed-akhtar-rizvi/territorial-slavery#comment-0>