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"Rev. John Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774), Natural Justice, and the American Declaration of Independence (1776)"

By

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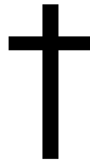

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Foreword

This paper is a Christian apologetical discourse on the relationship of the Christian religion to the institution of African slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Our discussion begins and ends from the unique perspective stated in the classic work *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774),[1] written by one of the Christian faith's great exponents, the Rev. John Wesley (1703 – 1791).

One popular objection to the Christian religion has been, throughout the ages, that it tolerated slavery, and, furthermore, that Christians owned African slaves and promoted the transatlantic slave trade. But though these charges are undeniably true, every true, born-again Christian knows that one of the unholy marks of the persecution of the saints is the presence of heresy and heretics, who wear the name "Christian," and who exist, sometimes as high-ranking ordained clergymen or influential laymen, inside of the holy Church. This agonizing situation is biblical, and it has been acknowledged by Christian witnesses from times immemorial, beginning with Judas' betrayal of Christ himself. Of this existential state of affairs, Augustine of Hippo has also written thus:

> The heretics themselves also, since they are thought to have the Christian name and sacraments, Scriptures, and profession, cause great grief in the hearts of the pious, both because many who wish to be Christians are compelled by their dissension to hesitate, and many evil-speakers also find in them matter for blaspheming the Christian name, because they too are at any rate called Christians. By these and similar depraved manners and errors of men, those who will live piously in Christ suffer persecution, even when no one molests or vexes their body; for they suffer this persecution, not in their bodies but in their hearts.[2]

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[1] John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (originally published in London and Philadelphia in 1774)[public domain].

[2] St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 662.

Indeed, in Rev. Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774), we find one of history's great Christian advocates sharply excoriating these Christian heretics, as well as his fellow countrymen of all religious persuasions, who participated in, and profited from, the transatlantic slave trade and plantation slavery.

Significantly, as Rev. Wesley points out that, as early as 1765, the great English jurist Sir William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* had already summarized and promulgated with meticulous clarity that "Slavery" was unlawful under the English Common Law; and that in England, the system of "Slavery" that was practiced in the West Indies and in the British American colonies was against the fundamental laws of England and thus unlawful or unconstitutional![3]

Since Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* became the cornerstone of American jurisprudence, this is truly significant! One cannot help but ponder the lack of juridical integrity amongst the several United States Supreme Court jurists-- Chief Justice Roger B. Taney and Associate Justices James M. Wayne, John Catron, Peter V. Daniel, Samuel Nelson, Robert C. Grier, and John A. Campbell-- who upheld the notorious opinion in the case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857),[4] which reflected a sharp deviation from Blackstone's restatement of the foundational, fundamental law of the British-American constitutional system. Indeed, American jurisprudence looked to, and incorporated, the Common Law of England, especially as it was reflected in Blackstone's *Commentaries,* into its own legal and constitutional system.

> The first American edition [of Blackstone's *Commentaries*] was produced in 1772; prior to this, over 1,000 copies had already been sold in the Thirteen Colonies…. While useful in England, Blackstone's text answered an urgent need in the developing

[3] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765), Article 4, Section 2, Clause 3, at the following link: https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/a4_2_3s1.html

[4] *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857).

> United States and Canada. In the United States, the common law tradition was being spread into frontier areas, but it was not feasible for lawyers and judges to carry around the large libraries that contained the common law precedents. The four volumes of Blackstone put the gist of that tradition in portable form…. They were required reading for most lawyers in the Colonies, and for many, they were the only reading. Blackstone's Whiggish but conservative vision of English law as a force to protect people, their liberty, and their property, had a deep impact on the ideologies that were cited in support of the American Revolution, and ultimately, the United States Constitution.[5]

Moreover, the anti-slavery premises, legal theories, and jurisprudence that were contained within Blackstone's *Commentaries* reflected the Christian jurisprudence of the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Church of England, as well of the Puritan covenant theology and constitutional systems of colonial New England. In Great Britain, both the Church and the State stood behind and backed this fundamental law that was against Slavery. And in the new United States, the same anti-slavery constitutional principle had been acknowledged and upheld in the case of *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, 41 U.S. 539 (1842), which had been rendered some fifteen years prior to the *Dred Scott* decision (1857).

In addition, several years after the *Commentaries* (1765) were published, Lord Mansfield rendered his famous anti-slavery judgment in the case of *Somerset v. Stewart* (1772) 98 ER 499, (1772) 20 State Tr 1, (1772) Lofft 1 (1772), which restated the same anti-slavery position which Blackstone had previously published in his *Commentaries* (1765). This anti-slavery *Somerset* decision sent shock waves throughout the British empire! Freedom lawsuits and petitions were filed throughout the American colonies. Thus, whether or not the pro-slavery contingent within the American Revolutionary party wished to separate from Great Britain due

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[5] "Commentaries on the Laws of England," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commentaries_on_the_Laws_of_England

to the anti-slavery *Somerset* decision (1772) is an obscure question that few, if any, historians or constitutional scholars have answered.

Hence, when Rev. Wesley, who was then a priest in the Church of England, published his *Thoughts Upon Slavery* in 1774, in both London and Philadelphia, the official English position that Slavery had no support in the law of nature, the Christian religion, the English common law, or the fundamental laws of Great Britain, had already been widely diffused and disseminated throughout the American colonies and the British empire. Wesley's polemic against the institution of Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade certainly reinforced the anti-slavery opinions stated in Blackstone's *Commentaries* (1765) and the *Somerset* decision (1772). Thus, Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774) had merely restated the solid anti-slavery legal foundations that had already been laid in 1765 and 1772 by two influential English jurists: Lord Blackstone and Lord Mansfield.

What *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774) does, Wesley's objective is achieved, which is to lay bare the economic hypocrisy and the blatant racism of English Christians in both the North American colonies and throughout the British empire.

Indeed, by the year 1774, even before there was a Declaration of Independence, a Revolutionary War, or a Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, both morally and Scripturally, the institution of African slavery could no longer be supported, and its vicious and bloody exploitation of Africans and the African continent could no longer be defended on any plausible grounds.

Wherefore, I hold that the American revolutionary patriots were not without authoritative guidance in 1787—they knew that, under the English Common Law, which they inherited and incorporated into their own legal and constitutional systems, that Slavery and the transatlantic slavery trade were immoral, odious, unlawful, and unconstitutional.

This short summary of Rev. Wesley's polemic against Slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade ought to cause present-day Christians to pause and to reassess their ministerial priorities as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Respectfully,

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Introduction

Rev. John Wesley, who was a priest in the Church of England, a principle founder of the Methodist movement, and a Fellow of Christ Church College, Oxford, published in the year 1774[6]—in the cities of London and Philadelphia—his classic work *Thoughts Upon Slavery*. This publication is not only a polemic against the transatlantic African slave trade and the institution of chattel slavery, but it also fully sets forth the prevailing moral and Christian sentiments then prevailing among Abolitionists in much of New England and in the northern States.

First, just a few years prior to the publication of Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield had issued his landmark opinion in the case of *Somerset v. Stewart* , 98 ER 499, 20 State Tr 1, Lofft 1 (1772), which held the English Common Law—that is to say, its customary law, its common laws, and its unwritten constitution—did not support or uphold the institution of slavey, stating:

> The power of a master over his slave has been extremely different, in different countries. The state of slavery is of such a nature, that it is incapable of being introduced on any reasons, moral or political ; but only positive law, which preserves its force long after the reasons, occasion, and time itself from whence it was created, is erased from memory : it's so odious, that nothing can be suffered to support it, but by positive law. Whatever inconveniences, therefore, may follow from a decision, I cannot say this case is allowed or approved by the law of England ; and therefore the black must be discharged.

Subsequently, in those areas of the British Empire where the institution of African slavery had been made expressly legal by positive laws, the

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[6] See, e.g., *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. xiv ("John Wesley publishes Thoughts Upon Slavery, the U. S. Continental Conference adopts a resolution banning the importation of slaves and American participation in the slave trade after December 1."

Abolition Movement early and largely relied upon the holding in *Somerset* to attack those statutes through the courts or through petitioning the state legislatures. In colonial British North America, successful court or legislative challenges to the institution of African slavery occurred in Vermont (1777),[7] followed by Pennsylvania (1780),[8] Massachusetts (1783),[9] and Connecticut (1784).[10] These court or legislative acts reflected a spirit of

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[7] On July 2, 1777, Vermont's legislature enacted a law the banned slavery, outlawed the slave trade, and enfranchised African American males.

[8] On March 1, 1780, Pennsylvania's legislature enacted a law providing for gradual emancipation and stated that no African American children born after that date could be held in slavery.

[9] Declarations regarding the ***natural rights*** of all mankind had been set forth, and promises of liberty made, in the Sheffield Declaration (1773), the Declaration of Independence (1776), and the Massachusetts Constitution (1780). Therefore, when "freedom" lawsuits were filed on behalf of an African American ex-slave/ fugitive Quock Walker, in a series of three cases, that of *Walker v. Jennison*, *Jennison v. Caldwell*, and *Commonwealth v. Jennison*, and these cases (i.e., "The Quock Walker Cases") reached the Massachusetts Supreme Court. In September 1781, Chief Justice William Cushing stated:

> As to the doctrine of slavery and the right of Christians to hold Africans in perpetual servitude, and sell and treat them as we do our horses and cattle, that (it is true) has been heretofore countenanced by the Province Laws formerly, but nowhere is it expressly enacted or established. It has been a usage – a usage which took its origin from the practice of some of the European nations, and the regulations of British government respecting the then Colonies, for the benefit of trade and wealth. But whatever sentiments have formerly prevailed in this particular or slid in upon us by the example of others, a different idea has taken place with the people of America, more favorable to the natural rights of mankind, and to that natural, innate desire of Liberty, with which Heaven (without regard to color, complexion, or shape of noses-features) has inspired all the human race. And upon this ground our Constitution of Government, by which the people of this Commonwealth have solemnly bound themselves, sets out with declaring that all men are born free and equal – and that every subject is entitled to liberty, and to have it guarded by the laws, as well as life and property – and in short is totally repugnant to the idea of being born slaves. This being the case, I think the idea of slavery is inconsistent with our own conduct and Constitution; and there can be no such thing as perpetual servitude of a rational creature, unless his liberty is forfeited by some criminal conduct or given up by personal consent or contract ….

[10] On March 1, 1784, "gradual emancipation" act went into effect in Connecticut. This law was intended to slowly "phase out" slavery, and would become the primary mechanism of abolition throughout New England. In Connecticut, it worked like this: All enslaved persons born on or after March 1, 1784, remained bonded while children, but were released upon reaching a certain

a revolutionary Age of Reason; namely, the natural law principles that were enunciated in the American Declaration of Independence (1776).

But as the 18th-century came to a close, and the economic interests of the American Slave Power began to strengthen, instead of being phased into extinction, the idea that those same natural-law principles in the Declaration of Independence (1776) were ever meant to apply to Africans became hotly contested in American politics—as reflected in the position often expressed by Abraham Lincoln; and the opposition position expressed by Chief Justice Taney in the infamous case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393, 403-404, 407 (1857), stating.

> The question is simply this: can a negro whose ancestors were imported into this country and sold as slaves become a member of the political community formed and brought into existence by the Constitution of the United States, and as such become entitled to all the rights, and privileges, and immunities, guarantied by that instrument to the citizen, one of which rights is the privilege of suing in a court of the United States in the cases specified in the Constitution?
>
> It will be observed that the plea applies to that class of persons only whose ancestors were negroes of the African race, and imported into this country and sold and held as slaves. The only matter in issue before the court, therefore, is, whether the descendants of such slaves, when they shall be emancipated, or who are born of parents who had become free before their birth, are citizens of a State in the sense in which the word "citizen" is used in the Constitution of the United States. And this being the only matter in dispute on the pleadings, the court must be understood as speaking in this opinion of that class only, that is, of those persons who are the descendants of Africans who were imported into this country and sold as slaves….

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age (first 25, later reduced to 21). All enslaved persons born before 1784 remained enslaved for life. This allowed slavery to slowly disappear.

> The words "people of the United States" and "citizens" are synonymous terms, and mean the same thing. They both describe the political body who, according to our republican institutions, form the sovereignty and who hold the power and conduct the Government through their representatives. They are what we familiarly call the "sovereign people," and every citizen is one of this people, and a constituent member of this sovereignty.
>
> The question before us is whether the class of persons described in the plea in abatement compose a portion of this people, and are constituent members of this sovereignty? We think they are not, and that they are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word "citizens" in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States….
>
> In the opinion of the court, the legislation and histories of the times, and the language used in the Declaration of Independence, show that neither the class of persons who had been imported as slaves nor their descendants, whether they had become free or not, were then acknowledged as a part of the people, nor intended to be included in the general words used in that memorable instrument.

It should be noted here that Chief Justice Taney's opinion goes on to describe a very slanted, unpersuasive national history of the 18th-century United States that is wholly void of the predominant political, legal, and constitutional views of colonial New England, following Lord Mansfield's *Somerset* opinion (1772) regarding the clear status of the English Common Law and the fundamental law of Great Britain;[11] and following Chief Justice Cushing's opinion in *The Quock Walker Cases* (1781-1783).

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[11] For instance, in the *Dred Scott* case, supra, pp. 407 – 408, C. J. Taney wrote:

> They had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race either in social or political relations,

Hence, Chief Justice Taney's *Dred Scott* opinion (1857) created a national stir, fomented conspiracy theories about a prevailing Slave Power that backed Taney's opinion,[12] and propelled Abraham Lincoln to national prominence as an anti-slavery advocate.

Lincoln's "Speech on the Dred Scott Decision" was delivered on June 26, 1857, and in it he relied heavily upon the two dissenting opinions of Associate Justices Curtis and McLean. For instance, Associate Justice Benjamin Curtis's dissenting opinion in the Dred Scott case stated:

> and so far inferior that **they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect**, and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold, and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic whenever a profit could be made by it. **This opinion was at that time fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the white race**. It was regarded **as an axiom in morals as well as in politics which no one thought of disputing or supposed to be open to dispute**, and **men in every grade and position in society daily and habitually acted upon it in their private pursuits**, as well as in matters of public concern, without doubting for a moment the correctness of this opinion.
>
> And in no nation was this opinion more firmly fixed or more uniformly acted upon than by the English Government and English people. They not only seized them on the coast of Africa and sold them or held them in slavery for their own use, but they took them as ordinary articles of merchandise to every country where they could make a profit on them, and were far more extensively engaged in this commerce than any other nation in the world.
>
> The opinion thus entertained and acted upon in England was naturally impressed upon the colonies they founded on this side of the Atlantic. And, accordingly, a negro of the African race was regarded by them as an article of property, and held, and bought and sold as such, in every one of the thirteen colonies which united in the Declaration of Independence and afterwards formed the Constitution of the United States. The slaves were more or less numerous in the different colonies as slave labor was found more or less profitable. But no one seems to have doubted the correctness of the prevailing opinion of the time.

[12] Gustavus Myers, *History of the Supreme Court of the United States* (Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1912) p. 472 ("On March 3, 1858, Senator Seward of New York, arose in the United States Senate, and in a scathing yet measured speech, which caused a national sensation, denounced the Supreme Court of the United States, and accused it of having in its Dred Scott decision been in collusion with Buchanan as President-elect and President in a conspiracy to fasten slavery upon the United States for all time.")

To determine whether any free persons, descended from Africans held in slavery, were citizens of the United States under the Confederation, and consequently at the time of the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, it is only necessary to know whether any such persons were citizens of either of the States under the Confederation at the time of the adoption of the Constitution.

Of this there can be no doubt. At the time of the ratification of the Articles of Confederation, all free native-born inhabitants of the States of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and North Carolina, though descended from African slaves, were not only citizens of those States, but such of them as had the other necessary qualifications possessed the franchise of electors, on equal terms with other citizens….

As I conceive, we should deal here not with such disputes, if there can be a dispute concerning this subject, but with those substantial facts evinced by the written Constitutions of States and by the notorious practice under them. And they show, in a manner which no argument can obscure, that, in some of the original thirteen States, free colored persons, before and at the time of the formation of the Constitution, were citizens of those States.

The fourth of the fundamental articles of the Confederation was as follows:

> 'The free inhabitants of each of these States, paupers, vagabonds, and fugitives from justice, excepted, shall be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of free citizens in the several States.'

The fact that free persons of color were citizens of some of the several States, and the consequence that this fourth article of the Confederation would have the effect to confer on such persons the privileges and immunities of general citizenship, were not only known to those who framed and adopted those

> articles, but the evidence is decisive that the fourth article was intended to have that effect, and that more restricted language, which would have excluded such persons, was deliberately and purposely rejected.

Furthermore, Justice Curtis's dissenting opinion in the *Dred Scott* case (1857) also affirmed the "natural rights" conception of liberty that was enunciated in the Lord Mansfield's *Somerset* opinion (1772) and in Chief Justice Cushing's opinion in *The Quock Walker Cases* (1781-1783). To that end, Justice Curtis wrote:

> Slavery, being contrary to natural right, is created only by municipal law. This is not only plain in itself, and agreed by all writers on the subject, but is inferable from the Constitution and has been explicitly declared by this court. The Constitution refers to slaves as "persons held to service in one State, under the laws thereof." Nothing can more clearly describe a status created by municipal law. In *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, 10 Pet. 611, this court said: "The state of slavery is deemed to be a mere municipal regulation, founded on and limited to the range of territorial laws." In *Rankin v. Lydia*, 2 Marsh. 12, 470, the Supreme Court of Appeals of Kentucky said:
>
> > "Slavery is sanctioned by the laws of this State, and the right to hold them under our municipal regulations is unquestionable. But we view this as a right existing by positive law of a municipal character, without foundation in the law of nature or the unwritten common law."
>
> I am not acquainted with any case or writer questioning the correctness of this doctrine. See also 1 Burge, Col. and For. Laws 738-741, where the authorities are collected.[13]

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[13] See, generally, Justice Curtis' dissenting opinion in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393, 564 – 633 (1857).

Similarly, Associate Justice John McClean expressed a similar rationale in his dissenting opinion in the *Dred Scott* case (1857), while citing the case of *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, 41 U.S. 539 (1842), and stating:

> No case in England appears to have been more thoroughly examined than that of *Somerset*. The judgment pronounced by Lord Mansfield was the judgment of the Court of King's Bench. The cause was argued at great length, and with great ability, by Hargrave and others, who stood among the most eminent counsel in England. It was held under advisement from term to term, and a due sense of its importance was felt and expressed by the Bench.
>
> In giving the opinion of the court, Lord Mansfield said:
>
> > 'The state of slavery is of such a nature that it is incapable of being introduced on any reasons, moral or political, but only by positive law, which preserves its force long after the reasons, occasion, and time itself from whence it was created is erased from the memory; it is of a nature that nothing can be suffered to support it but positive law.'
>
> The words of Lord Mansfield, in giving the opinion of the court, were such as were fit to be used by a great judge in a most important case. It is a sufficient answer to all objections to that judgment that it was pronounced before the Revolution, and that it was considered by [the United States Supreme Court] as the highest authority. For near a century, the decision in *Somerset's* Case has remained the law of England….
>
> A slave is brought to England from one of its islands, where slavery was introduced and maintained by the mother country. Although there is no law prohibiting slavery in England, yet there is no law authorizing it, and for near a century, its courts have declared that the slave there is free from the coercion of the master. Lords Mansfield and Stowell agree upon this point, and there is no dissenting authority.

> There is no other description of property which was not protected in England, brought from one of its slave islands. Does not this show that property in a human being does not arise from nature or from the common law, but, in the language of this court, "it is a mere municipal regulation, founded upon and limited to the range of the territorial laws?" This decision is not a mere argument, but it is the end of the law, in regard to the extent of slavery. Until it shall be overturned, it is not a point for argument, it is obligatory on myself and my brethren, and on all judicial tribunals over which this court exercises an appellate power.[14]

This natural law jurisprudence in Justice Curtis' and Justice McClean's dissenting opinions in the *Dred Scott* case (1857) certainly squares with the general constitutional maxim that "slavery" was "against the Gospel as well as the fundamental law of England,"[15] which the *Somerset* case (1772) reflected. Abraham Lincoln would later restate this natural law position, quite emphatically, in his first debate against Senator Stephen Douglass on August 21, 1858, stating:

> [T]here is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. [Loud cheers.] I hold that he is as much entitled to these as the white man. I agree with Judge Douglas he is not my equal in many respects-certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment. But in the right to eat the bread, without the leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man.

And, similarly, in his 1774 classic work, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, while "setting the Bible out of the question" and considering only the principles

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[14] See, generally, Justice McLean' dissenting opinion in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393, 529 – 564 (1857).

[15] See, e.g., W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Suppression of the African Slave Trade," *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1986), p. 15.

of "justice or mercy," Rev. John Wesley attacked the institution of slavery under the same natural-law principles, stating:

> The grand plea is, 'They are authorized by law.' But can law, Human Law, change the nature of things? Can it turn darkness into light, or evil into good? By no means. Notwithstanding ten thousand laws, right is right, and wrong is wrong still. There must still remain an essential difference between justice and injustice, cruelty and mercy. So that I still ask, who can reconcile this treatment of the negroes, first and last, with either mercy or justice?[16]
>
> … What, to whip them for every petty offense, till they are all in gore blood? To take the opportunity, of rubbing pepper and salt into their raw flesh? To drop burning sealing-wax upon their skin? To castrate them? To cut off half their foot with an axe? To hang them on gibbets, that they may die by inches, with heat, and hunger, and thirst? To pin them down to the ground, and then burn them by degrees, from the feet, to the head? To roast them alive?—When did a Turk or a Heathen find it necessary to use a fellow-creature thus?[17]
>
> … Where is the justice of inflicting the severest evils, on those that have done us no wrong? Of depriving those that never injured us in word or deed, of every comfort of life? Of tearing them from their native country, and depriving them of liberty itself? To which an Angolan, has the same natural right as an Englishman, and on which he lets as high a value? Yea where is the justice of taking away the lives of innocent, inoffensive men? Murdering thousands of the in their own land, by the hands of their own countrymen: many thousands, year after year, on shipboard, and then crafting them like dung into the

[16] John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, supra, pp. 14-15.

[17] Ibid., pp. 18 - 19.

> sea! And tends of thousands in that cruel slavery, to which they are so unjustly reduced?[18]

Though Rev. Wesley uses the pastoral language of a Christian minister in making his point, it should be noted that this analysis is perfectly aligned with the appropriate legal or judicial analysis that lawyer or judges are required to make under either the British or the United States constitutions;[19] namely, to analyze and to determine whether, as Wesley put it, "Human Law" squares with natural law or natural justice, such as "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness," which is stated in the Declaration of Independence.

Hence, a good minister of the Gospel—a competent minister—needs to have sufficient knowledge of the social ills of his day, in order to meet the needs of the Church and his fellow countrymen, with respect to confronting those social ills or injustices. The early British and American Methodists readily adopted Rev. Wesley's anti-slavery stance and ministerial example in confronting social ills and injustices.[20] Moreover,

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[18] Ibid., p. 15.

[19] See, e.g., *U.S. v. Morris*, 125 Fed. Rep. 322, 325 (E.D. Ark. 1903), stating:

> Every citizen and freeman is endowed with certain rights and privileges, to enjoy which no written law or statute is required. These are fundamental or natural rights, recognized among all free people. In our Declaration of Independence, the Magna Charta of our republican institutions, it is declared:
>
> > "We hold these rights to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

[20] C. Erick Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, p. 50. the "opposition of Methodists to slavery was expressed officially in the original General Rules set forth by Wesley in 1743 and in the rules adopted at the 1784 Christmas Conference."

Wesley's ideals were also incorporated into the ideals and thoughts of Black America's greatest Christian leaders, such as Frederick Douglass (1817 – 1895)[21] and Bishop Daniel Payne (1811 – 1895).[22]

Lawrence, Brian D., "The relationship between the Methodist church, slavery and politics, 1784-1844" (2018). Theses and Dissertations, pp. 1-2 ("**John Wesley set the tone early for the Methodist's attitude towards slavery**, but **his enthusiasm for the emancipation of slaves would not be fully replicated in the American Methodist church**…. Spiritual equality among people was a fundamental belief in the early Methodist church, whether male, female, black or white. Methodists embraced Galatians 3:28 which says, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

"Slavery was antithetical to both the political ideals of the new nation and the 'soul liberty' of the Methodist church. **While British Methodists proclaimed that slavery represented a fundamental lack of freedom and equality, American Methodists faltered on this issue**…. Though slavery was condemned by early American Methodists, it would eventually become engrained into the church even after outcry from northern Methodists who advocated abolitionism in the 1830s….)

The Methodist Church engaged in a valiant anti-slavery protest movement during the late 1780s. See, e.g., "The Long Road: Francis Asbury and George Washington," (October 1, 2015), https://www.francisasburytriptych.com/francis-asbury-and-george-washington/

> For example, in 1785, Methodists superintendents **Bishop Francis Asbury** and **Thomas Coke** met personally with future **President George Washington** at his home at Mount Vernon. They both asked Gen. Washington to sign their abolition petition to be submitted to Virginia legislature. Gen. Washington stated that he shared their abolition sentiments but felt that it would not be appropriate for him to sign any petition, but that if the Virginia legislature brought the matter to the floor, then he would give his opinion on the subject.

[21] See, generally, "Frederick Douglass," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/frederick-douglass/

[22] Payne argued that slavery must be abolished in principle and in practice. In a speech given in 1839, Payne said:

> Slavery brutalizes man…. So it subverts the moral government of God. In view of the moral agency of man, God hath most wisely and graciously given him a code of laws, and certain positive precepts, to control and regulate moral actions.
>
> This code of laws, and these positive precepts, with the divine influence which they are naturally calculated to exert on the mind of man, constitutes his moral government. Now, to nullify these laws—to weaken or destroy their legitimate influence on the human mind, or to hinder man from yielding universal and entire obedience to them is

Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that I now turn to Rev. Wesley's essay, *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774) as a polemical masterpiece of an example of how Christian clergy should address the social ills and social injustices within the body politic—indeed, it is their stern duty to do so. And here, in *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774), Rev. Wesley does this quite masterfully, without relying upon sermons or the Sacred Scriptures, but with the use of (a) logic and reason, (b) general principles of natural justice and mercy (i.e., equity), (c) the general jurisprudence from Lord Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England, (d) contemporary reports from European travelers to the continent of Africa, and (e) history.

Rev. Wesley's ability to utilize the same analytical and logical tools of secular scholarship, and to do so on a very sophisticated level, is *sine qua non* for effective Christian apologetics. In that regards, Wesley's analytical tools are reminiscent of the theological apologetics of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas. Wesley's apologetics, which *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774) is an example, are a great model for orthodox Methodist and other Protestant pastors, theologians, and lawyers who must, as ambassadors for Christ, vindicate the cause of the voiceless and the oppressed, when circumstances afford the opportunity.

> to subvert the moral government of God. Now, slavery nullifies these laws and precepts—weakens and destroys their influence over the human mind, and hinders men from yielding universal and entire obedience to them; therefore slavery subverts the moral government of God….
>
> In a word, slavery tramples the laws of the living God under its unhallowed feet–weakens and destroys the influence which those laws are calculated to exert over the mind of man, and constrains the oppressed to blaspheme the name of the Almighty.

Source: https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1839-daniel-payne-slavery-brutalizes-man/

I.

"On the Nature and Origins of Slavery"

In *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774), Rev. Wesley defines "Domestic Slavery" and admits that slavery may be manifest in a "variety of forms." There are, however, as Rev. Wesley contended, certain universal and key features of slavery that were manifest in almost every place where that institution existed. One key feature of slavery is compulsory service from the slave to the master, -- a relationship which only the master could dissolve. Another key feature is that the master class retained an arbitrary power of correction and punishment over their slaves. An additional key feature is that the slave class could own or possess nothing except for the benefit of the master class. And, finally, a fourth key feature of slavery was that the master class could also alienate or sell his slaves, just as any of its other domestic animals.

This form of slavery, under various disguises, has appeared worldwide since time immemorial, contended Rev. Wesley in *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, "and in process of time spread into all nations. It prevailed particularly among the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, and the ancient Germans: and was transmitted by theme to the various kingdoms and states, which arouse out of the Roman empire."[23]

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[23] John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, supra, p. 3.

II.

"The Christian Religion Destroyed Slavery"

Thoughts Upon Slavery (1774) purports the important truth that the true essence of the Christian religion—its emphasis upon brotherly love for all mankind—created a set of circumstances that naturally led to the ultimate liberation of humanity and the ultimate extinction of slavery.

Notably, Rev. Wesley pointed out that slavery "gradually fell into decline in almost all parts of Europe," during a period of its history "after Christianity prevailed."[24] "From this time Slavery was nearly extinct," Wesley concludes.[25] Here we may surmise that Rev. Wesley intends to purport that the influence of the Christian religion curtailed the continuation and growth of the institution of slavery throughout Europe.

Thus commenting on the same subject matter, the great French social theorist Alex De Tocqueville opined in his class work *Democracy in America* (1835) that "[a]ntiquity could only have a very imperfect understanding of this effect of slavery on the production of wealth. Then slavery existed throughout the whole civilized world, only some barbarian peoples being without it. Christianity destroyed slavery by insisting on the slave's rights; nowadays it can be attacked from the master's point of view; in this respect interest and morality are in harmony."[26]

Here it is appropriate to pinpoint Frederick Douglass' (1817 – 1895) general three-fold assessment of the Christian religion: first, he witnessed a sort of backwards, mystical, and unlettered "slave" religion among African Americans that was unhelpful; second, he witnessed the slave masters' Christianity, which was hypocritical and avaricious; and, finally, he

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 4.

[26] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, N.Y.: Harper Perennial, 1988), p. 348.

witnessed the true Christianity from many freedom-loving Methodists, such as John Wesley; and from New England Puritans such as William Lloyd Garrison; and from his other fellow African American Christians, and from many others. For it was this later form of "true, freedom-loving Christianity," as Frederick Douglass himself attested to as being his own religion within his autobiographies, and which is reflected in Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, that helped to destroy slavery in America.[27]

[27] Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1995).

III.

"The Age of Discovery, Mercantilism, and Profit"

Thoughts Upon Slavery (1774) addresses the problem of economic greed in a subtle but forceful and masterful way. It does this, first, by pointing out when, where, and why slavery was revitalized; and, secondly, by exposing the three classes of persons—i.e., (a) the captains of the slave ships, (b) the merchants who induce Africans to sell their countrymen, and (c) the planters who owned the plantations—who profited from African slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

Rev. Wesley thus contended that slavery was, unfortunately, revitalized during the 15th century, when the Portuguese began to supply the Spanish colonies in the Western Hemisphere African slaves.[28] This wicked traffic and trade was briefly halted in 1540 when Charles V, the king of Spain, ended them through royal decree. But later, slavery and the slave trade were soon revitalized, and continued for the next three centuries. "Slavery returned and flourished as before."[29]

[28] John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, supra, p. 4.

[29] Ibid.

IV.

"Who were the African captives and From Whence Did they Come?"

In *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774), Rev. Wesley inquires as to precisely what parts of the continent of Africa were the slaves taken, captured, and transported to the New World, and he gives the following description:

> That part of Africa when the Negroes are brought, commonly known by the name of *Guinea*, extends along the coast, in the whole, between three and four thousand miles. From the river *Senegal* (seventeen degrees North of the line) to Cape Sierra Leona, it contains seven hundred miles. Thence it runs Eastward about fifteen hundred miles, including the *Grain-coast*, the *Ivory-coast*, the *Gold-coast*, and the *Slave-coast*, with the large kingdom of *Benin*. From thence it runs Southward, about twelve hundred miles and contains the kingdoms of *Congo* and *Angola*.[30]

Rev. Wesley goes on to describe the character of the African peoples who inhabited Senegal, the Grain coast, the Ivory coast, the Gold coast, the Slave coast, Benin, Congo, and Angola and thus concluded:

> Upon the whole therefore the Negroes who inhabit the coast of Africa, from the rive Senegal to the Southern bounds of Angola, are so far from being the stupid, senseless, brutish, lazy barbarians, the fierce, cruel, perfidious Savages they have been described, that o the contrary, they are represented by them who have no motive to flatter them, as remarkably sensible, considering the few advantages they have for improving their understanding: as industrious to the highest degree, perhaps

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[30] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

> more so than any other natives of so warm a climate: as fair, just, and honest in all their dealings, unless where white men have taught them to be otherwise: and as far more mild, friendly and kind to strangers, than any of our forefathers were. Our forefathers! Where shall we find at this day, among the faire-faced natives of Europe, a nation generally practicing the justice, mercy, and truth, which are found among these poor Africans? Suppose the preceding accounts are true, (which I see no reason or pretence to doubt of,) and we may leave England and France, to seek genuine honesty in Benin, Congo, and Angola.[31]

From these general descriptions, it is clear that Rev. Wesley concludes in *Thoughts Upon Slavery* that the African civilizations from which the slaves were extracted were monotheistic, religious, orderly, and governed by custom and law; and that the Europeans who captured and enslaved these African peoples were avaricious criminals.[32] Hence, Rev. Wesley insinuates that the systematic enslavement of these poor Africans was predicated upon racist stereotypes and pretexts that were designed to vindicate their brutal enslavement.[33]

It is therefore appropriate, once again, to highlight the very important point that, when Rev. Wesley was disseminating this information throughout the British empire 1774—including in the North American colonies where it was published in the city of Philadelphia—that the Declaration of Independence (1776) had not yet been ratified and promulgated. The American revolutionary patriots knew, or should have known, that African slavery and the transatlantic slave trade were crimes against humanity.

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[31] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[32] See, also, Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1994), 534 ("'Slaveholders,' thought I, 'are only a band of successful robbers, who, leaving their own homes, went into Africa for the purpose of stealing and reducing my people to slavery.'").

[33] John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, supra, pp. 4-9.

V.

"How Africans were Captured and Transported to the New World?"

Thoughts Upon Slavery (1774) also documents and summarizes the cruel and avaricious methods which the Englishmen and other Europeans utilized to capture and transport Africans to the New World.

In this masterful work, Rev. Wesley concluded that the whole system of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade was induced "by fraud"[34] by "[c]aptains of ships,"[35] and "by force."[36] He pointed that, significantly, the Europeans sowed seeds of dissension between the Africans, thus "prevailing upon them to make war upon each other, and to sell their prisoners."[37] "[T]he white men first taught them drunkenness and avarice," Rev. Wesley observed, "and then hired them to sell one another. Nay, by this means, even their Kings are induced to sell their own subjects."[38]

In support of these conclusions, Rev. Wesley cites "Mr. Moore, Factor of the African Company in 1730)";[39] "Barbot, (another French Factor)";[40] the

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[34] Ibid., p. 9.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., p. 9 ("The Christians landing upon their coasts, seized as many as they found, men, women and children, and transported them to America."

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[40] Ibid., p. 10.

Journal of a Surgeon";[41] and "Mr. Anderson in his history of Trade and Commerce";[42]

[41] Ibid., p. 11.

[42] Ibid.

VI.

"In What Manner are the African Captives Treated?"

The horrors of the Middle Passage are today well known and studied, and Rev. Wesley mentions some those same accounts in his *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774).

"[A]t least ten thousand of them die in the voyage" of the Middle Passage," Rev. Wesley concluded,[43] and "about a fourth part more die at the different Islands, in what is called the Seasoning. So that at an average, in the passage and seasoning together, thirty thousand die: that is, properly are murdered."[44]

The remaining survivors are exposed naked, whipped, branded, and packed into the slave ships under conditions that evoke wonder as to how any of them survived the voyage from Africa to the West Indies. Upon arrival in the New World, families were brutally separated. "Here you may see mothers hanging over their daughters, bedewing their naked breasts with tears, and daughters clinging to their parents, till the whipper soon obliges them to part."[45]

"As to the punishment inflicted on them," Rev. Wesley quotes "Sir Hans Sloan," who writes, " 'they frequently geld them, or chop off half a foot: after they are whipped till they are raw all over. Some put pepper and salt upon them: some drop melted wax upon their skill. Others cut off their ears, and constrain them to broil and eat them. For Rebellion,' (that is, asserting their native Liberty, which they have as much right to as to the air they breathe) 'they fasten them down to the ground with crooked sticks on

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., p. 12.

every limb, and then applying fire by degrees, to the feet and hands, they burn them gradually upward to the head.'"[46]

One objection which Rev. Wesley received was this: "it is necessary when we have slaves, to use them with severity."[47] To this point, Rev. Wesley rejoined, "What, to whip them for every petty offence… To castrate them? To cut off half their foot with an axe?"[48]

Rev. Wesley then analyzes the "law of Virginia," the "law of Jamaica," the "law of Barbadoes" and concluded that "these Law-makers" were no more civilized or merciful than the brutal slave traders aboard the slave ships or the slave drivers on the plantations.[49]

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[46] Ibid., p. 13.

[47] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

[48] Ibid., p. 19.

[49] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

VII.

"Slavery is Inconsistent with Natural Law and the Fundamental Laws of England"

Significantly, Rev. Wesley turned to a greater legal historian than himself, Chief Justice William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765)[50] where it can be found the whole and complete rationale for the natural-law jurisprudence which undergird the holding in the *Somerset* opinion (1772) and in the *Quock Walker* opinion (1781)—two landmark cases which expressly refute the infamous *Dred Scott* opinion (1857).

Rev. Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774) thus quotes Blackstone's *Commentaries*, as follows:

> The three origins of the right of slavery assigned by Justinian, are all built upon false foundations.
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> 1. Slavery is said to arise from captivity in war. The conqueror having a right to the life of his captive, if he spares that, has then a right to deal with them as he speaks. But this is untrue, if taken generally, That by the laws of nations, a man has a right to kill his enemy. He has only a right to kill him in particular cases, in cases of absolute necessity for self-defense. And it is plain, this absolute necessity did not subsist, since he did not kill him, but made him prisoner. War itself is justifiable only on principles of self-preservation. Therefore it gives us no right over prisoners, but to hinder their hurting us by confining them. Much leis can it give a right to torture, or kill, or even enslave an enemy when the war is over. Since therefore the right of making our prisoners slaves, depends on a supposed

[50] Ibid. Here, Rev. Wesley's quote of Blackstone is taken from Article 4, Section 2, Clause 3 of the *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765), which the University of Chicago has reprinted at the following link: https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/a4_2_3s1.html

> right of slaughter, that foundation failing, the consequence which is drawn from it must fail likewise....
>
> It is said secondly, Slavery may begin, by one man's selling himself to another. And it is true, a man may sell himself to work for another; but he can not sell himself to be a slave, as above defined. Every sale implies an equivalent given to the seller, in lieu: of what he transfers to the buyer. But what equivalent can be given for life or liberty? His property likewise, with the very price which he seems to receive devolves *ipso facto* to his master, the instant he become his slave: in this case therefore the buyer gives nothing. Of what validity then can a sale be, which destroys the very principle upon which all sales are founded?'
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> We are told, Thirdly, that men may be born slaves, by being the children of salves. But this being built upon the two former rights must fall together with them, if neither captivity, nor contract can by the plain law of nature and reason, reduce the parent to a state of slavery, much less can they reduce the offspring.'[51]

And even though Rev. Wesley omits a portion of Blackstone's quotation, it is helpful to our discussion to include, in addition, the following part, where Blackstone concludes his remarks by stating:

> Upon these principles the law of England abhors, and will not endure the existence of, slavery within this nation….
>
> Upon these principles the law of England abhors, and will not endure the existence of, slavery within this nation: so that when an attempt was made to introduce it, by statute 1 Edw. VI. c. 3. which ordained, that all idle vagabonds should be made slaves, and fed upon bread, water, or small drink, and refuse meat; should wear a ring of iron round their necks, arms, or legs; and

[51] Ibid., pp. 15-16 [Rev. Wesley quoting William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765)]

> should be compelled by beating, chaining, or otherwise, to perform the work assigned them, were it never so vile; the spirit of the nation could not brook this condition, even in the most abandoned rogues; and therefore this statute was repealed in two years afterwards. And now it is laid down, **that a slave or negro, the instant he lands in England, becomes a freeman**; that is, the law will protect him in the enjoyment of his person, his liberty, and his property.

From these two authorities, Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765) and Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774), we must conclude that Chief Justice Roger B. Taney and the several Associate Justices who upheld the *Dred Scott* decision (1857) were without excuse, and without ignorance of the moral law or common law or constitutional law of Great Britain, which were then adopted and incorporated into the laws of all of the colonies.[52]

When the United States was founded, it tried to compromise with this moral evil, this moral stench, with all of its trifling, filthy, and licentious wrongs that were inflicted upon the African slaves, by permitting the institution of slavery and the slave trade to exist *for a while*, by permitting the slave trade *to linger for twenty additional years,* from the adoption of the United States Constitution in 1788 to the year 1808; and by protecting the interests of slave-holders by having fugitive slaves in the free states to be returned to their masters in the slave states.[53] These were

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[52] See, e.g., W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Suppression of the African Slave Trade," *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1986), p. 15 (stating that in the colony of Georgia, "Oglethorpe and the London proprietors prohibited from the beginning both the rum and the slave traffic, refusing to 'suffer slavery (which is against the Gospel as well as the fundamental law of England) to be authorised under our authority.'")

[53] "Justice Thurgood Marshall on the Declaration of Independence (1776)." See, e.g., Justice Thurgood Marshall's dissenting opinion in *Regents of Univ. of Cal. vs. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265, 388-389 (1978), stating,

> An earlier draft of the Declaration of Independence, submitted by Thomas Jefferson to the Continental Congress, had included among the charges against the King that
>
> > "[h]e has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended

temporary measures, and it is reasonable to assume that the Founding Fathers believe in the gradual elimination of slavery. This grand assumption, the United States Supreme Court had already acknowledged in the case of *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* (1842), supra, some fifteen years before its holding in the *Dred Scott* opinion (1857)—hence, the influence of the Slave Power in American jurisprudence and the hypocrisy among the justices of the United States Supreme Court were laid bare for all Americans to witness and study, as did Abraham Lincoln and many others This was the chief cause of the American Civil War (1861 – 1865).

> him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither."

Franklin 88. The Southern delegation insisted that the charge be deleted; the colonists themselves were implicated in the slave trade, and inclusion of this claim might have made it more difficult to justify the continuation of slavery once the ties to England were severed. Thus, even as the colonists embarked on a course to secure their own freedom and equality, they ensured perpetuation of the system that deprived a whole race of those rights.

VIII.

"Capitalism, Slavery, and Profits"

Finally, Rev. Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774) goes directly to what he concludes is the seat and source of an economic problem; namely the avarice among (1) "the captains employed in this trade";[54] (2) "every Merchant, who is engaged in the Slave-Trade";[55] and (3) "every gentleman that has an estate in our American plantations."[56]

Regarding the later class, that of the "planter class" or the "gentlemen" who owned the American plantations, Rev. Wesley charged:

> Now it is *your money* that pays the Merchant, and through him the Captain, and the African butchers. You therefore are guilty, yea principally guilty, of all these frauds, robberies and murders. You are the spring that puts all the rest in motion: they would not stir a step without you: therefore the blood of all these wretches, who die before their time, whether in the country or elsewhere, lies upon your head.[57]

Here Rev. Wesley's critique of the British-American capitalistic system—the triangular transatlantic African slave trade-- that produced the brutal exploitation of the African continent, is an exemplification of legitimate Christian social-justice advocacy! Not only are there present-day crimes against humanity that warrant the same vigorous critique and opposition, as is manifest in *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774), but the present-day plight of the descendants of those same African slaves is deserving of the same

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[54] John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774), supra, p. 21.

[55] Ibid., p. 22.

[56] Ibid., p. 23.

[57] Ibid., pp. 23-24.

critical analysis and condemnation from Christian social-justice advocates and ministers.

This is what Rev. Wesley meant by his definition of "social holiness" – a theme that characterizes true Methodism—it means mercy, justice, and truth. Criticize it as being communism, socialism, and Marxism, but the universal gravitation toward social justice—the "love of neighbor as oneself" — is an iron law of nature and of the human spirit, which cannot be ignored or denied.[58]

THE END

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[58] See, also, R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New York, N.Y.: Mentor Books, 1954), pp. 156 – 157:

> With the expansion of finance and international trade in the sixteenth century, it was this problem which faced the Church. Granted that I should love my neighbor as myself, the questions which, under modern conditions of large-scale organization, remain for solution are, **Who precisely is my neighbor**? And, **How exactly am I to make my love for him effective in practice**? To these questions the conventional religious teaching supplied no answer, for it had not even realized that they could be put. It had tried to moralize economic relations by treating every transaction as a case of personal conduct, involving personal responsibility. In an age of impersonal finance, world-markets and a capitalist organization of industry, its traditional social doctrines had no specific to offer, and were merely repeated, when, in order to be effective, they should have been thought out again from the beginning and formulated in new and living terms. It had endeavored to protect the peasant and the craftsman against the oppression of the moneylender and the monopolist. Faced with the problems of a wage-earning proletariat, it could do no more than repeat, with meaningless iteration, its traditional lore as to the duties of master to servant and servant to master. It had insisted that all men were brethren. But it did not occur to it to point out that, as a result of the new economic imperialism which was beginning to develop in the seventeenth century, the brethren of the English merchants were the Africans whom he kidnaped for slavery in America, or the American Indians whom he stripped of their lands, or the Indian craftsmen from whom he bought muslims and silks at starvation prices…. [T]he social doctrines advanced from the pulpit offered, in their traditional form, little guidance. Their practical ineffectiveness prepared the way for their theoretical abandonment…. [T]he Church of England turned its face from the practical world, to pore over doctrines which, had their original authors been as impervious to realities as their later exponents, would never have been formulated. Naturally it was shouldered aside. It was neglected because it had become negligible.

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