

# The African Continent: From Protagonist in Spreading the Gospel to Enslaved in the Name of God

Rogério Donizetti Bueno

Throughout history, humans have altered and changed their criteria to classify who is the “other.” This “other” is obviously a different reference from who we are, which is classified from an ideal model in a structured racist system. In the course of human history, this system was developed with a single goal, according to Husserl: the “Europeanization” of all

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peoples, including black people, who will be the focus of this text.<sup>1</sup>

Trying to number and analyze all the criteria already used for the classification of the black subject, that is, the “other” here, would be a task beyond the scale of our research; instead, we will focus on the religious pretexts used throughout human history for an almost always negative classification, the consequences of which are beyond dispute.

According to Dawson, “There is no civilization that has not been built on a religious framework,”<sup>2</sup> so from this perspective all civilizations have their foundations in religion, and, in the case of the West, the Christian base is undeniable. Of all nations, Portugal, a “small, rather poor, culturally backward nation, perched on the south-west coast of Europe,”<sup>3</sup> came to be characterized by a slave-based economy during its imperialistic expansion. In the “imperialist age,” European powers came to dominate large parts of the world while affirming their cultural superiority.<sup>4</sup> Portugal went out to sea, giving rise to a colonialism which, according to Ferro, justified itself under the sign of evangelization.<sup>5</sup>

In going out to sea, the Portuguese objectives were not necessarily clear in relation to the subjugation of

1. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1970), 16.

2. Christopher Dawson, *Criação do ocidente: A religião e a civilização medieval* (São Paulo: É Realizações, 2016), 9 (in the presentation to the Brazilian edition).

3. J. H. Plumb, introduction to *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415–1825*, by Charles Ralph Boxer (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), xxi.

4. Marc Ferro, *A colonização explicada a todos* (São Paulo: Unesp, 2017), 14.

5. Marc Ferro, *Colonization: A Global History* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 8, 76, 113.

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the peoples with whom they would make contact. Yet the result was a long period of dominion over part of the African continent that would pass through a forced migration process entirely unprecedented in human history and that would last until 1888 in Brazil.

Compulsory migration had to be justified, and the construction of a pejorative image of the African peoples was necessary in order to dehumanize an entire continent. This process did not take place abruptly; it was constructed over the centuries and was based on the idea that the African peoples “were very underdeveloped tribes which led a sub-human life, similar to animals.”<sup>6</sup>

In the name of saving the souls of black people under religious zeal, one of the greatest crimes against humanity was committed. But does the Christian religion or even Judaism, from which Christianity comes, legitimize this appalling and lamentable episode of our story?

Answering this question is perhaps not an easy task since colonized territories are, according to Achille Mbembe, “prime” places where controls and judicial guarantees can be suspended—zones where the violence of the state of exception<sup>7</sup> supposedly operates

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6. John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History* (Nairobi: Paulines, 1994), 96.

7. Daniel Arruda Nascimento describes the state of exception as an essentially extrajudicial mechanism for the protection of the legal order, a provisional suspension of the democratic regime to safeguard democracy itself. See Daniel Arruda Nascimento, “Do fim da experiência ao fim do jurídico: percurso de Giorgio Agamben” (PhD diss., Universidade de Campinas, 2010), 121–22.

in the service of “civilization.”<sup>8</sup> This violence also operates from the religion of the colonizer.

If, on the one hand, black people groups were forced to migrate, on the other and centuries before, black territories were welcoming homes for the descendants of Abraham, and for Jesus himself and his parents who took refuge in Egypt. From this juxtaposition we will try to understand the relationship of these peoples who are sent off from their territories after having received those who sought a home.

## Who Were They Before They Became “Black”?

Although it is common to refer to the African continent as the “black” continent, “between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, ‘blacks’ did not see themselves in Africa at all as ‘blacks.’”<sup>9</sup> They identified themselves according to their ethnicity. “Black” was somehow a “white” construction.<sup>10</sup> Even knowing that the history of African peoples did not begin with the arrival of the Europeans, nor with the arrival of the Portuguese, it is undeniable that, upon their arrival, an “other” was created from the white perspective in denominating the African subjects “blacks.” And then the ideal of uniformity was imposed by the Europeans,

8. Achille Mbembe, *Necropolítica: Biopoder, soberania, estado de exceção, política de morte* (São Paulo: N-1 Edições, 2018), 35 [English edition, *Necropolitics*, forthcoming October 2019].

9. José d’Assunção Barros, *A construção social da cor: Diferença e desigualdade na formação da sociedade brasileira* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 2014), 39.

10. *Ibid.*

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and the human diversity that was to be seen as something natural came to be seen as “scandalous and shocking.”<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, technologies allowed bigger displacements, encounters and contact between different peoples increased, and what once was rare became more frequent. Thus, understanding the one who is different turned out to be a necessity! But “different” from which referential?

The construction of the African “other” as the embodiment of evil happened in a continuous way. In order to understand this process, we must refer back to 150 BC, when Ptolemy was the mapmaker of Alexander the Great. For Ptolemy, “Modern Ethiopia, called Abyssinia, with which all contacts had been lost for centuries, was known as Middle India.”<sup>12</sup>

Against this highly confused background concept of the geographical world, the legend of Prester John of India and a mysterious call arose from Ethiopia. The legend spoke of a powerful Christian ruler who was both priest and king and who reigned over a great empire somewhere in the Indies.<sup>13</sup>

It is noteworthy, therefore, that there was the expectation of an African and Christian king who would join forces with the European kings in the fight against the spread of Islam, for he had “a formidable army” under

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11. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), 330.

12. Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity*, 43.

13. *Ibid.*

his command.<sup>14</sup> As the historian John Baur explains, “The origin of the legend was twofold: the title *Gian...*, occasionally given to the Ethiopian kings; and their position as accepted heads of their Church which had given rise to the Ethiopian idea that they were priests (presters in old English).”<sup>15</sup>

To gain such a powerful ally was, for Portugal, the chance for the “reconquest of their own homeland from the power of their age-long overlords, the Moors.”<sup>16</sup> But if on the one hand there was the expectation of a Christian king and a possible ally, on the other hand, it was necessary to stop the advance of Islam and punish those who, under the Christian Catholic perspective, were enemies and, in this case, not only the Saracens, but also all pagans. The foundation to legitimize the holy war was given by Pope Nicholas V on June 18, 1452. In issuing the papal bull *Dum Diversas*, the pope authorized the Portuguese king to “invade, conquer, fight, subjugate the Saracens and pagans, and other infidels and other enemies of Christ”;<sup>17</sup> and “to capture their goods and their territories; to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to transfer their lands and properties to the King of Portugal and his successors.”<sup>18</sup>

The papal bull made it clear that the Islamists and pagans were to be fought, and there were no difficulties

14. *Ibid.*, 44.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 46.

17. “Dum Diversas (English Translation),” *Unam Sanctam Catholicam*, February 5, 2011, <http://unamsanctamcatholicam.blogspot.com/2011/02/dum-diversas-english-translation.html>.

18. Boxer, *Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, 21.

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in identifying these two groups. But how to define the group called “other enemies of Christ”?

Before defining “the enemies of Christ,” it was necessary to define the parameters under which the values considered true were erected, since, as Wallerstein observes, “The history of the modern world-system has been in large part a history of the expansion of European states and peoples into the rest of the world.”<sup>19</sup> The capitalist world economy has in fact been constructed on the foundation of such expansion. In most regions of the world, this expansion has involved “military conquest, economic exploitation, and massive injustices.”<sup>20</sup>

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Europe puts itself as a parameter to be followed by other peoples and, in order for this to happen, it has used every possible expedient to the point that Edmund Husserl affirms that there is a European humanity that transcends geographical limits and presents itself as a spiritual figure.<sup>21</sup>

Larrosa corroborates Husserl's idea that the “Europeanization” of all foreign humanities is gradually transforming “the world into one world, all humanity into one humanity, and all history into one history.”<sup>22</sup> And this single story that is unable to cope with other

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19. Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (New York: The New Press, 2006), 1.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences*, 275–76.

22. Jorge Larrosa, *Nietzsche & a Educação* (Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2009), 78.

stories also requires a deletion of all non-European narratives.

This way of thinking in relation to non-European knowledge is classified by Santos as “abyssal thinking,” which for the author is the disappearance of other forms of thought. The only epistemological production validated as legitimate is what falls on one side of the line, the European side.<sup>23</sup> This process was not peaceful, and in it, Europeans took advantage of racist violence that aimed to “destroy the identity of the black subject.”<sup>24</sup>

## Other Enemies of Christ

Not professing the Islamic faith or other animist faiths in any way meant being free to be considered “other enemies of Christ.” A model of personhood, of civilization, and of faith was already set, and that standard was Catholic Christianity, self-titled the guardian of the tradition initiated by a Jewish rabbi named Yeshua the Messiah, who claimed not to have come to destroy the law or even the prophets but to fulfill it, a rabbi committed to the teachings brought by the Torah. Therefore, if the Messiah was committed to the Torah and claimed only to do what he had seen his Father doing,

23. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Para além do pensamento abissal: das linhas globais a uma ecologia de saberes,” in Maria Paula Meneses and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, eds., *Epistemologias do Sul* (São Paulo: Cortez, 2010), 32.

24. Neusa Santos Souza, *Tornar-se negro: as vicissitudes da identidade do negro brasileiro em ascensão social* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal, 1983), 2–3.



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we will seek in the pages of the Torah, the Tanakh, and the New Testament what treatment was given to black peoples.

The first mention in the Torah of the African continent is found in the book of Bereshit (Genesis), chapter 2, verse 13, which tells us about a river called “the Gihon,” which “winds through the entire land of Cush.” “Cush” is the Hebrew way of referring to the part of the territory that currently encompasses Sudan and Ethiopia.<sup>25</sup> The same river that gave life to the garden planted in Eden gave life to the land of the Cushite people. For the prophet Ezekiel, the same river originated in the temple (Ez 47:1–12).<sup>26</sup> As we can see, the biblical text is not communicating racial restraints in regard to Africa and African peoples. This land, watered by the waters that came from the garden, received the descendants of Abraham, born in the land of Ur, whose current location is in Iraqi territory.

In responding to God’s call to leave his homeland and go to an unknown land, Abraham became a migrant. The land that welcomed him also welcomed his descendants and, until the days of Jacob, Canaan was the land of this nomadic people.

The situation stays the same until a great famine comes, and, in order to avoid starvation, Jacob tells his

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25. Aryeh Kaplan, *A Torá Viva: O Pentateuco e as Haftarot*, trans. Adolpho Wasserman (São Paulo: Maayanot, 2013), 7.

26. *Bíblia sagrada africana: texto sagrado da Bíblia da Difusora Bíblica* (Maputo: Difusora Bíblica, 2004), 29n.

sons, “Why do you just keep looking at each other?... I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die” (Gn 42:1–2). The account of the coming and going of the sons of Jacob to buy grain would culminate in the reunion of Jacob and his other sons with Joseph, and eventually the whole family would move to Egypt. Pharaoh himself received them, and Jacob maintained good relations with Pharaoh: “Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence” (Gn 47:9–10).

At first, the Jews called Egypt “Mizraim,” which among other things may mean “narrow place.”<sup>27</sup> But, initially, the Egyptian lands were not narrow for Jacob and his children; on the contrary, Egypt was a wide place, for it received the seventy members of their family, giving them the best of the land so that, engaged in herding, the newcomers could continue their trade. The land was welcoming, and the people multiplied.

Although the interpretation that Egypt was oppressive to the Hebrew people is recurrent, we cannot lose sight of the fact that Egypt was never supposed to be the final destination of the Hebrews. A uterus that nurtures a fetus is spacious at first, but, as the months go by, it becomes narrow and cramped. In order not to kill the fetus, the uterus forces the fetus to leave. Something similar happened in the relationship between Egypt and the Hebrews. It was not the land of promise, and the expelled people set out, migrant once again!

27. Nilton Bonder, *Our Immoral Soul: A Manifesto of Spiritual Disobedience*, trans. Diane Groszklaus (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), in “Steps toward Betrayal,” Kindle.

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But who were these people? This is not, in fact, a rhetorical question.

Over the course of many years<sup>28</sup> there were interactions among the Hebrews to the point of deserving the record in Exodus 12:38 that there was among them “many other people” (NIV), “a mixed multitude” (KJV), “an ethnically diverse crowd” (HCSB); and, in Numbers 11:4, “the mixt multitude that was among them” (KJV), “the rabble with them” (NIV). According to historian John Bright, “These were presumably likewise fugitive slaves,...perhaps even Egyptians.”<sup>29</sup> It is precisely from this mixed people that the leader of the Hebrews, Moses, chose his wife, a Cushite woman (Nu 12:1).

In this crowd of peoples who left Egypt, part was Hebrew, but not all: “Israel, even in the wilderness, had picked up groups of miscellaneous origin, some of whom no doubt had been neither in Egypt nor at Sinai but who had, one might say, become converts.”<sup>30</sup> And if, on the one hand, foreigners joined Jacob’s descendants when Moses led them out of Egypt, on

28. Determining the time frame of the development of the people of Israel and how long Jacob’s descendants were enslaved in Egypt is an extremely difficult task and is a highly debated matter. Scriptural references to numbers and generations present seeming contradictions when approached from a strict sense of chronology. The scholar David Glatt-Gilad summarizes the various approaches to rectifying the biblical math and ultimately concludes that, despite our inability to know exactly when and for how long, “We can still draw theological meaning from this lack of historical clarity.... God’s plan was to redeem Israel at the proper time whether sooner or later, but with a pre-determined outer limit.” See David Glatt-Gilad, “How Many Years Were the Israelites in Egypt?”, *TheTorah.com*, January 11, 2016, <https://thetorah.com/how-many-years-were-the-israelites-in-egypt/>.

29. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 134.

30. *Ibid.*

the other hand, some Hebrews stayed in Egypt. Jewish traditions preserved in the Talmud hold that roughly eighty percent of Jacob's descendents decided to stay in Egypt instead of following Moses to liberation.<sup>31</sup> As Rosenberg explains, from the earliest days of the saga of the Jewish people "to their being exiled and scattered among the nations, there were always a large number of Jews who 'left the boat,' who forgot about the Torah and its traditions and let themselves be carried away by the little whirlwind that we call assimilation."<sup>32</sup>

The Old Testament mentions the peoples of the African continent in countless accounts, and, even in passages that exhort them, the reprimands and exhortations have nothing to do with racial matters. We do not consider, therefore, that there are theological foundations in the Old Testament for racial prejudice.

*We do not find theological foundations in the Old Testament for racial prejudice.*

The New Testament also mentions people from African nations, including the region of Cush (Ethiopia, Ac 8:28) and, unlike the Old Testament, it does include a mention of skin color. In the church at Antioch, where the disciples were first called Christians, there were the following prophets and teachers: Barnabas; Simeon, called "Niger" ("black" in Latin); Lucius of Cyrene, a city located in present-day Libya, an African country located to the

31. Gidon Rothstein, "Failures on the Eve of Exodus and Its Aftermath," *Orthodox Union*, <https://www.ou.org/torah/machshava/change-your-pesach-change-your-life/failures-eve-exodus-aftermath/>.

32. Ruben Rosenberg, *Ensaio sobre a Torá – Shemot* (São Paulo: Sêfer, 2009), 116–17.

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north of the continent; Manaen; and Saul (Ac 13:1).<sup>33</sup> Two of the five men mentioned as prophets and teachers in the influential congregation of Antioch were of African heritage.

In contrast to what is commonly believed, the gospel did not reach the African continent via evangelization from Europeans; rather, through the prayer of Africans led by the Holy Spirit, Paul received the commission and was sent to the Gentiles (Ac 13:2–3).

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Another passage in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, by mistake of the translators, hides a precious and elucidative message for the descendants of Cush. The passage deals with Philip's meeting with an Ethiopian eunuch described as "an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means 'queen of the Ethiopians')"; the Lucan text further tells us that "This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and [was] on his way home" (Ac 8:28).

According to Stern, there are only two possibilities for this Ethiopian: to be a Jew by birth or a proselyte, but, regardless of which, as a Jew he had the right to enter the temple premises to offer his worship.<sup>34</sup> Yet, the Scripture found in Acts 8 points out that he was a eunuch, and, according to the book of Deuteronomy,

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33. See Rogério Donizetti Bueno, "Um olhar negro para uma releitura bíblica," in Francisco Evangelista, Lucineia Chrispim Pinho Micaela, and Rubia Cristina Cruz, eds., *Africanidades, afrodescendências e educação* (Curitiba: CRV, 2017), 313.

34. David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1999), 250.

“No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord” (Dt 23:1, ESV).

The solution to this impasse, which over the centuries has been explained in many ways, has gained new contours since 2001 with the publication of Andrew Gabriel Roth’s *Signs of the Cross: The Search for the Historical Jesus from a Jewish Perspective*. He believes the New Testament is a set of accounts written in Aramaic, a language common in the time of Jesus. And “In Aramaic, the word *m’haimna* can mean ‘eunuch’, but it also means ‘faithful one’ or ‘believer’, which is the intended meaning here.”<sup>35</sup>

If Roth is correct, we have not only Judaism but also the messianic expectation among Cushites long before any European evangelizes Africa. When the Portuguese do arrive in Africa with their many mixed motives, how would they categorize these people who were neither Saracens, pagans, nor infidels? For the Portuguese Catholics, it was not enough that the Cushites were descendants of one of Noah’s sons, or that a New Testament Cushite demonstrated the expectation of the Christian Messiah. The fact of the matter was that the people the Portuguese encountered did not follow the standards dictated by the Roman religion. That is, not following the standards of Rome meant one belonged among the “other enemies of Christ” identified in the papal bull.

35. Andrew Gabriel Roth, *Signs of the Cross: The Search for the Historical Jesus from a Jewish Perspective* (n.p.: Xlibris Corporation, 2001), 260–61.

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As much as some might wish to believe there was a purely religious basis for the justification of the slave system, to disregard the overlapping economic question is to have a myopic viewpoint, for the core of the slave system was indelibly connected with past forms of capitalism. Not immediately apparent in the mid-fifteenth century, racial issues were masked by a religious fog, the purpose of which was to entertain the unwary and lead them to believe in a struggle between good and evil; when, in fact, it was the attempt of the kings of Portugal to unite “the two powers, spiritual and temporal, that the one should never be exercised without the other.”<sup>36</sup>

This cloud of smoke is an ideology. To explain it, Althusser elaborated the metaphor of the building. According to him:

The structure of every society as an *edifice* comprising a base (or infrastructure) on which the two “floors” of the superstructure are erected is a metaphor. To be quite precise, it is a spatial metaphor: the metaphor of a topography [*topique*]. Like all metaphors, this one, too, suggests or makes us see something. What? Precisely the fact that the upper floors could not “stay up” (in the air) all by themselves if they did not rest, precisely, on their *base*, and its foundations. Thus the object of the metaphor of the edifice is, above all, to represent

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36. Diogo do Couto (1612), quoted in Boxer, *Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, 228.

“determination *in the last instance*” by the economic base.<sup>37</sup>

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Religious cloaks have been used throughout Christian history to cover up profitable trade, the basis for the primitive accumulation of capital, and the system of the reification of people, which was the basis for future bourgeois revolutions in Europe.

The existence of a theoretical foundation with biblical/theological bases required the participation of clerics in its elaboration. These ecclesiastics, according to Gramsci, constituted the most typical category of traditional intellectuals in the service of hegemonic power and acted as “the dominant group’s ‘deputies’ exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government.”<sup>38</sup> That is, they were responsible for disseminating the ideology established by the dominant elite, relying first on their prestige and, therefore, on the trust they enjoyed with the population for the purpose of establishing a “spontaneous consent.”<sup>39</sup>

We must keep in mind that, at the time, the Bible was inaccessible to commoners, as it was written in languages most people did not know. Hebrew, Greek,

37 Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (New York: Verso, 2014), from chapter 4, “Base and Superstructure.”

38. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 12.

39. *Ibid.*



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and Latin were languages restricted to intellectuals, and the Bible was not accessibly translated into the vernacular until the sixteenth century, with the German translation by the Catholic monk Martin Luther, after he set off what came to be known as the Protestant Reformation. In this context of little to no access to Scripture, it was to be expected that the “truths” spoken and confirmed by the clerics would be accepted by the people, thus safeguarding the hegemonic order.

The best known of the biblical/theological arguments used to justify black enslavement was based on the biblical text of Genesis 9, which describes the initial moments after the departure from the ark that saved Noah and his family from the flood:

The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth. Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father’s naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would

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not see their father naked. When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said,

“Cursed be Canaan!  
The lowest of slaves  
will he be to his brothers.” (Gn 9:18–25)

As we can read, the curse is directed not to Ham, who had committed the disrespectful act against his father; instead, it falls upon his son Canaan. To clarify the reasons for this is not our focus. However childish this argument may seem, it served in the past and still serves today as a basis for the justification of the ills to

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which the African peoples are subjected. On March 31, 2011, a widely circulated newspaper in Brazil called *Estadão* reported that the pastor and then-congressman for the Christian Social Party (PSC), Marcos Feliciano, published on his social networks that “The curse that Noah cast on his grandson, Canaan, spills over on the African continent, hence the famine, pestilence, disease, ethnic wars!”<sup>40</sup>

To use Genesis 9 as justification for the enslavement of black bodies requires hyperleaps of prejudice and the disregard of logic. A close reading of the text indicates that, first,

40. Eduardo Bresciani, “No Twitter, deputado diz que africanos são amaldiçoados,” *Estadão*, March 31, 2011, <https://politica.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,no-twitter-deputado-diz-que-africanos-sao-amaldicoados,700037>.

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the curse is directed to Canaan and, though we may extend it to Canaan's descendants, it in no way would touch Cush, his older brother, according to Josephus<sup>41</sup> and, much less, to his descendants, the Cushites.

Canaan was an ancestor of the Canaanite people. Canaanites and Cushites were geographically separated. The enslavement of the descendants of Canaan, unlike the enslavement of the descendants of his brother, never had an economic base. It was unlike what happened with the enslavement of blacks in the American continent, as William tells us: "Here, then, is the origin of Negro slavery. The reason was economic, not racial; it had to do not with the color of the laborer, but the cheapness of the labor. As compared with Indian and white labor, Negro slavery was eminently superior."<sup>42</sup>

Connected to that, we can disregard all other attempts to justify from Scripture the enslavement of Africans. Although such justifications have, over time, had greater or lesser emphasis, the religious argument has always been concomitant to arguments from politics, philosophy, culture, the sciences, the arts, etc. The aim of a religious argument was to justify the claim that African peoples would be saved through slavery from their intellectual backwardness and paganism, but the smokescreen confirms the "building-like metaphor of

41. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* in *The Complete Works of Flavius-Josephus the Celebrated Jewish Historian*, trans. William Whiston (Philadelphia: John E. Potter, 1895), 35–36.

42. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1943; Philadelphia: R. P. Pryne, 2015), in chapter 1, "The Origin of Negro Slavery."

base and superstructure...used by Marx and Engels to propound the idea that the economic structure of society (the base) conditions the existence and forms of the state and social consciousness (the superstructure).<sup>43</sup>

We cannot, therefore, disregard the role of the colonial system and the slave trade in the primitive accumulation of capital as the main cause of the enslavement of the African peoples.

## Conclusion

The slave enterprise arose from and was developed by two extremely Christian nations: Roman Catholic Spain and Portugal. Yet even among the nationals there were few who found the practice of imprisoning people in order to sell them as slaves to be incompatible with adhering to the Christian faith. The pervasive lack of appreciation for the incompatibility of these two things on the part of those who profited from this trade was so extensive that the Propaganda Fide secretary wrote to the Portuguese ambassador to the Congo in 1833 that “The greatest hindrance of the missions is the slave-trade, operated by the [Portuguese] Christians of Angola. It renders our religion odious to the Africans who keep in mind their chains instead of seeing the freedom brought to them by Jesus Christ.”<sup>44</sup>

43. Tom Bottomore, ed. *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 45.

44. Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity*, 95.

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We see that when there was an interest in carrying out real evangelization among the peoples who did not yet know Christianity, there existed a legitimate repulsion on the part of the African peoples, since the practices of the Christians did not agree with their preaching; and even the people who knew Christianity, but who did not fit into the Christian Catholic standard, were considered to be “other enemies of Christ.” This left no alternative for those who were subjected by force first to the faith of the colonizer and then to enslavement.

For almost four centuries, African peoples were subjected to Christian catechesis, first by Catholics and then, after 1517, also increasingly by Protestants. This process did not occur without resistance, which surfaced in the most varied forms. Syncretism, a primary form of resistance, served to conceal the real meaning of celebrations that took place in slave quarters or even in public spaces when slave masters allowed them. Yet as soon as the slaves and their descendants were able to express themselves freely, they no longer demonstrated the faith of the colonizer, nor even the original beliefs of the many enslaved peoples. Rather, through a dialectical process, the faith of the many black peoples and the faith of the Europeans generated a new, third expression of the sacred. It manifested itself in nonconformity with the oppression still maintained by society. Sartre’s question drives the point home once slavery was officially ended: “When you removed the gag that was keeping these black mouths shut, what were you hoping

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*Freed African slaves and their descendants claimed Christianity as a black religion again.*

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for? That they would sing your praises?”<sup>45</sup> The peoples of Africa and the African diaspora resignified the European Christian faith from their own cultures. Europeans had co-opted the Christian faith and reduced it to the image and likeness of the European man; freed African slaves and their descendants claimed Christianity as a black religion again.

45. Jean-Paul Sartre, “Black Orpheus,” in *The Massachusetts Review* 6, no. 1 (1964–1965), 13.