

Bad Rap for Biblical Slavery

The purpose of this document is to define Biblical Slavery. Like every gift from God, Biblical Slavery is for good. Set up for the slave, it was not a permanent indenture. In fact, if he wanted a permanent indenture, he (he/she) could do it, but they were “earmarked” as a fool, a slave who had chosen slavery as a lifetime profession. By the way since we were made in the image of God, an earmark (the seal of a fool pounded into the ear with a hammer) was the only type of mark allowed to be added to the body. Except for the fools, slavery only lasted for term of the indenture or until the Jubilee year, whichever came first. Like when we go into our Armed Services for a period of years to earn money for college, develop skills, get financing for a business, or to get out of debt; the Biblical Slave chose to be a slave. It was his path to freedom, and many people came to America using this path.

Biblical Slavery is good, Slavery as we know it is bad

For good Biblical Slavery came from God, but not for good slavery as we know it came from God’s Church. Although not existing in England and Northern Europe, this permanent indenture slavery (that we now call slavery to distinguish it from an indenture contract (Biblical Slavery)) was well established in Southern Europe by the time of Columbus¹. Even though Biblical Slavery was set up for good, Church leaders did not always pay attention to the Bible. Here are the two Papal Bulls (directives from Pope, the head of the Roman Catholic Church) that set up slavery as we know it in the Church:

“The first transnational, institutional endorsement of African slavery occurred in 1452 when Pope Nicholas V issued the bull, *Dum Diversas*, which granted King Afonso V of Portugal the right to reduce to “perpetual slavery” all “Saracens and pagans and other infidels and enemies of Christ” in West Africa. In 1454, the Pope followed up *Dum Diversas* with *Romanus Pontifex*, which granted Portugal the more specific right to conquer and enslave all peoples south of Cape Bojador².”

Negro Means Slave

Not all those slaves were black, but they were all Negroes because they were all slaves.

“Taken together, these papal bulls did far more than grant exclusive rights to the Portuguese; they signaled to the rest of Christian Europe that the enslavement of sub-

¹ Page 5, Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, Collective Degradation: Slavery and the Construction of Race, November 7-8, 2003, Yale University New Haven, Connecticut, *Spanish and Portuguese Influences on Racial Slavery in British North America, 1492-1619*, James H. Sweet, Florida International University

² A.C. de C...M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1551* (Cambridge, 1982), 37-38. On *Romanus Pontifex*, see Valentin Y. Mudimbe, “*Romanus Pontifex* (1454) and the Expansion of Europe,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, eds. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995): 58-65.

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Saharan Africans was acceptable and encouraged.”³ I believe it is interesting that [the word “negro” means slave](#)⁴. Negro came from a Pope’s declaration that all non-Christian’s south of the Sahara Desert in Africa were subject to permanent indenture slavery: not good.

Summary: Bad Rap for Biblical Slavery

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³ Page 6, Proceedings....

⁴ Page 7, Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, Collective Degradation: Slavery and the Construction of Race, November 7-8, 2003, Yale University New Haven, Connecticut, *Spanish and Portuguese Influences on Racial Slavery in British North America, 1492-1619*, James H. Sweet, Florida International University