

White Christ

"Slaveholding Christianity"

A Christian apology for the chattel system

As European explorers encountered the unique customs and culture of African people, they decided that dark skin was an unquestionable mark of inferiority. (Previously slaves were product of war, conquering, debt but not inherently inferior). They rationalized that God ordained slavery and that Africans were better off enslaved. *"The condition of the slaves is far better than that of the Africans from among whom they have been brought. Instead of debased savages, they are, to a considerable extent, civilized, enlightened and christianized."* (Samuel How, 1856)

Slavery justified through scripture (sub-humanity)

Old Testament evidence for slavery. Jesus never spoke AGAINST slavery (ex. The Roman centurion). Paul's letters specific instructions on duties of slaves & masters.

Christians CAN be slaves

The Virginia General Assembly (1667): "It is enacted and declared by this Grand Assembly, and the authority thereof, that the conferring of baptism does not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom."

Custom in England: Christians could not enslave one another. Yet the economy of the colonies depended on slave labor. Missionaries pressuring slave owners to evangelize their slaves. WHAT TO DO???

Africans would remain in physical bondage even after their conversion. Be content w/your spiritual liberation and to obey

Black Christ

"Slave Christianity"

A rejection of slaveholding Christianity

Enslaved people weren't buying white Christianity that supported the dehumanization of black people. They had heard wondrous stories...of God liberating the people of Israel; of Jesus suffering at the hands of power and authority yet overcoming... They were convinced that God desired freedom for all. ' Steal away to practice "real Christianity"

Intimate relationship between Jesus and slaves (full-humanity)

They found alternative stories in scripture (the gospels) that depicted Jesus' ministry and relationship to the oppressed of his own time. Luke birth narratives "poor boy" Luke 4: "proclaim release to the captives..." Crucifixion—solidarity of suffering

Jesus as liberator

Jesus' resurrection reveals death on the cross is not the final word—freedom is. Jesus' deliverance from the death of the cross meant slaves could be delivered from the death of slavery. Black Jesus stands against the status quo.

earthly masters. Takeaway: the church codified racism B4 the entity of the USA was even formed. (Tisby, pp. 25-26).

Christianity compatible with cruelty of slavery

SEE LAST POINT FIRST. So...you can't lose your salvation so it doesn't matter how you treat your slaves. Keeping them enslaved is God's plan. The White Christ places few demands on behavior in relationship to others.

"Your reward is in heaven"

Salvation assured through profession that Jesus (God incarnate) is Lord and Savior

Knowledge and belief in Jesus essential for human salvation. What Jesus did in human history is secondary. Do you believe Jesus is God? That's the key. KNOWLEDGE "Spiritualized" themes of freedom/equality. What Jesus DID in human history was disconnected from the salvation that he offered.

Christianity contradicts cruelty

Christian freedom has RADICAL and secular implications. How we treat one another matters! People have intrinsic worth and value.

"What we do on earth matters"

Salvation comes through Jesus' power to overcome death (the cross and slavery)

Slaves celebrated what Jesus did for the downtrodden. He delivered them from the conditions that oppressed them. Salvation is tied to Christ's liberating activity not to just to knowledge that Jesus is God.

Sources: Douglas, Kelly Brown. The Black Christ. Orbis, 2019.

Tisby, Jemar. The Color of Compromise. Zondervan, 2019.