

Martin Luther proclaimed the doctrine of "Justification by Faith," the dignity of the individual in the sight of God, the universal brotherhood of man, and his eternal equality as a joint heir with Jesus Christ, the teaching fell like a benediction upon the poor groaning serfs of Europe, who were being ground under the iron heel of an ecclesiastical aristocracy, and kindled a hope in the breast of the poor slave which culminated in a struggle for liberty and ultimate emancipation.

In Britain this diabolical institution had gained such a foothold, that it seemed as if nothing but the power of God could shake it. In the England of the 11th century children were reared for the slave market, and sold into perpetual bondage. In some counties the number of slaves exceeded the number of freemen. During the 16th and 17th centuries Britain led all the nations in the disgraceful work of plundering one Continent of its inhabitants, for the purpose of selling them in another. Even the Church engaged in the slave trade. In England a "Society for the propagation of the Gospel in heathen lands" was formed by men who owned thousands of slaves in the Barbadoes. In one century Britain wrenched from the bleeding heart of poor Africa 4,000,000 of her dusky sons and daughters. Of these, 250,000 perished in the awful voyage, and were hurled into the sea, leaving behind the slaver a track of blood. But mighty men, men of Christian faith, men who understood the mind of the Master, men whose eyes were keen enough to pierce the shallow hypocrisies of the church, were on the watch tower of Zion, and launched forth their thunders against the horrible iniquity. Foremost among those were Baxter, Warburton, Paley, Wesley, Whitfield and Porteous, all men of the changed heart, men sworn to abolish the slave trade from Britain. The great Evangelical Revival that swept over Britain in the 18th century took hold of three men—Wilberforce, Clarkson and Sharpe—who were in God's hands, perhaps more than any others, the means of bringing to an end in Britain the accursed traffic. The struggle was long and severe, but applied Christianity prevailed. The slumbering conscience of Britain was aroused, and in 1807 all slaves in the British Isles were liberated.