

# **SLAVERY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

**THE HISTORY OF CATHOLIC TEACHING  
CONCERNING THE MORAL  
LEGITIMACY OF THE  
INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY**

**JOHN FRANCIS MAXWELL**

Foreword by

**THE RIGHT HON. LORD WILBERFORCE, C.M.G., O.B.E.**  
Lord of Appeal in Ordinary

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## FOREWORD

This little volume which gives the essence of the story concerning the Catholic Church and the institution of slavery is complete in itself and, while being well researched, is more readable than a massive documentary history.

The fact is that the history of Catholic teaching concerning the moral legitimacy of slavery is not simple and straightforward. The Church's attitudes to slavery have been so widely misrepresented and misunderstood that "this private investigation" as the author calls it is not only of absorbing interest and valuable in itself but also important as a witness to the truth.

This Society is therefore glad to sponsor this publication, believing it to be an achievement in the anti-slavery cause and a worthwhile contribution to the Society's interests.

Joint-President,

WILBERFORCE

Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights,  
London  
March 1974

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Due acknowledgement is gratefully made to the Anti-Slavery Society, London, for its assistance in allowing this small book to see the light of day. The original intention had been to prepare a collection of documents with short commentaries, something along the lines of the work of S. Z. Ehler and J. B. Morrall *Church and State through the Centuries* (London, 1954). For the situation is that no adequate documentary study exists to illustrate the history of Catholic teaching in the Western Church concerning the moral legitimacy of the institution of slavery. Historical studies on particular moral problems can provide source-material for general histories of Catholic moral theology; it is no doubt regrettably true that because of the lack of such specialized historical studies in the past, no detailed full-scale history of the whole field of Catholic moral theology has yet been written.

However, the preparation of a full documentary history in this particular field is beyond the limited capabilities of the collector and translator of these documents. Further research is needed especially of Portuguese and Italian sources; and if the archives of the Holy Office (now the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) could be placed at the disposal of competent investigators, this would be likely to provide a rich store of theological source-material. The author disclaims any expert knowledge of ecclesiastical history; and the provision of an adequate historical background in proper perspective for some of the documents is something which would demand the willing collaboration of an ecclesiastical and a social historian. So the author apologizes in advance that this is a mere interim report after a private investigation into the history of the common Catholic teaching in this particular area. This interim report indicates that future expert investigation is called for. As a preliminary summary presentation of the case it presupposes in the reader a minimal knowledge of the history of Western Europe.

The author wishes to record his thanks to the Most Reverend

Cyril C. Cowderoy, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Southwark, who released him from parochial duties between 1966 and 1973 and enabled him to do full-time research.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the late Thomas J. P. Walsh, whose unpublished posthumous documentary work, "The Popes and Slavery" was examined between September and December, 1969, through the kindness of the Rev. David Woodard, M.A.

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