

Texts for Scriptural Reasoning

1. Slavery

The Scriptural Reasoning Society

Introduction

Today's session is a 'taster' for Scriptural Reasoning in Camden and North London at the British Library. The theme 'slavery' is not only timely, but it also ties in rather well with SR as a civic practice. Speaking as a Christian, when selecting the New Testament texts for this topic, it struck me again how much I was being...well, selective. The clear, liberating voice of the New Testament that spoke to Christians like Wilberforce is celebrated rightly in our days. But then, there are other passages that have seemingly kept a lid on inequality for centuries, and the ancient writers were shockingly disinterested in societal reform of any kind. Or were they?

One of the strengths of Scriptural Reasoning is its honesty and its willingness to look at our faith communities in their particularity, rather than how we would sometimes like to represent ourselves vis-à-vis the language of pluralism. Again, to speak again from the Christian tradition, the New Testament texts we will read do not overlook well-known, glorious passages like, 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28). But as people of faith it is sometimes given us to struggle with our tradition. When reading passages like the ones we will look at in this session, the least we can hope for is to understand what made for civic identity at the time of their writing. The hope is, however, that we gain from our scriptures a deeper understanding of what can make our society just and fair today. As we celebrate here at the British Library texts that our traditions have held sacred for millennia, we will interrogate these very texts in a way that hopefully makes them come alive.

Karsten van Sander

ויקרא כה: מז-נה

מז וכי תשיג, יד גר ותושב עמך, ומך אחיך, עמו; ונמכר, לגר תושב עמך, או לעקר, משפחת גר.

מח אחרי נמכר, גאלה תהיה-לו: אחד מאחיו, יגאלנו.

מט או-דדו או בן-דדו, יגאלנו, או-משאר בשרו ממשפחתו, יגאלנו; או-השיגה ידו, ונגאל.

נ וחשב, עם-קנהו, משנת המכרו לו, עד שנת היבל; והיה כסף ממכרו, במספר שנים, כימי שכיר, יהיה עמו.

נא אם-עוד רבות, בשנים--לפיהן ישיב גאלתו, מכסף מקנתו.

נב ואם-מעט נשאר בשנים, עד-שנת היבל--וחשב-לו; כפי שגיו, ישיב את-גאלתו.

נג כשכיר שנה בשנה, יהיה עמו; לא-ירדנו בפרך, לעיניך.

נד ואם-לא יגאל, בגאלה--וניצא בשנת היבל, הוא ובניו עמו.

נה כי-לי בני-ישראל, עבדים--עבדי הם, אשר-הוצאתי אותם מארץ מצרים: אני, יהנה אלהיכם.

נד ואם-לא יגאל, בגאלה--וניצא בשנת היבל, הוא ובניו עמו.

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Leviticus 25:47-55^a

47 And if a stranger^b who is a settler^c with thee be waxen rich, and thy brother be waxen poor beside him, and sell himself unto the stranger who is a settler with thee, or to the offshoot of a stranger's family,

48 after that he is sold he may be redeemed^d; one of his brethren may redeem him;

49 or his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family^e may redeem him; or if he be waxen rich, he may redeem himself.

50 And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he sold himself to him unto the year of jubilee^f; and the price of his sale shall be

^a Jewish Publications Society 1917 Translation

^b גֵר *ger* {*gare*} or (fully) גֵיִר *geyr* {*gare*} '1) sojourner 1a) a temporary inhabitant, a newcomer lacking inherited rights 1b) of foreigners in Israel, though conceded rights

^c תוֹשָׁב *towshab* {*to-shawb*'} or תוֹשָׁב *toshab* (1 Ki 17:1) {*to-shawb*'} 1) sojourner, stranger

^d גְּאֻלָּה *geullah* {*gheh-ool-law*'} 1) kindred, redemption, right of redemption, price of redemption 1a) kin, kindred 1b) redemption 1c) right of redemption 1d) price of redemption, redemption price

^e מִשְׁפָּחָה *mishpachah* {*mish-paw-khaw*'} 1) clan, family 1a) clan 1a1) family 1a2) tribe 1a3) people, nation 1b) guild 1c) species, kind 1d) aristocrats

^f יוֹבֵל *yowbel* {*yo-bale*'} or יֵבֵל *yobel* {*yob-ale*'} 1) ram, ram's horn, trumpet, cornet 1a) ram (only in combination) 1a1) ram's horn, trumpet 1b) jubilee year (marked by the blowing of cornets)

according unto the number of years; according to the time of a hired servant^g shall he be with him.

- 51** If there be yet many years, according unto them he shall give back the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for.
- 52** And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubilee, then he shall reckon with him; according unto his years shall he give back the price of his redemption.
- 53** As a servant hired year by year shall he be with him; he shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight.
- 54** And if he be not redeemed by any of these means, then he shall go out in the year of jubilee, he, and his children with him.
- 55** For unto Me the children of Israel are servants; they are My servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

^g שָׂכִיר *sakiyr* {*saw-keer*'} 1) hired 1a) hired (of animal) 1b) hireling, hired labourer (subst) 1b1) mercenary

שמות כא:א-ו

א וְאֵלֶּה, הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים, אֲשֶׁר תִּשִׂים, לִפְנֵיהֶם.
ב כִּי תִקְנֶה עֶבֶד עֲבָרִי, שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים יַעֲבֹד; וּבְשִׁבְעַת--יָצֵא לְחֻפְשִׁי, חֲנֹם.
ג אִם-בְּגִפּוֹ יָבֵא, בְּגִפּוֹ יָצֵא; אִם-בַּעַל אִשָּׁה הוּא, וַיִּצְאָה אִשְׁתּוֹ עִמּוֹ.
ד אִם-אֲדָנָיו יִתֶּן-לוֹ אִשָּׁה, וַיִּלְדָּה-לוֹ בָּנִים אוֹ בָנוֹת--הָאִשָּׁה וַיִּלְדֶּיהָ, תִּהְיֶה לְאֲדֹנֶיהָ,
וְהוּא, יָצֵא בְּגִפּוֹ.
ה וְאִם-אָמַר יְאֹמֵר, הָעֶבֶד, אֶהְבֵּתִי אֶת-אֲדֹנָי, אֶת-אִשְׁתִּי וְאֶת-בְּנֵי; לֹא אֲצֵא, חֻפְשִׁי.
ו וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֲדָנָיו, אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים, וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶל-הַדָּלֶת, אוֹ אֶל-הַמְּזוּזָה; וְרָצַע אֲדָנָיו אֶת-
אָזְנוֹ בַּמַּרְצֵעַ, וַעֲבָדוּ לְעֹלָם. {ס}

Exodus 21:1-6^a

- 1 Now these are the ordinances^h which thou shalt set before them.
- 2 If thou buy a Hebrew servantⁱ, six years he shall serve; and in the seventh he shall go out free^j for nothing.
- 3 If he come in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he be married, then his wife shall go out with him.
- 4 If his master give him a wife, and she bear him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself.
- 5 But if the servant shall plainly say: I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free;
- 6 then his master shall bring him unto God, and shall bring him to the door, or unto the door-post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever^k. {S}

^h מִשְׁפָּט *mishpat* {*mish-pawt*'} 1) judgment, justice, ordinance 1a) judgment 1a1) act of deciding a case 1a2) place, court, seat of judgment 1a3) process, procedure, litigation (before judges) 1a4) case, cause (presented for judgment) 1a5) sentence, decision (of judgment) 1a6) execution (of judgment) 1a7) time (of judgment) 1b) justice, right, rectitude (attributes of God or man) 1c) ordinance 1d) decision (in law) 1e) right, privilege, due (legal) 1f) proper

ⁱ עֶבֶד *`ebed* {*eh'-bed*} 1) slave, servant 1a) slave, servant, man-servant 1b) subjects 1c) servants, worshippers (of God) 1d) servant (in special sense as prophets, Levites etc) 1e) servant (of Israel) 1f) servant (as form of address between equals)

^j חֻפְשִׁי *chophshiy* {*khof-shee*'} 1) free 1a) free (from slavery) 1b) free (from taxes or obligations)

^k עוֹלָם *`owlam* {*o-lawm*'} or עֹלָם *`olam* {*o-lawm*'} 1) long duration, antiquity, futurity, for ever, ever, everlasting, evermore, perpetual, old, ancient, world 1a) ancient time, long time (of past) 1b) (of future) 1b1) for ever, always 1b2) continuous existence, perpetual 1b3) everlasting, indefinite or unending future, eternity

Προς Κορινθίους Α 7:20-24

- 20 ἕκαστος ἐν τῇ κλήσει ἧ ἐκλήθη, ἐν ταύτῃ μείνω.
21 δοῦλος ἐκλήθης, μή σοι μελέτω· ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ δύνασαι ἐλεύθερος γενέσθαι, μάλλον χρῆσαι.
22 ὁ γὰρ ἐν κυρίῳ κληθεὶς δοῦλος ἀπελεύθερος κυρίου ἐστίν, ὁμοίως ὁ ἐλεύθερος κληθεὶς δοῦλός ἐστιν Χριστοῦ.
23 τιμῆς ἠγοράσθητε· μὴ γίνεσθε δοῦλοι ἀνθρώπων.
24 ἕκαστος ἐν ᾧ ἐκλήθη, ἀδελφοί, ἐν τούτῳ μείνω παρὰ θεῶ.

1 Corinthians 7: 20-24'

- 20 Let each one remain in the same calling^m in which he was called.
21 Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made freeⁿ, rather use it.
22 For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman^o. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave.
23 You were bought at a price^p; do not become slaves of men.
24 Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

^l *New King James Version*

^m κλήσις *klesis* {*klay'-sis*} 1) a calling, calling to 2) a call, invitation 2a) to a feast 2b) of the divine invitation to embrace salvation of God

ⁿ ἐλεύθερος *eleutheros* {*el-yoo'-ther-os*} 1) freeborn 1a) in a civil sense, one who is not a slave 1b) of one who ceases to be a slave, freed, manumitted 2) free, exempt, unrestrained, not bound by an obligation 3) in an ethical sense: free from the yoke of the Mosaic Law

^o ἀπελεύθερος *apeleutheros* {*ap-el-yoo'-ther-os*} 1) a slave that has been released from servitude, a freeman

^p τιμή, *time* {*tee-may'*} 1) a valuing by which the price is fixed 1a) of the price itself 1b) of the price paid or received for a person or thing bought or sold 2) honour which belongs or is shown to one 2a) of the honour which one has by reason of rank and state of office which he holds 2b) deference, reverence

Προς Εφεσιους 6:5-9

- 5 Οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου ἐν ἀπλότητι τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ,
6 μὴ κατ' ὀφθαλμοδουλίαν ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι ἀλλ' ὡς δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ ποιοῦντες τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκ ψυχῆς,
7 μετ' εὐνοίας δουλεύοντες ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις,
8 εἰδότες ὅτι ἕκαστος ἐάν τι ποιήσῃ ἀγαθόν, τοῦτο κομίσεται παρὰ κυρίου εἴτε δοῦλος εἴτε ἐλεύθερος.
9 Καὶ οἱ κύριοι, τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς, ἀνιέντες τὴν ἀπειλήν, εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ αὐτῶν καὶ ὑμῶν ὁ κύριός ἐστιν ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ προσωποληψία οὐκ ἔστιν παρ' αὐτῷ

Ephesians 6:5-9ⁱ

- 5 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh^q, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ;
6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,
7 with goodwill^r doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,
8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.
9 And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality^s with Him.

^q σὰρξ *sarx* {*sarx*} 1) flesh (the soft substance of the living body, which covers the bones and is permeated with blood) of both man and beasts 2) the body 2a) the body of a man 2b) used of natural or physical origin, generation or relationship 2b1) born of natural generation 2c) the sensuous nature of man, "the animal nature" 2c1) without any suggestion of depravity 2c2) the animal nature with cravings which incite to sin 2c3) the physical nature of man as subject to suffering 3) a living creature (because possessed of a body of flesh) whether man or beast 4) the flesh, denotes mere human nature, the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God

^r εὐνοια (*eunoia*) goodwill

^s προσωποληψία (*prosopolempsia*) respect of persons, partiality

سورة النور ٣٢-٣٣

وَأَنْكِحُوا الْأَيَامَىٰ مِنْكُمْ وَالصَّالِحِينَ مِنْ عِبَادِكُمْ وَإِمَائِكُمْ إِنْ يَكُونُوا فُقَرَاءَ يُغْنِهِمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ٣٢

وَلَيْسَتَغْفِرَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ نِكَاحًا حَتَّىٰ يُغْنِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَالَّذِينَ يَبْتَغُونَ الْكِتَابَ مِمَّا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ فَكَاتِبُوهُمْ إِنْ عَلِمْتُمْ فِيهِمْ خَيْرًا وَأَثْوَهُمْ مِنَ مَالِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي آتَاكُمْ وَلَا تُكْرَهُوا فَتِيَاتِكُمْ عَلَىٰ الْبَغَاءِ إِنْ أَرَدْنَ تَحَصُّنًا لِنَبْتُهُنَّ عَرَضَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَنْ يُكْرِهِنَّ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِكْرَاهِهِنَّ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ٣٣

The Light 32-33^t

- 47 Marry those who are unmarried^u among you and the righteous^v from among your slaves^w and handmaidens^x; if they are poor, God will enrich them from His grace^y; and God is Encompassing^z and Knowing.
- 48 And let those who do not find a marriage remain chaste^{aa} until God enriches them from His grace; and as for those who seek after a writ [of manumission]^{bb}, from those whom your right hands possess^{cc}, write it for them if you know there is good^{dd} in them, and give to them from the wealth of God which he has given you; and do not coerce^{ee} your maids into whoredom when they desire chastity, in order to seek after the vanities^{ff} of the life of the world; and whomsoever coerces them, indeed God after their compulsion is Forgiving, Merciful.

^t Quran 24, Rendered into English by Muhammad Yusuf

^u أَيَامَى *ayāma* accusative plural of أيم *ayyim* 'widow, widower' root: 'y-m 'widowhood'

^v صَالِحِينَ *ṣāliḥīn* oblique plural of صالح *ṣāliḥ* 'righteous, virtuous' root: ṣ-l-ḥ 'righteousness, healing, reform'

^w عِبَاد *ibadi* genitive plural of عبد *abd* 'slave, worshipper' root: 'a-b-d 'worship, slave'

^x إِمَاء *ima* 'i genitive plural of أمة *amma* 'bondswoman' root: 'm-m 'mother, female slave, nation, community'

^y فَضْل *faḍl* 'bounty, overflowing grace, favour' root: f-d-l 'favour, preference, bounty'

^z وَاسِعٌ *wāsi* 'wide, encompassing' root: w-s- 'wideness, compass, breadth'

^{aa} يَسْتَعْفِفُ *yast 'afif* 3 person singular jussive of استعف *ist 'affa* 'to seek chastity, virtue' Xth form root: 'a-f-f 'chastity, virtue'

^{bb} كِتَاب *kitāb* 'document, writ' root: k-t-b 'write'

^{cc} مِمَّا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ *mimma malakat aymānukum* 'from those whom your right hands possess (captive slaves)'

^{dd} خَيْر *khayr* 'goodness, righteousness' root: kh-y-r 'good, fine, righteous'

^{ee} لَا تُكْرَهُوا *la tukrihū* 'do not compel' 2 person plural negative imperative of أكره *ikraha* 'coerce' IVth form root: k-r-h 'hate, coerce'

^{ff} عَرَضَ *arad* 'appearance, vanity, display' root: 'a-r-d 'accident, attribute, appearance'

سورة البقرة ١٧٧

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ
وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَى وَالْيَتَامَى وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْنَ
السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا
وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ١٧٧

The Heifer 177^{gg}

177 It is not piety^{hh} to turn your faces in the direction of the East or the West, but rather piety is whomsoever believes in God and the Last Day, and the angels and the Bookⁱⁱ and the prophets^{jj}, and gives wealth for sake of love of Him to the possessors of near relation^{kk}, and the orphans and the destitute and the wayfarer^{ll} and the beggars, and for [ransom of] slaves^{mm}, and establishesⁿⁿ prayer and gives the alms due, and are those who honour their promises when they make promises, and are patient in affliction or hardship or in time of adversity; they are those who are true and they are those who are god-fearing^{oo}.

^{gg} Quran 2, Rendered into English by Muhammad Yusuf

^{hh} بر *birr* 'piety, virtue' root: *b-r-r* 'piety'

ⁱⁱ كتاب *kitāb* 'book, scripture' root: *k-t-b* 'write'

^{jj} نبيين *nabyīn* oblique plural of نبي *naby* 'prophet, messenger' root: *n-b-y* 'prophesy, news'

^{kk} ذوي القربى *dhawī al-qurbā* accusative of ذو القربى *dhū al-qurbā* 'possessors of near relation (kinsfolk)'

^{ll} ابن السبيل *ibn al-sabīl* 'son of the highway (traveller)'

^{mm} رقاب *riqāb* 'captives, slaves' root: *r-q-b* 'guard, oversee'

ⁿⁿ أقام *aqāma* 3 person perfect 'establish, set up, undertake' IVth form root: *q-w-m* 'stand, establish, begin'

^{oo} متقين *muttaqīn* oblique plural of متق *muttaq* 'god-fearing, pious' root: *t-q-w* 'piety, fear of God'