

RACISM: Degrading effect on racist (slave-owner, oppressor)..... Elliott #413

The hereditary-authority model (which, uncorrupted, allowed for personal integrity) got replaced by the slave-master model (which allows for personal integrity neither in slave/subject nor in master/lord). Here, in 1943, Free Frenchwoman Simone Weil (THE NEED FOR ROOTS, Beacon/52) sweats this out for her people under Hitler.

that of the Oriental monarchies of antiquity. But the latter too often suffered damage. The Assyrians did it a lot of harm. So did Alexander—that product of Aristotle's pedagogical art, and who was never disowned by his mentor. The Hebrews, those escaped slaves, never knew it. Nor, in all probability, did the Romans either—that handful of adventurers brought together by necessity.

What repented it in Rome was the relationship between master and slave. Already Cicero admitted with shame that he regarded himself as being half the slave of Caesar. From the time of Augustus, the Emperor was looked upon as the master of all the inhabitants of the Roman Empire in the sense of an owner of slaves.

Men cannot imagine themselves being the victims of wrongs, which they find it quite natural to inflict upon others. But when that, in fact, happens, to their own horror, they find it to be quite natural; in their hearts they can find nothing to produce the necessary indignation and resistance against a form of treatment which they themselves have never been reluctant to inflict. It is so at least when circumstances are such that, even for the imagination, there is nothing that can any longer serve as outward support, when the only possible resource left lies in the depths of the heart. If past crimes have destroyed that resource, total enfeeblement is the result, and one accepts no matter what degree of shame. It is on this mechanism of the human heart that the law of reciprocity is founded, expressed in the Apocalypse in the following terms, "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity."*

Thus it is that a number of Frenchmen, having found it perfectly natural to talk about collaboration to the oppressed natives of the French colonies, went on making use of this word without any trouble in talking with their German masters.

* Quotation: Revelation 13: 10. [Translator.]

In the same way, because the Romans regarded slavery as the basic institution of society, there was nothing that might prurient their hearts to say no to a man who claimed to have an owner's rights over them, and had victoriously upheld that claim by force of arms; nothing either which might say no to his heirs, whose property they became by right of inheritance. Hence all the cowardly acts whose enumeration sickened the heart of Tacitus, all the more so since he had taken his share in them. They used to commit suicide as soon as they received the order to do so, not otherwise; a slave cannot commit suicide, that would be robbing the master. Caligula used to have stranding behind him, as he ate his meals, a row of senators wearing tunics, which was in Rome the characteristic mark of degradation for slaves. At banquets, he would absent himself for a quarter of an hour to take a noble woman into his private apartments, and then would bring her back flushed and disheveled to rejoin the other guests, among whom was her husband. But these people had always found it perfectly natural to treat not only their slaves in this fashion, but also the colonial peoples of the provinces.

And so in the cult of the Emperor, what was made divine was the institution of slavery. Millions of slaves made an idolatrous cult of their owner.

It is that which determined the Roman attitude in religious matters: it has been said that they were tolerant. They certainly tolerated all religious practices devoid of any spiritual content.

No doubt Hitler, if the fancy took him, would be able to tolerate theosophy without danger. The Romans were able to tolerate without the least difficulty the cult of Mithras, a faked Orientalism fit for snobs and idle women.

There were two exceptions to their tolerance. To begin with, they could naturally not endure that anybody, whoever it might be, should lay claim to property rights over their slaves. Hence their hostility to Judaism. The Jews were their property and could