



Africa Waiting Charles Satchell Morris (1901)

This essay was published as part of a collection promoting the missionary activities of the recently formed National Baptist Convention (NBC), which at its formation became the largest independent black denomination in the United States. The author of this essay, Charles S. Morris, was an African American lawyer turned minister; over the course of his career, he pastored black Baptist congregations in Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia. In 1899-1900, Morris visited South Africa, Liberia, and Sierra Leone on a tour jointly funded by the NBC and two other Baptist organizations in the United States. Morris's task was to visit African American Baptist missionaries already working in those places and to scout out opportunities for establishing industrial missions. During his tour, Morris admitted to the NBC a group of about 1,200 black South Africans, former Methodists who had created their own independent church in reaction to racial restrictions in the Methodist church founded by British missionaries.

If there is a continent on the face of the earth that needs the gospel of Jesus Christ more, if possible, than any other, that continent is Africa. It has been more cruelly neglected. Sixty generations of its people have perished in rayless paganism. Africa's darkest millions have not yet begun their forward march out of centuries of midnight darkness. There are regions large as all Europe, packed with 50 million souls, without one single missionary. [...]

Africa has been more deeply wronged. Northern Africa gave to Christianity its first Latin Bible, produced Athanasius (who stood against the world contending for the deity of our Lord), Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, and Ambrose. At one time there were 500 bishops in North Africa, but the ruthless invasion of the Vandals put thousands of Christians to the sword and scattered the remainder to the four corners of the earth. Then came the red deluge of Mohammedanism, rolling like a bloody sea over that fair region, completing the work of annihilating the last vestiges of Christianity, and Africa's doom was sealed.

Then came slavery, "the heart disease of Africa."^a Vasco da Gama discovered West Africa about the same time that Columbus discovered America, and Africa was sacrificed for America. Europe and America inaugurated the most gigantic crime of the Christian era against her. Unnumbered millions of her children were slain in slave raids, other millions perished in the horrors of the "middle passage"; sometimes 700 would be stowed away on board one ship. Only sixty years ago, 250,000 were being exported every year by Christian states. Now that Christian nations have driven the slave trade from the Atlantic, Arabian slavery, like an eating cancer, is gnawing at Africa's vitals from the east. There are 50 million slaves in Africa today, a million of whom perish miserably every year. [...]

Then came the civilized rum traffic, hell's masterpiece of damnation, that has turned the whole oceanfront into one long barroom, at which two million frenzied savages drop dead every year of delirium tremens. Rum is deadly in the temperate regions; it is rank poison in the tropics. It is

^a The quoted phrase is a chapter title from *Tropical Africa*, a popular travelogue published around 1890 by Henry Drummond, who was a Scottish Presbyterian theologian and a naturalist.

depopulating Africa. Bishop Flickinger^b claims that to reckon the ravages of rum at twice those of Arabian slavery is to state the case weakly. Joseph Thomson^c led three expeditions to Africa. "I had," he confessed, "traveled and suffered, inspired by the idea that I was doing good in opening up new lands to commerce and civilization; but all the satisfaction was blighted as I felt that what little I had done had better be left undone, and Africa better remain a dark continent, if such must be the sad end of it all. Underneath the cry for gin, I seemed to hear the reproach, 'You see what Christians have made us; you speak of peace and good will, yet you put devils into us.'" "

In the eighteenth century, Europe stole the African from Africa; in the nineteenth, she is stealing Africa from the African. The unhallowed spirit of civilized greed for aggrandizement at the African's expense is not yet sated. The slave raiding of other days is to give place to the second magnificently unscrupulous conspiracy, which is to partition Africa and plunder the African of the bounds of his habitation, which God has determined beforehand, and thus deprive 200 million people of their birthright; to seize upon their property and permanently drain the wealth of Africa and the African's labor into European channels, leaving her like a sucked orange, like a rifled treasure house—her keepers slain, her treasures stolen, the marauders gone.

What an awful, many-sided charge the vast cloud of African witnesses will have against the civilized world on the day of judgment. A continent turned into a slave pen, a rum shop, great open running ulcers on either breast. Robbed of her children, rifled of her treasures, fettered in soul, manacled in mind, enslaved in body—Africa lies prostrate before the rapine and avarice of the world. Civilized nations found in Africa the most prodigious mass of savage humanity, of degradation bordering on the bestial, to be seen on the earth. They have sunk her to a deeper damnation, twofold more the child of darkness than she was before. The unclean spirit of heathenism has returned with seven other spirits from the civilized world more wicked than itself, and the last state of Africa is worse than the first. Beaten, robbed, half dead, she has lain for centuries on the highway of history while the civilized world passes by on the other side. Africa is on her back, weltering in her own blood; the witch doctor holds one arm, the other is in the red grip of Mohammed, while the slave traffic and the rum traffic, like two gigantic vultures, tear at her vitals. There she stretches to the ocean, a continent in ruins, one vast graveyard of everything divine in man. There are her people, one of the great branches of the human family, going to pieces, physically, mentally, morally, spiritually; a world of ignored, forgotten, submerged, abandoned humanity, literally rotting before the eyes of 13 million American

^b Daniel Kumler Flickinger was a white American who made several trips to western Africa during the 1850s-1880s to initiate or supervise missions of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.

Morris lifts the paraphrase of Flickinger's claim from Frederic Perry Noble, "Christendom's Rum-Trade with Africa: A Modern Devil's-Mission," *Missionary Review of the World*, June 1894, 418, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/ia.ark:/13960/t59d0k023>.

^c A Scottish naturalist who explored eastern and southern Africa during the 1870s-1890s for the Royal Geographical Society and the British South Africa Company.

Morris's source for the Thomson quotation, which Morris imperfectly reproduces, is Noble, "Christendom's Rum-Trade," 419.

Christians who own 13 billion dollars' worth of property, and they do not give one-tenth of one penny a head to save them!

Was the Master trifling when he said, "There shall be more rejoicing among the angels of God over one lost sheep than over ninety and nine that are safely housed"? Here are sheep, many millions of them—and lost, and no one will go after them. [...] We believe if he stood here today with that pallid and majestic face wet with the sweat drops of Gethsemane, torn with his diadem of agony, as he looked at Africa's whitening harvest field rotting for lack of reapers, surely he would send us forth to that ruined continent, whose people stand there in waiting, restless millions with outstretched hands. Still, still in outer darkness, unsought by any missionary, they have heard no glad tidings, they are without hope in the world; and his parting blessing would be, "Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these my brethren, ye do it unto me." [...]

Jesus says, "Go ye into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature." And in the judgment, when the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of his glory and behold the unreached millions for whom he died, to whom he sent a message of pardon they never heard, will he not turn to his recreant disciples whom he entrusted with the message and say, "I made you my stewards, and you took my wealth and clothed yourselves in purple and fine linen; you fared sumptuously every day while I was hungry in India, and ye gave me no bread; thirsty in China, and ye gave me no drink; sick and in prison in Africa, and ye visited me not. Inasmuch as ye did it not unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it not unto me." We have not done our duty to Africa, as will be seen by a comparison of what American societies spend in Asia and Africa respectively; but if, in addition to her claim on account of her numbers, we should, in the spirit of the repentant Zacchaeus, restore unto Africa fourfold that which we have taken by false accusation, what a noble atonement we might make in sending missionaries for the slaves that were taken, and Bibles for the rum which America is dumping on her shores by the million gallons annually. [...] God grant that there may come to all who read this a new vision of the whitening fields, a profounder sense of personal duty and warmer touch of the Savior's sympathy. God grant that all may do something, that some may give grandly to this grand need, and that none may imitate those servants "who with one consent began to make excuse."

Source: C. S. Morris, “Africa Waiting,” in *Up the Ladder in Foreign Missions*, ed. L. G. Jordan (Nashville, TN: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1901), 168-174, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t6349sv8r>. Public domain.

Excerpts edited and annotated by John-Charles Duffy. Two run-on sentences broken up. Two grammatical infelicities corrected. Spelling corrected, modernized, or Americanized, including emending the spelling of names to facilitate recognition (with the exception that the antiquated spelling *Mohammed* is retained from the source to reflect the usage of the era). Some spelled-out numbers converted to numerals for readability and a more internally consistent style. An Oxford comma inserted; other punctuation emended in line with modern conventions. Italics, used frequently in the source publication for emphasis, are omitted here.

Several religious or governmental terms capitalized in the source have been converted here to lowercase: *gospel*, *deity* (as a divine attribute, not an epithet), *bishop*, *judgment*, and *state*. The christological titles *Master* and *Son of Man* are capitalized here as in the source publication, but pronouns for Christ have been converted to lowercase. The regional designators *North Africa* and *West Africa* are capitalized here as in the source, but *the east* has been converted to lowercase where it seems to indicate a direction instead of a region.

These edited excerpts from Morris’s essay are intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



© 2025 by John-Charles Duffy. Except as otherwise noted, this work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–ShareAlike 4.0 International License, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

All rights are reserved for the flag-shaped “Empire and American Religion” logo; if you alter this work, you may not reproduce the logo. Use of the Creative Commons license icon is subject to the Creative Commons Trademark Policy.