

## **Confronting the Ills of Society: Thomas Clarkson and the Slave Trade**

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### **Abstract**

The first generation of Christians constituted a small minority within the Roman Empire and did not seek to wield significant social influence. Thus, the New Testament does not provide a direct mandate for social transformation. Instead, Christians were encouraged to maintain a constructive relationship with the state while also being prepared to adopt adversarial stances when faced with oppression from hostile authorities. This context characterised their existence under the centralised, undemocratic Roman Empire. The challenge arises in applying the teachings of the New Testament to a participatory democracy, where Christians have ample opportunities for public engagement. Using Thomas Clarkson's approach to confronting the slave trade in Britain as an entry point, this paper has a two-pronged focus: 1) to bring Clarkson's somewhat eclipsed story into contemporary church-state discussions and 2) to contend that the strategies employed by Clarkson and other abolitionists can serve as a model for contemporary African churches and Christians in their efforts to engage with the democratic state, aiming to foster societal transformation.

**Keywords:** Slavery, slave trade, Thomas Clarkson, public engagement, societal transformation

### **Introduction**

The early Christians were a small minority within the Roman Empire and did not aspire to hold significant social influence. As a result, the New Testament does not contain a direct mandate for social transformation. Nevertheless, they believed that the Gospel would ultimately change the world (1 Cor 15:25-28; 2 Cor 5:18-19). They were also concerned about how others perceived them (Matt 5:13-16; 1 Pet 3:15-16) and were prepared to stand up against the authorities when necessary (Acts 4:19-20). What is clear is that the first-generation Christians did not teach political or social action as a conduit for spreading the Gospel. Instead, they shared their faith by preaching and healing and acts of mercy, which were basically directed toward their fellow believers (Matt 25:40; John 13:34-35) and sometimes, on others too (1 Pet 4:9; 1 John 3:16-17; Jas 2:15-17). Their attitude toward the political situation of their time was largely shaped by their anticipation of the kingdom of God, which they saw demonstrated through the miraculous power of Jesus. As a result, they regarded the importance of the political order as minimal, as Jesus himself declared, "My kingship is not of this world..." (John 18:36).

Despite their longing for the coming kingdom of God, these first-generational Christians still acknowledged the state as a bearer of order. Therefore, two opposing views coexisted within the Christian communities. On the one hand, Paul's perspective was that the existing Roman Empire, the political structure of his time, was "from God...for your good" and that Christians should be "subject to the governing authorities" (Rom 13:1-4). Additionally, Paul believed that the Roman state played a crucial role in "restraining" the chaos that the anti-Christ sought to introduce through its political order (2 Thess 2:1-12). In Pauline teaching, Christians were encouraged to engage positively with the state (Rom 13:1-7) and are called to live peacefully with everyone as much as possible (Rom 12:18).

On the other hand, Rome is often associated with the notorious "whore of Babylon," a significant figure depicted in the apocalyptic narrative of Revelation (Rev 17:3-7). This figure is seen as analogous to the pagan nations and governments that stood in direct opposition to Christianity, particularly the city of Rome itself.<sup>1</sup> The imagery serves as a counter-protest to that provided by Rome. Consequently, Christians are expected to adopt adversarial stances as an unfortunate necessity under duress (Rev 13). The difference between Paul's teaching in Romans and the imagery in Revelation shows that the early Christians did not have the same attitude toward the state in every situation. Their approach to engaging with a friendly and transparent state was different from their strategy for a hostile, secular society, where they were to resist oppression.

This was the picture of their lives under the centralised, undemocratic Roman Empire. The question then is how one can apply the New Testament to a participatory democracy, like Ghana, in which Christians do have a considerable opportunity for public engagement. Generally, there are two approaches to sociopolitical issues among Christians today. Some Christians advocate for a complete separation between church and state. They argue that since New Testament believers did not participate in sociopolitical battles, contemporary Christians should refrain from public engagement. Instead, they believe the church should focus on fulfilling its divine mandate of evangelising the world. They argue that concentrating on sociopolitical issues diverts the believers' attention "from the heavenly toward which Christians should look." Dave Hunt, a proponent of this perspective, argues that the first generation of Christians stayed away from sociopolitical engagements out of conviction and not simply by necessity.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to this group is another approach where contemporary Christians find

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<sup>1</sup> M. Matthias. "whore of Babylon." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 26, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/whore-of-Babylon>.

<sup>2</sup> Dave Hunt, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1988), 8, 41-44, 79, 205.

sociopolitical implications from New Testament texts, albeit sometimes without regard to serious exegesis. For instance, proponents of this view typically point to a social mandate in Jesus' call to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19) and "let your light shine before men" (Matt 5:16).<sup>3</sup>

Although both groups anchor their arguments on Scripture, there is no consensus on whether and how Christians should participate in the socio-political transformation of contemporary nation-states. Many Christian groups today hold differing views on this issue. While both sides of the debate invoke the support of Jesus and Paul, they often selectively choose historical church figures to bolster their positions. Church history is filled with individuals and Christian groups who advocated for societal change in their respective contexts. We can discuss reformers like John Calvin, Huldrych (Ulrich) Zwingli, and, more recently, Abraham Kuyper, who were regarded as visionaries whose influences shaped their societies.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, we can consider groups like the Pietists, who were commended for recovering the importance of the heavenly hope, although they are criticised for their perceived lack of social relevance.<sup>5</sup>

One notable churchman who dedicated his entire adult life to fighting one of the most grievous issues in British society – and, broadly speaking, global society – was Thomas Clarkson. Clarkson worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the injustices of slavery, emphasising the profound suffering it caused both individuals and society as a whole. Through his efforts, Clarkson and like-minded abolitionists advocated for the abolition of the slave trade, urging society to acknowledge and rectify this grave sin. His contributions to the abolition movement ultimately led to Britain's abandonment of the lucrative slave trade and slavery itself, which are considered some of the most significant and morally transformative changes which swept British society. Clarkson's life and work exemplify how the church and Christians, in general, can actively participate in a democratic society like Ghana to foster essential sociopolitical change. His commitment to confronting the sin of the slavery trade demonstrates the power of individual resolve in effecting social change. There are numerous lessons that the church in Ghana, especially the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, can learn from Clarkson's efforts to confront the moral and ethical violations associated with slavery and the slave trade.

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<sup>3</sup> Barron Bruce, *Heaven on Earth: The Social and Political Agendas Dominion Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 153.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce, *Heaven on Earth*, 157.

<sup>5</sup> F. Ernest Stöffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century*. (Leiden: Brill, 1973), ix-xi.

## **Britain and the Transatlantic Slave Trade**

The British were at the heart of the transatlantic slave trade. The significance of British involvement in this historical process cannot be overstated; they played a critical and pioneering role, particularly in the transportation of millions of Africans into slavery across the Atlantic. The influx of a large number of African slaves significantly bolstered the viability of British colonies. Furthermore, British material prosperity was greatly enhanced by the labour of those same slaves.<sup>6</sup>

Slavery itself has been a part of human history since ancient times. In the UK, even Britons experienced enslavement and were transported under Roman rule. In the sixteenth century, captured British sailors were forced into servitude as galley slaves for the Spanish. Throughout the seventeenth century, the British government exported Irish men and women to the Americas under conditions that closely resembled slavery.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, in the sixteenth century, indigenous slavery existed in Africa, much like in Europe, but it differed significantly from the form of slavery practised by Europeans in the Americas. In African societies, slaves were often prisoners of war who were required to serve a period of unpaid labour for their captors. They were not dehumanised or subjected to brutal treatment. Even those enslaved for life typically had the opportunity to marry and could be assimilated into their captors' families and communities, although they were not always treated as equals.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the enslavement of Africans by Europeans was characterised by a significant difference in how they were treated. Enslaved Africans were viewed as mere possessions stripped of human dignity and completely at the mercy of their owners. While the conditions for enslaved Africans in Europe were often less brutal, those sent to the Americas faced even harsher treatment; they were regarded as expendable, subhuman labourers. Although the Roman Catholic Church placed some moral restrictions on its followers, British owners were particularly notorious for their inhumane treatment of the enslaved.<sup>9</sup> At one point in 1783, one slave ship captain was reported to have thrown 132 slaves overboard alive, a "scheme to collect insurance for what seemed the inevitable loss of a sickly cargo of slaves."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> James Walvin, *Making the Black Atlantic: Britain and the African Diaspora* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), x; By 'involvement,' I mean participating in and benefiting from the trade of slaves and the institution of slavery. Without the existence of slavery, there could not be trade in slaves.

<sup>7</sup> Marika Sherwood. *After Abolition: Britain and the Slave Trade Since 1807*. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Sherwood, *After Abolition*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> See Walvin, *Making the Black Atlantic*, 1-2; Matthew David Mitchell, *The Prince of Slavers: Humphrey Morice and the Transformation of Britain's Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1698-1732* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Ellen Gibson Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson: A Biography* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 10.

The primary reason for the enslavement and transportation of African men, women, and children to the Americas was to generate profit for European emigrants who were establishing mines, plantations, farms, and businesses. In many cases, especially outside of the North American colonies, the profits were sent back to Europe. Accordingly, slavery persisted in European colonies and even in countries that gained independence. Britain actually enacted its last anti-slavery legislation in its African colonies in 1928 in the Gold Coast (Ghana), even though the slave trade was officially abolished by an Act of Parliament in 1807.<sup>11</sup>

The immense human cost of slavery and the slave trade by the British was devastating. Many of the enslaved people died in Europeans' congested slaveholding cells in places like Elmina and Cape Coast Castles in Ghana while awaiting shipment. Sherwood estimates that in the late eighteenth century, 4.5 per cent of enslaved people died on shore, 12.5 per cent on board the ships, and 33 per cent during acclimatisation in the Americas. When those killed in battles are added, it seems that half the number of slaves actually died before they even started their often brief lives as unfree, dehumanised labourers. This is shocking, considering that the slaveholding nations were people who supposedly practised Christian virtues.<sup>12</sup> What is even more shocking is that some pastors and church leaders in the South of the United States had slaves of their own and treated them as brutally as other slaveholders. Additionally, Christian missionaries, particularly in Africa and the Americas, were also implicated in this practice for either supporting or participating in this trade.<sup>13</sup>

The slave trade was an exceptionally lucrative endeavour that involved multiple stakeholders, including British merchants, shipbuilders, insurers, bankers, manufacturers, and workers. Many investors reaped substantial benefits from this trade, particularly through the use of enslaved individuals in plantations, farms, and mines. The trade functioned as an economic engine for Britain, significantly contributing to its economic growth.<sup>14</sup> Thus, slavery and the slave trade were deeply intertwined with the British imperial economy, relying on vast property holdings and contributing significantly to the nation's prosperity. Ellen Wilson contends that the abolition of the slave trade would not have occurred purely through economic forces had it not been for the efforts of abolitionists. She argues that the trade was not only profitable for investors but also sustained by the indifference of ordinary British and European citizens. For

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<sup>11</sup> Sherwood, *After Abolition*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Sherwood, *After Abolition*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African, Translated from a Latin Dissertation* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1785), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Walvin, *Making the Black Atlantic*, 1-2.

them, Africa and the West Indies were distant lands, largely invisible, while plantation owners were regarded as prominent figures within British society.<sup>15</sup> It was in this context of a morally and ethically challenged Christian-dominated British society that Thomas Clarkson devoted his efforts to the abolition of the slave trade and, later, slavery as a whole.

### **Thomas Clarkson: A Life Dedicated to Abolition of Slavery**

Thomas Clarkson was born on March 28, 1760, in Wisbech, England. He was the eldest son of John Clarkson, an Anglican priest and headmaster, and Anne Ward, who hailed from a notable Huguenot family. Thomas's father epitomised piety and a strong sense of duty, but he died when Clarkson was just six years old, leaving a profound effect on his three children. To understand why Clarkson chose his mission, it is crucial to reflect on his religious upbringing and the early influences of his parents. Clarkson's Christian upbringing remained with him throughout his life. His father served as a model of self-sacrifice for a noble cause, while his mother instilled in him resilience and hard work. She was known for her remarkable energy and strong character, successfully navigating the challenges of early widowhood while raising three young children and coping with chronic rheumatism. With his mother's guidance, young Thomas opted to follow his father's path by seeking ordination in the Church of England. He enrolled at St. John's College at the University of Cambridge, just as his father had done before him.

At Cambridge, Clarkson was regarded as a brilliant and disciplined scholar in the field of Classical Studies. He received his bachelor's degree in 1783 and was subsequently ordained as a deacon in preparation for the Anglican priesthood. While working towards his master's degree, Clarkson decided to enter the Vice Chancellor's essay competition on the question, "Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their will?" Initially, he viewed the competition as an intellectual challenge, having little prior knowledge of the subject. Nonetheless, he approached his research with diligence, ultimately becoming overwhelmed by the gravity of his findings. He remarked at one time while working on the essay, "I sometimes never closed my eye-lids for grief."<sup>16</sup> In the end, his completed essay won the contest.

By this point, deeply troubled by the horrors of the slave trade, he experienced a moment of awakening – an epiphany concerning slavery. Clarkson came to understand that "If the contents of the Essay were true, it was time some person should see these calamities to the end,"<sup>17</sup> and he resolved to be that person.

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<sup>15</sup> Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson*, 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade*, Volume I (1808), 209.

<sup>17</sup> Clarkson, *History*, 210.

With the support of the Society of Friends (Quakers), who had long opposed the slave trade, he published his essay, which became a crucial resource in the indictment of that trade.<sup>18</sup> Committing to the mission of abolition required him to forgo a promising priesthood career in the church. He ultimately emerged as the architect of a national campaign aimed at the abolition of the slave trade, believing this cause to be his divine assignment. Until his death, he devoted his entire life to the abolition movement, playing a prominent role not only in Britain but also on the global stage. It took two decades, until 1807, for the British Parliament to outlaw the slave trade, yet long before that, the British public had been convinced by this unparalleled movement that slavery was a crime.<sup>19</sup> Later, he worked with a new wave of abolitionists to establish the anti-slavery movement, which led to the emancipation of slaves in British colonies in 1833.

### **Clarkson's Advocacy and Methods**

While many abolitionists and organisations, such as the Quakers, were involved, Thomas Clarkson stood out as a leading advocate against the moral atrocities of the slave trade, mobilising the British public around this issue. To grasp how his strategies could assist contemporary African churches and Christians in addressing today's moral and ethical dilemmas, it is important to explore some of his key methods.

### **Research and Documentation of Slavery's Atrocities**

Foremost, Clarkson grounded his advocacy in thorough research and documentation of the atrocities of the slave trade.

#### *Gathering Testimonies and Evidence*

To be effective, he initiated the collection of testimonies and evidence from London, alongside key slaving centres such as Bristol and Liverpool. This approach resembled a form of fieldwork, allowing him to better grasp the practical severity and scale of the challenges he would face. London was chosen for its role as the financial and commercial nucleus of the plantation economy. Moreover, it was a crucial location where influential West Indies lobbyists had embedded themselves within the highest echelons of government, Parliament, and commerce.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Clarkson embarked on a series of observations and investigative trips to the major slave ports of Bristol and Liverpool in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the trade and expose the weaknesses

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<sup>18</sup> See Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African, Translated from a Latin Dissertation* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1785).

<sup>19</sup> Sherwood. *After Abolition*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Clarkson, *History*, 236.

of the institution they aimed to dismantle. These pioneering journeys often posed significant risks to his life, as he sought evidence and testimonies in these cities.

Through this field research, he gathered a variety of items, including leg shackles and handcuffs that were once used on slave ships, along with woven and dyed cloths crafted in Africa. The cloths served as exhibits to challenge the prevailing perceptions of the general public, many of whom viewed Africa as a dark, uncivilised continent populated by unskilled people. They exemplified sophisticated craftsmanship produced for the British market. He also conducted interviews with many involved in the slave trade, including naval and army officers who served along the coast. Through his research efforts, Clarkson demonstrated that slavery had far-reaching effects beyond just African countries; notably, half of the seamen serving on British slave ships never returned, and one in five lost their lives.<sup>21</sup> This evidence became one of the most compelling arguments for the abolitionists. Thus, Clarkson advocated for a type of evidence-based advocacy that is grounded in proper methods of data collection and analysis.

### *Publications and Writings*

The thorough research culminated in a wealth of publications and the dissemination of vital information for the abolition movement. Clarkson notes that the central committee of abolitionists collectively produced “51432 pamphlets or books and 26526 reports and other papers. It had also inspired 103 petitions to Parliament.”<sup>22</sup> Among these many publications, Clarkson’s two books emerged as essential reference materials for the movement, achieving the highest distribution.

The first book, an expanded version of his award-winning essay from Cambridge University, covered the subject in great detail. The arguments presented in this essay gained momentum and became increasingly effective in lobbying Members of Parliament. One MP noted that Clarkson’s first book was “unanswerably and I should have thought, irresistibly. It marked a turning point for British abolitionists.”<sup>23</sup> To make his essay accessible to ordinary citizens, Clarkson created a shorter pamphlet based on his work. He ordered a thousand copies of “A Summary View of the Slave-Trade, and of the Probable Consequences of its Abolition” for immediate distribution.<sup>24</sup>

Clarkson’s second major publication and one of his most influential works, *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade*, became a valuable resource for abolitionists. Even

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<sup>21</sup> Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson*, 29, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Clarkson, *History*, 571, 491.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson*, 28.

stronger arguments were derived from this book. He sought to prove that the slave trade was not only inhumane and unjust but also a grave danger for seamen and an impractical means of providing plantation labour, as well as demonstrating the immorality of the slave trade. The arguments in this book are not only evidence-based but also biblically grounded. Clearly, writings and publications were critical means of engaging the public and sustaining the abolitionist fight in Parliament.

### **Grassroots Mobilisation and Public Engagement**

The next strategy was embarking on grassroots mobilisation and engaging the British public. Arguably, Clarkson's most significant contribution to the abolition movement was his idea of a new form of extra-parliamentary action through the formation of a committee of twelve like-minded abolitionists called The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. He described this committee as representing all aspects of the history of abolition. He compared it to a great river fed by tributaries, illustrating how each member played a role in creating the powerful current that ultimately ended the slave trade. In addition to their piety, the committee members brought a wealth of worldly experience from diverse occupations and philanthropic endeavours. As one member aptly stated, "I believe no committee was ever made up of persons whose varied talents were better adapted to the work before them."<sup>25</sup> Clarkson's organisational skills, appreciation for the unique contributions of other leaders, and ability to unite people from different backgrounds were truly exceptional.

To engage the British public, Clarkson traversed 35,000 miles on horseback across the country. This method was not only the most efficient mode of transportation in all weather conditions, but it also required considerable physical effort and stamina. Through his extensive journeys, he transformed the abolitionist movement into a national cause, representing both society and its governing bodies. He inspired and educated supporters about the advancements in the struggle for abolition. Additionally, he recruited subscribers and established local committees to gather petitions and raise funds. Wilson states that Clarkson was "listened to with breathless attention and reminded at least one man of St. Paul preaching at Athens."<sup>26</sup> Although the journeys were fraught with danger and exhaustion, they were also exhilarating; Clarkson utilised speeches, local committee meetings, and other public engagements to mobilise grassroots support and bring the cause of abolishing the slave trade closer to fruition.

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<sup>25</sup> Clarkson, *History*, 271-272.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson*, 29.

## **Partnership with William Wilberforce and Other Abolitionists**

Through the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Clarkson worked alongside other influential abolitionists. Central to this effort was his collaboration with the charismatic William Wilberforce, who took up the campaign within Parliament. Their partnership spanned nearly fifty years. While both men were instrumental in the fight to abolish the slave trade, it is Wilberforce's name that has become widely recognised as the parliamentary champion, whereas Clarkson's legacy has faded. Nevertheless, during their time, the names of the two abolitionists were often mentioned together in the public consciousness.<sup>27</sup> It was Clarkson who envisioned the campaign and galvanised public support for it. As a master strategist, he and his colleagues recognised the necessity of combating the slave trade in Parliament, and they required someone capable of representing the moral imperative of their cause.

Clarkson and Wilberforce were different in many ways, yet they found common ground that allowed their partnership to thrive. Clarkson was methodical, always punctual, and had a quiet voice, but he was also sensitive and deeply passionate. In contrast, Wilberforce was charming, easy to talk to, and an impressive orator, though he did not share Clarkson's methodical approach. While Clarkson dedicated his life exclusively to the abolition of the slave trade, Wilberforce aimed to transform a corrupt society through serious Christianity, with the abolition of the slave trade serving as a significant political expression of his faith. This effort was just one of many evangelical causes he supported. Clarkson and Wilberforce had differing political perspectives. Clarkson embraced a Whiggish philosophy, while Wilberforce held deeply conservative views, although both claimed to be non-partisan. Although they were both members of the Anglican Church, Clarkson identified with the Orthodox tradition, whereas Wilberforce was an evangelical who felt comfortable among his fellow evangelicals. In contrast, Clarkson was more flexible in his associations and was even at ease with the Quakers.

Despite these glaring differences, Wilberforce and Clarkson collaborated with one another, understanding the value of each in their endeavour. Clarkson described the working relationship within the Committee when he said,

For what, for example, could I myself have done if I had not derived so much assistance from the committee? What could Mr. Wilberforce have done in parliament, if I...had not collected that great body of evidence, to

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<sup>27</sup> This paper is inspired by Prof. Dr. (Emeritus) Ulrich Berner, my *Doktorvater*, who introduced me to Thomas Clarkson's work, "Letter to the Clergy of Various Denominations and to the Slave-Holding Planters." and his lifelong role in the abolition movement.

which there was such a constant appeal? And what could the committee have done without the parliamentary aid of Mr. Wilberforce?<sup>28</sup>

They needed each other to achieve their goal. As leaders, they overcame class, regional, personal, and religious barriers to advance the cause of abolition.

### **Reflection on Confronting Societal Issues: Lessons for Pentecostal-Charismatic Advocacy**

The New Testament does not offer a clear social mandate for Christians, leading some to opt for living in closed communities to distance themselves from the broader society, fearing potential contamination. However, historically, most Christians and churches have engaged with the state to some extent. The current debate has shifted from whether Christians should pursue social change or participate in democratic processes for transformation; it is now widely accepted that they should. A key question now is: how can Pentecostal-Charismatic churches enhance their role as the moral conscience of society, advocating for fairness and justice while effectively addressing societal issues at hand, such as the *galamsey*<sup>29</sup> menace in Ghana?

One effective way to achieve this is through consistent advocacy on pressing social, economic, and political issues. The church can draw valuable lessons from Thomas Clarkson's approach to engaging with society and addressing the challenges that afflict communities. First and foremost, the church's advocacy efforts must be founded on thorough research and the publication of essential materials, including books, journal articles, magazines, and other sources that facilitate the dissemination of vital information regarding the topic at hand. Although some Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Ghana may exhibit a degree of scepticism towards anything labelled as 'academic,' the case of the abolitionist movement clearly demonstrates that grounding advocacy in a diligent and methodical approach yields not only theoretical arguments but also empirical evidence to support a position.

Second, mobilising grassroots support, especially within local churches, is essential to enhance the efforts of national committees. Clarkson successfully leveraged his extensive

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<sup>28</sup> Clackson, *History*, 271-272.

<sup>29</sup> Galamsey is a linguistic corruption of the English phrase "gather and sell." It refers to illegal small-scale gold mining activities that cause significant environmental damage in Ghana, including the pollution of major water bodies like rivers. For more on galamsey, See Amy S. Patterson, "When to Speak? Church Advocacy on Galamsey and Mental Health in Ghana," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 16, no. 1, (2018): 37-50.

travels throughout the country to gain more support for the abolitionist movement and increase their funding sources. While a central committee is important for addressing national issues, it may not be adequate for making significant progress on the social causes endorsed by the church.

Third, partnerships are essential for sustained advocacy. It is insufficient for a single church to champion all causes independently, as this can lead to a greater likelihood of losing focus during challenging times. For the African church to effectively drive social transformation, it must collaborate with other faiths and engage both governmental and non-governmental entities. Establishing partnerships with like-minded politicians, such as Members of Parliament, who possess the knowledge, willingness, and moral integrity to advance its initiatives, is crucial. Every church needs advocates similar to Wilberforce—individuals within the political sphere who are committed to fostering social change. Politicians who are willing to strive for “the common good” of society, embodying a way of “doing politics” that transcends sectional or partisan interests.<sup>30</sup>

Ultimately, having moral courage is essential when facing societal injustices, no matter who wields political power or is in the wrong. Clarkson consistently called out anyone who remained complicit in the sin of the slave trade, including missionaries and pastors. In one of his letters, he addressed them with unwavering firmness:

I am told, that some of you, when you first went to your respective congregations, undertook the charge with an honest indignation against slavery, and with a conviction of its sinfulness, but that you afterwards changed your sentiments; that you had at length the hardihood to preach in favour of what you had denominated sinful before; that many of your profession became owners of slaves: and it grieves me to say, that you whipped and treated them severely as others; but O, monstrous profaneness!<sup>31</sup>

This quotation is from a letter written by Clarkson to slave-holding ministers in North America. It highlights that during the peak of the slave trade, some ministers of the Gospel were complicit in the grave sin of treating human beings as mere possessions, stripped of their dignity. Furthermore, it demonstrates that Clarkson was unafraid to call out these Christians. This suggests that in a society marked by moral decay, the Nathan

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<sup>30</sup> Andrew Bradstock and Hilary Russell, “Politics, Church and the Common Good.” in *A Companion to Public Theology*, ed. Sebastian Kim and Katie Day (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 166-67.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Clarkson. *A Letter to the Clergy of Various Denominations and to the Slave-holding Planters* (London: Johnson and Barrett, 1841), 3,4.

principle,<sup>32</sup> beloved by Pentecostals, should not be the only approach to holding political or even religious leaders accountable; there are instances when public accountability is warranted, and the church should not compromise.

## Conclusion

This article focuses on Thomas Clarkson's life mission to abolish the transatlantic slave trade, one of the most egregious crimes against humanity. It serves as a foundational lens through which to explore how the Pentecostal-Charismatic church can respond to the social, economic, and political challenges facing African societies. The discussion highlights the dehumanisation inflicted by the slave trade, which reduced individuals to mere commodities within a lucrative business that bolstered the British imperial economy until its abolition in 1807, followed by the emancipation of all enslaved individuals in 1833. Thomas Clarkson made significant contributions to this cause, including co-founding the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, conducting research and documentation on the trade, and mobilising public opinion through pamphlets and speeches. Finally, the article argues that the strategies and methods employed by Clarkson and other abolitionists can serve as a valuable model for the contemporary African Pentecostal-Charismatic church and Christians. By adopting these approaches in their advocacy, the church can effectively engage with the democratic state to promote societal transformation.

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<sup>32</sup> Nathan confronted David in a unique way, as described in 2 Sam. 12:17. Rather than publicly rebuking him, he chose to speak to David privately. Nonetheless, he managed to convict David of the injustice he had committed and the abuse of his power. This approach reflects a principle that is prevalent among Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians in Ghana.

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