Forgotten Foundations:
Christianity and Modernity's Amnesia

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In recent decades, Christianity has been subjected to intense scrutiny and criticism, especially from Western academics and writers. Early in our century, there emerged a new perspective dubbed the 'New Atheism', which expressed open hostility towards religion, especially Christianity. Led by writers such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett – sometimes described as the four horsemen of the New Atheism – this new perspective portrays Christianity as intellectually bankrupt and dangerous. These critics target Christian beliefs and practices not only as intolerant but even as the root of violence. The titles of their books say it all: *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* by Sam Harris, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* by Christopher Hitchens, and *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* by Daniel Dennett.

The new atheists are not alone in disparaging Christianity. The academic world – especially in the humanities and social sciences – has increasingly distanced itself from traditional Christian thought. Christian perspectives have often been side-lined or marginalised in academic discussions on ethics, history, and human identity. In some circles, Christian thought and perspectives are not only excluded from academic debates because they are perceived as outmoded. They are shunned because they are regarded as irrational and even morally repressive, and, therefore, unworthy of serious engagement. Christian sexual ethics, particularly in discussions surrounding LGBTQ+ rights, are frequently dismissed by academia and the general public as repressive and harmful. The Christian view of life, of human beings, sin and salvation are routinely caricatured in academic settings as anti-scientific and even psychologically damaging.

In addition to this, there is an influential narrative that claims that the foundations of modern liberal democracies and the progress that humanity has achieved are largely due to Enlightenment ideals. This is the argument advanced by Canadian-American cognitive psychologist, linguist, and public intellectual Steven Pinker, in his book *Enlightenment Now: The Case for*

Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress. Pinker argues that modern values such as reason, science, humanism and progress are the results of the Enlightenment. It was the great 18th century intellectual and cultural revolution that laid the groundwork for modernity's greatest achievements such as peace, safety, and prosperity. Pinker argues that the pre-Enlightenment world, shaped by Christian orthodoxy, did not nurture these goods. Instead, it generated suffering, injustice and intolerance as evidenced by witch hunts, religious wars, slavery and repression. Pinker states quite categorically and boldly that many of the things that we now take for granted – liberty, equality, tolerance, freedom of expression, democracy, and science – are chiefly products of the Enlightenment.

These perspectives, which have become so commonplace in the West, reveal a selective reading of history and a profound cultural amnesia regarding the foundational contributions of Christianity. In this lecture, I am going to tell a different story. It is a story of the role that Christianity played in the shaping of Western culture and of modernity. It is a story that some Western academics and writers have either forgotten or suppressed. In providing this counter-narrative, I am not saying anything original or idiosyncratic. Many historians and scholars – both Christian and non-Christian – have already told the story that I am about to share. You will encounter some of them in this lecture.

In telling this story, I am not attempting to ignore or gloss over the darker threads of Church history where the actions of the Church or Christians appear to contradict the very Gospel they are called to proclaim. I am referring to incidents such as the Crusades (11th and 13th centuries), in which the Church sanctioned military campaigns against the Muslims. The Spanish Inquisition in the 12th century is another example. Infamous for its severity the Inquisition tried and executed those who were deemed to be deviating from orthodoxy through the Church's ecclesiastical courts. The Church's chequered history of complicity with slavery is yet another example in which its actions are not in harmony with the Gospel. This is especially illustrated by papal bulls such as *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) which gave European monarchs the right to enslave non-Christian peoples and seize their lands.

However, it is important that we bear in mind three things when considering these aberrations. The first is that these are complex phenomena that must be carefully studied and whose complexity defies simplistic causations. The Crusades are a clear example of this. The Crusades cannot be explained by a single cause, such as 'Christian aggression.' Their motivations were varied. They include the Christian desire to defend the Holy Land as well as the political and territorial ambitions of European rulers.

Secondly, the errant and even evil actions of the Church and some Christians do not implicate the integrity of the Gospel and the soundness of Christian teaching. And thirdly, these dark moments in the history of the Church do not cancel out or nullify the profound contributions of Christianity and the Church that we are about to examine.

I will organise my remarks on the contribution and influence of Christianity in Western and modern culture in two parts. The first part has to do with the role that Christianity played in the establishment and development of the major social institutions of society such as healthcare and education. And the second part is devoted to values. In what way did Christianity help shape the ideals of dignity and equality?

INSTITUTIONS

The first broad area in which Christianity has made significant contributions that I would like to discuss is that of social institutions. Social institutions are the foundational frameworks through which societies organise social interactions and responsibilities. Institutions such as the family, education, healthcare, the legal system, government and economy provide patterns of social life that structure relationships. They are the scaffolding of social order and stability, offering individuals a sense of belonging and ensuring security and support essential for societal flourishing. Social institutions also play a crucial role in transmitting values, beliefs, customs, language and practices that form a society's culture.

For example, the scientific enterprise, as a social institution, provides a structured and organised system of norms, practices and relationships that guide the pursuit of knowledge. It functions within a framework of shared values and performs roles that are vital for the development of society. In the same way, law and the legal system are social institutions that regulate behaviour and uphold societal values. They protect individual rights and liberties, promote justice, and maintain the order and stability necessary for daily life, economic activity and public safety.

In the West, these institutions are shaped by its unique cultural and historical context. What is often overlooked, however, is the crucial role Christianity has played in their development. In what follows, I will briefly discuss four key institutions and the ways in which Christianity has influenced their formation and evolution.

Education

Let me begin with education in general and the establishment of institutes of higher learning – namely, universities – in particular. We have been accustomed to a widespread narrative in intellectual history that it was the Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries that gave birth to modern education. To be sure, the Enlightenment did leave a significant imprint on modern educational theory and practice. Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau introduced important ideas that have shaped modern philosophies of education and pedagogy.

However, it would be a serious oversimplification to assert that modern education originated solely or even primarily from the Enlightenment. The roots of modern education in the western world lie much deeper. It can indeed be traced to classical antiquity, but its most fundamental and direct influence is arguably the Christian Middle Ages and the Reformation – long before thinkers such as Locke and Rousseau appeared on the scene. When the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason burst onto the scene, universities such as Bologna (1088), Paris (1150) and Oxford (1096) had already been in existence for centuries.

Many scholars have made this point. For example, in his magisterial work, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, historian Hastings Rashdall notes that the medieval university was a child of the Church, adding that it was the Church that gave birth to the idea of organized learning. Educational historian James Bowen concurs with Rashdall. In his *History of Western Education*, Bowden emphasises that the universal education which the Enlightenment advocated depended on the groundwork laid by Christian Europe. Historian Christopher Dawson argues convincingly that the modern educational ideal of a liberal and humane education owes more to the Christian Middle Ages than to the Enlightenment.

The Church's focus on education stems from the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), which comprises Jesus' instruction to his disciples to 'make disciples of all nations … teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.' In obedience to Jesus' command, the Church provided catechetical instruction to new converts to the Christian faith known as catechumens. Catechetical instruction soon gave rise to the establishment of catechetical schools such as those established by the great Christian apologist, Justin Martyr (100-165). Gradually, these catechetical schools provided the theological and literary foundation for future theologians such as Origen (185-254), Athanasius (296-373), and many others.

Christian monasteries also played a significant role in the provision and promotion of education. With the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, Christian monasteries became the primary centres of learning and the preservation of classical knowledge. Monks work tirelessly to copy and preserve manuscripts of the Bible, theological works and classical texts in an effort to preserve ancient wisdom. The *scriptoria* – rooms where manuscripts were copied – became vital for the preservation and handing down of literature, philosophy, science, and theology. As Alvin Schmidt points out, these medieval monasteries became the seedbeds of modern universities.

From the fifth to the tenth century, cathedral and episcopal schools also played a major role in providing education. These schools, which were managed by bishops, did not only teach Christian doctrine but also what is called the seven liberal arts: the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy). These schools not only trained clergy to serve in the Church but also provided education for children of royalty and the higher social ranks. They also served as precursors to universities.

The sixteenth century Protestant Reformation gave further impetus to education, especially in the promotion of literacy. This was in concert with the Reformers' belief that every Christian must be able to read the Bible for themselves. This led not only to the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages but also to widespread efforts to establish schools to promote literacy. Thus, the Reformers invested heavily in the school systems across Europe. This is evident in parts of Germany where the Church played a crucial role in the establishment of schools and the training of teachers. It is seen supremely in the Geneva Academy, established by John Calvin, which served as a model for Christian education in Europe.

Luther also urged state schools to include vernacular primary schools for both sexes in an effort to make education truly universal. He chastised parents who deprived their children of education as 'shameful and despicable'. Thus, while Luther continued to emphasise the importance of education for the clergy, he also believed that all children should receive proper education. Education, Luther believed, would enable children to be God-fearing and law-abiding citizens who would serve God and society. Furthermore, the Reformers also believed that education should not be the privilege of the rich but must be made available to the poor as well. Thus, Protestant leaders such as John Comenius (1592-1670), bishop of the Moravian Brethren, established schools for the children belonging to all social classes, especially the poor.

Christian missionaries played a crucial role in bringing formal education systems to various parts of the world. Wherever they went to proclaim the

good news of Jesus Christ, they also established schools. In Singapore, for example, the earliest schools were established by both Protestant and Catholic missionaries. They include prominent educational institutions such as the Anglo-Chinese School (ACS) which was established in 1886 by Methodist missionary William Oldham and St. Joseph's Institution (SJI) which was founded by the La Salle Brothers in 1852.

This is also the case for Indonesia. Missionaries were among the first to introduce formal Western-style education to the archipelago, with an emphasis on reading, writing and arithmetic. Perhaps the most enduring legacy of Christian missionary education in Indonesia is the inclusion of marginalised groups, especially women and the poor.

Christianity played a crucial role in the shaping and promotion of education. As Alvin Schmidt straightforwardly puts it:

> Catechetical schools, cathedral schools, monasteries, medieval universities, schools for the blind and deaf, Sunday schools, modern grade schools, secondary schools, modern colleges, universities, and universal education all have one thing in common: they are the products of Christianity.

Healthcare

The second significant contribution that Christianity made is in shaping the development of healthcare and the institutional care of the sick. The Greco-Roman world from which the early Christian communities emerged provided very limited care for the sick. Medical care was often limited to the family, where professional care by trained physicians was mostly accessible only to the wealthy. The poor were left very much to their own devices – some relied on folk remedies, while others turned to the services of healing shrines or the *Aesculapia*.

Historians of antiquity, however, believe that these shrines did not actually offer medical treatment. Instead, they were places for the sick to wait upon Aesculapius, the Greek god of healing, in the hope that they might receive revelations for a particular course of treatment for their ailment. As antiquity scholar Gerhard Uhlhorn explains, these houses were 'only hospices for shelter, and not hospitals for care and attendance.'

More significantly, a number of historians have observed that while some expressions of care existed in Greco-Roman society, compassion for the sick was not an institutional tenet, nor was it a defining cultural virtue. Illness was commonly viewed as a manifestation of divine punishment, and individuals

suffering from communicable diseases – such as leprosy – were especially shunned by society.

This attitude became especially evident during a plague that struck the great city of Alexandria (in Egypt) in AD 250. The Christian bishop Dionysius described the response of the pagans to their ailing fellow human beings thus:

> [The pagans] thrust aside anyone who began to be sick, and kept aloof even from their dearest friends and cast the sufferers out upon the public roads half dead, and left them unburied, and treated them with utter contempt when they died.

Many scholars believe that this reflects the typical pagan attitude toward the vulnerable, as bluntly expressed by the first century Roman philosopher Seneca: 'We drown children who at birth are weakly and abnormal.'

Bishop Dionysius contrasted this with the attitude and behaviour of Christians towards the sick and dying in the same epistle:

> [V]ery many of our brethren, while in their exceeding love and brotherly kindness did not spare themselves, but kept by each other, and visited the sick without thought of their own peril, and ministered to them assiduously, and treated them for their healing in Christ, died from time to time most joyfully … drawing upon themselves their neighbours' diseases, and willingly taking over to their own persons the burden of the suffering of those around them.

What was the reason for the stark contrast between the attitude and behaviour of Christians and pagans? The difference is found in Jesus Christ, whose example of care for the sick the early Christians sought to emulate. The Gospels present Jesus as a healer deeply moved by compassion for the sick. He touched lepers, healed the blind and paralysed and raised the dead. The disciples were taught to see the face of their Lord in the sick and suffering: 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me' (Matthew 25:36, 40). Thus, from the very beginning, Christians have made charitable works a priority. They reached out to widows, orphans and the poor and provided them with food and support. They cared for the sick and the infirm, nursed some back to health and provided palliative care to others.

The first Christian hospital (in the modern sense) was built by the great Cappadocian theologian Basil of Caesarea around AD 369. But even in the second and third centuries, Christians had begun to provide what may be described broadly as institutionalised healthcare to the general public – a

phenomenon unheard of before the Christian era. The homes of bishops and wealthy Christians were transformed to makeshift clinics for the sick and hospices providing palliative care for the dying. Collections were frequently taken to support those in need. Motivated by Christian compassion, these believers reached out to the sick and the dying in a way that was truly revolutionary and counter-cultural.

While pagan societies and families frequently abandoned their sick relatives, Christians would bring strangers into their homes to care for them. Christian women also played a crucial role in the early Christian care for the sick. Many female believers saw nursing as an extension of their discipleship. As early as the third-century, a Christian manual outlining the duties of widows called the *Didascalia Apostolorum* emphasised the tending of the sick and the dying.

It was after the Edict of Milan in AD 313, especially following Constantine's defeat of his co-emperor Licinius in 324 that Christians were able to focus on establishing institutionalised care for the sick. As mentioned earlier, Basil the Great founded the first hospital called the *Basileias*, which according to the historian of medicine Fielding Garrison was a sprawling complex 'with houses for physicians and nurses, workshops and industrial schools.' John Chrysostom (d. 407) – the patriarch of the Eastern church – also built hospitals in Constantinople in the late fourth and fifth centuries. The great theologian of the Latin church and Bishop of Hippo, Augustine, was also instrumental in establishing hospitals in the West.

Following the example of Basil, Christian monasticism became one of the most important vehicles for the development of hospitals throughout late antiquity. Thus, Alvin Schmidt could write that '[b]y the sixth century, hospitals also had become a common part of monasteries.' He adds that 'by the middle of the sixth century in most part of Christendom, in the East and West, hospitals were securely established.'

During the Middle Ages, the Church continued to be the primary provider of healthcare in all of Europe, with hospitals proliferating throughout Christendom and many founded and staffed by religious orders. Monasteries also continued to play an integral part in public healthcare, serving in many cases as the primary custodians of medical knowledge and care. Almost every monastery had an infirmary, where the sick – religious and lay alike – received treatment. In addition, monastic libraries preserved classical medical texts by Hippocrates, Galen, and Diocorides. Monks and nuns also studied herbal medicine, basic surgical practices and public hygiene.

The growing institutionalisation of healthcare was accompanied by the formalisation of medical education. Schools in Salerno, Montpellier, and

Bologna – while not hospitals as such – became prominent centres of medical learning. With the growth and expansion of towns and cities in the 11th and 12th centuries, hospitals were also established beyond the monasteries, although they were still mainly run by the Church. 'By the thirteenth century', writes Schmidt, 'most hospitals in Europe were under the direction of Christian bishops, who often came from wealthy homes and who frequently used their financial resources to aid and assist hospitals.'

The great Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century did not downplay the importance of medical charity but profoundly changed its motivation. For the Reformers, good works are not the means by which to earn salvation but the fruit of genuine faith. The Reformers and their churches therefore continued to support the building of hospitals and the development of medical knowledge. Luther's understanding of ministry to the sick was made profoundly evident during the bubonic plague which struck Wittenberg in 1527. In his famous treatise *Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague*, Luther emphatically encouraged Christians to remain and serve the afflicted, describing it as a work of love and obedience to God. Calvin's contribution to medical charity is seen in the way Geneva developed an integrated system of poor relief and healthcare under his leadership. The *L'Hopital General* of Geneva, founded in the 1530s became a model of Reformed medical charity that has inspired other Reformed cities such as Zurich, Strasbourg and Edinburgh.

With the advent of the Enlightenment in the 18th century and the so-called scientific revolution, medicine began to be professionalised and the healthcare landscape changed radically. However, the influence of Christianity continues to be evident despite the march of secularisation. Christianity also inspired new and enduring developments in this period. For example, the advent of modern nursing is attributed to the work of the devout Anglican, Florence Nightingale (1820-1910). Appalled by the squalid conditions during the Crimean War, Nightingale introduced strict hygiene protocols, proper ventilation and statistical tracking of patients. She also established the Nightingale Training School for Nurses at St Thomas' Hospital in London and professionalised nursing.

During the missionary era, Christian missions brought healthcare to different parts of the globe including Africa, Asia and the Middle East. They established hospitals and clinics as they preached the Gospel and taught the Faith. Public healthcare would not have developed in the way it did if not for Christianity. As Gary B. Ferngren observes,

> The hospital was in origin and conception, a distinctively Christian institution, rooted in Christian concepts of charity and philanthropy.

> There were no pre-Christian institutions in the ancient world that served the purpose that Christian hospitals were created to serve … None of the provisions for health care in classical times … resembled hospitals.

Law

The third institution that Christianity has exerted significant influence on and which I would like to examine is Western jurisprudence and its legal system.

To be sure, Christianity emerged in the Greco-Roman world which already had in place its own laws. Roman law drew heavily on a legal theory that was shaped by the teachings of Plato and Aristotle and other Greek sages such as Cicero and Seneca. This included concepts such as natural, distributive and communicative justice and also methods of legal reasoning and interpretation. Roman jurists such as Gaius (130-180) and Ulpian (d. c. 228) introduced what would become classic distinctions in Western law. Civil law (*ius civile*) refers to statutes and procedures tied to a particular community and applied with equity. The law of nations (*ius gentium*) consisted of principles considered common across peoples and applied by Roman jurists in dealing with foreigners. Natural law (*ius naturale*) refers to immutable principles that apply universally and must prevail when a conflict occurs in civil or common laws.

Christianity, however, understood law very differently – as divinely ordained. It inherited this understanding from the Old Testament where law has to do not with a civil contract but with a covenant with God. Law is therefore understood as divine revelation which does not only prescribe human behaviour but is rooted in God's very character. The Hebraic understanding of justice does not only refer to judicial decisions but also to broader principles of righteousness and social relations that mirror divine justice. Furthermore, biblical justice is established on the belief that human beings are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). This theological affirmation introduces a radical egalitarianism and serves as the foundation for human dignity and the equality of all persons. As Leviticus 19 clearly instructs: 'Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor and favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly' (verse 15). This is antithetical to the hierarchical and class-based legal systems that were so common in the Greco-Roman world.

Following the conversion of Constantine in 312 and the Edict of Milan the year after, a convergence between Roman law and Christian belief took place. This marked a significant turning point in the legal structure of the Roman Empire where Christianity exerted a transformative influence on its legal framework. One of the most profound ways in which Christianity influenced

the legal system of the Empire was by introducing a higher standard of morality. Christianity transformed the highly developed but pragmatic and utilitarian system of pagan Roman law by subjecting it to its moral and theological principles. For example, according to the 19th century historian, William Lecky, Constantine banned gladiatorial contests because of the Christian belief in the sanctity of human life. In a similar vein, laws began to reflect Christian attitudes towards sexual ethics and the sanctity of marriage. John Cairns, professor of jurisprudence at Queen's University, Belfast, points out that Constantine introduced laws that made adultery a public crime.

Most significantly, under the influence of Christianity, laws were introduced in the Empire that sought to protect the poor and the vulnerable. Since their appearance in the first century, Christians have always been motivated to perform acts of mercy towards the poor, vulnerable and marginalised. This is evident in their opposition to the practice of infanticide which according to many historians, was widespread in the Greco-Roman world. Early Christian documents such as the *Didache* (85) and the *Epistle of Barnabas* (130) condemned the practice together with abortion and suicide.

The early Christians would pick up children left on the roadside by their parents to die (a common practice), bring them to their homes and raise them as their own. Under the influence of Christianity, laws to ban infanticide and to curb the practice of abortion were introduced. In addition, there were also laws protecting the poor and the vulnerable. For example, laws were enacted to penalise the killing of slaves and prohibit certain forms of cruel punishment. Laws were also passed to support the Church's mission to take care of the poor.

One of the most significant ways in which the Church influenced the modern Western legal system was through the development of canon law in the Middle Ages. Canon law refers to a legal system developed by the Roman Catholic Church which seeks to regulate internal governance, discipline, doctrine and clergy-laity relations. Canonical rules were formulated from as early as the 2nd century when the early Church made decisions on different matters in local synods. Canonical collections such as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and *Apostolic Constitutions* began to take form.

But the turning point took place in the 12th century when the monk Gratian compiled the *Decretum Gratiani* in 1140, synthesising the different canons and legal traditions into a coherent system. His work earned him the title 'Father of Canon Law.' It is pertinent to note that canon law did not only deal with ecclesiastical matters but also with marriage, inheritance, contracts and criminal justice. Canon law provided a universal legal code, a hierarchical court system and written jurisprudence. In a profound sense, the Church is

the first institution to develop a systematic, rational, and universal legal science after the collapse of the Roman Empire. This has led scholars such as Harold Berman to maintain in his influential work *Law and Revolution* that the Western legal tradition was born in the twelfth century and in a religious context.

Canon law introduces the concept of the Rule of Law, to which all members of the Church – clerics and laity – are subjected. Even popes are subjected to canon law, which means that bishops and other clerics could appeal to a higher authority. Some scholars have argued that in insisting on the Rule of Law for its own institutions, the Church has in fact set a precedent for constitutional governance. The Magna Carta, signed by King John of England in 1215, is often hailed as a foundational document in the history of constitutional law. Its fundamental idea that the ruler is subject to the law and must rule according to just procedure is deeply rooted in Christian jurisprudence.

The great cultural and intellectual movement in the late seventeenth to nineteenth centuries known as the Enlightenment brought about radical changes to the Western legal tradition. Its philosophy, rooted in individualism, rationalism and nationalism, is presented as a new dogma which seeks to supplant traditional Christian teachings. Individuals are no longer regarded as sinners seeking salvation but autonomous actors vested with inherent rights of life and liberty. Reason is no longer subservient to revelation but is regarded as a sufficient source of private morality and public law. The nation-state is no longer wedded to the Church but exists as an entity in its own right.

However, despite these radical shifts in sensibilities and philosophy, the influence of Christianity remains evident, as John Witte has observed:

> Although these modern reforms removed many traditional norms and forms of religious influence on law, some of the Bible's basic laws are still at the heart of Western legal systems today. 'Thou shalt not kill' remains at the foundation of the laws of homicide. 'Thou shalt not steal' grounds the laws of property and theft. 'Thou shalt not bear false witness' remains the anchor of modern laws of evidence and defamation. The ancient laws of sanctuary still operate for fleeing felons, refugees, and asylum seekers. The ancient principles of Jubilee are at the heart of modern laws of bankruptcy and debt relief. Like it or not, the Bible remains an important anchor text for the Western legal tradition.

Science

The final institution that Christianity has influenced that I would like to discuss, is arguably one of the most significant intellectual developments in human history: modern science.

In 1896, Andrew Dickson White, a former president of Cornell University, published his influential study, *A History of the Warfare of Science and Theology*. This two-volume work depicted the enduring conflict between science, presented as an empirical pursuit of truth, and theology, presented as institutional dogma. White's sweeping narrative portrays theology as the consistent impediment to scientific progress, a theory often described as the 'conflict thesis.' The conflict between Galileo Galilei and the Roman Catholic Church and the latter's rejection of the findings of geologists are presented as evidence of this 'warfare.' In later accounts, the Scopes 'Monkey' Trial associated with the Darwinian theory of evolution is also often commandeered as evidence of the conflict thesis. In this view, Christianity is portrayed as a fundamentalist religion that is anti-science and anti-intellectual.

Historians of science such as John Hedley Brooke and David C. Lindberg have thoroughly debunked White's simplistic theory. They have pointed out that many early scientists such as Newton and Kepler were profoundly religious and even regarded their scientific work as a form of worship. In his book, White also claimed that medieval theologians regarded the world as flat. In this regard, the leading historian of science and religion, Ronald Numbers, has accused White of perpetuating myths. In fact, the seminal thinkers in the medieval period held that the Earth is round. Indeed, as Rodney Stark has also pointed out, the Venerable Bede (671-735), Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) and Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) consistently taught this in their works. Consequently, some scholars have accused White of writing ideological propaganda rather than history.

Despite being discredited in academic circles, White's conflict thesis remains influential in some contexts, especially those committed to Enlightenment scientism. The 'warfare' metaphor has come in handy in ideological battles where secularists tried to depict scientists as heroic figures who stood against oppressive religious authorities. Historical inaccuracies such as the assertion that medieval Christians thought that the Earth is flat continue to circulate in public discourse.

White's conflict thesis has also found renewed vigour through the work of the so-called New Atheists. The Four Horsemen of the New Atheism – Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett – have

appropriated White's framework to argue that religion is harmful to human progress. However, the truth of the matter is not only that Christianity is not opposed to science and scientific progress. Rather, as Rodney Stark and others have convincingly shown, Christian theology was *essential* for the very rise of science.

The Christian understanding that the material world was brought into being by a Creator is arguably the fundamental basis for the legitimisation of scientific inquiry. Christians believe that the God who created the universe out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) is a rational God. Creation is therefore not arbitrary but a purposeful and intelligible act by a benevolent God. This profound theological conviction sets Christianity apart from the religions of the ancient world which were imbued with mythological cosmologies. These myths often depict the universe as the product of conflicts among capricious deities.

The Christian doctrine of creation is also distinguished from animistic or pantheistic traditions which still inspire some cultures and religions today. Pantheism discourages experimentation because it regards nature as divine and thus sacred. In contradistinction to the view that the world is indistinguishable from God or that it is inhabited by spirits, Christianity affirmed that God is distinct from creation. This ontological difference between Creator and creation has profound implications. It de-divinises nature and regards the universe as a natural phenomenon which can be studied without fear of causing offense to divine entities. As Dutch historian of science Reijer Hooykass explains, by demythologising nature Christianity has created the conditions necessary for the rise of science.

There is another way in which the firm belief that the world is created by God supports scientific inquiry. Because the universe is the handiwork of the rational God, it must be an ordered system with its own discoverable rationality. This idea is gleaned from Scripture passages such as Jeremiah 33:25, which say that God 'established the laws of heaven and earth …' Theologians and scientists alike have interpreted such passages to suggest that the world imbued by such laws is open to rational and empirical investigation. Additionally, theologians such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and the Reformers believed that the Creator is not only rational, but also truthful. This suggests that his handiwork is governed by laws that reveal its true nature. Hence, Johannes Kepler, the German mathematician and natural philosopher and devout Lutheran, believed that God has put in place mathematical harmonies in the cosmos which can be studied. Kepler famously described his work as 'thinking God's thoughts after him.'

The Christian doctrine of creation is not the only theological insight that supports the scientific enterprise. Christian theological anthropology also

plays a crucial role in the development of science in the West. The Bible teaches that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). While the *imago Dei* has been subjected to many different interpretations in the history of Christian thought, most theologians agree that it means that human beings are rational creatures. Put differently, as bearers of the divine image, human beings are endowed with the capacity to explore and discover the workings of God's creation. In addition, human beings are also given the responsibility to steward the natural world, to tend the garden of creation in the way that reflects the Creator. In Genesis 1:28, we read:

> God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'

Theologians have understood this mandate as God's call for human beings not just to investigate the world but shape it as created co-creators. One of the ways in which human beings do this is through scientific inquiry and application.

On the basis of these profound theological truths, the Church has always lent support to the scientific enterprise. We must be aware of the myths that secular historians of science have perpetuated for so long that they are accepted as facts. One such myth is wrapped up in the phrase the 'Scientific Revolution'. The general narrative that it was Copernicus who was responsible for this explosion of modern science into the world has been told for a long time by some prominent historians. However, the statement that Copernicus started this revolution which would change the world is a modern myth. Historians have now shown that the Scientific Revolution did not begin with Copernicus but with the quiet work of scholars in the medieval universities.

As Rodney Stark has plainly put it: 'it was in the universities that Scholastics began the rise of science.' In addition, Copernicus did not arrive at the theory of the heliocentric universe unaided. The theory was already formulated and discussed by scholars in the medieval universities. Copernicus' contribution was to present it as a fact and design a solar-system with the sun at the centre to explain it. As the distinguished Harvard historian of science I. Bernard Cohen puts it: 'In short, the idea that a Copernican revolution in science occurred goes counter to the evidence … and is an invention of later historians.' Be that as it may, it is important to note that Nicholas Copernicus was not an independent scholar. He was a canon at the Cathedral in Frauenburg, northern Poland, whose work in mathematics and astronomy was supported by the Church.

There were many other scientists and scholars who were clerics and whose work received ecclesiastical support. They include Roger Bacon ([1220-1292] Franciscan Friar), Albertus Magnus ([1200-1280] Dominican Friar and later Bishop of Regensburg), and Nicholas of Oresme ([1320-1382] Bishop of Lisieux).

Much more can be said on this topic. But I think it is quite clear that far from being an impediment to science and the scientific enterprise, the Church was a crucial supporter and cultivator of it. Modern science, far from arising in spite of Christianity, was born within a culture shaped by Christian metaphysics and theology – one that believed the universe to be the rational creation of a truthful God and humanity as called to discover its order.

VALUES

We turn now to the cherished values that have shaped the modern world and that continue to do so, such as dignity, freedom. and equality. These values are foundational to modern democracies as well as modern concepts of human rights and the rule of law. It is quite common to hear it argued that it was the Enlightenment that introduced these important values to the modern world. For example, Enlightenment philosophers and thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and John Locke have been credited with the development of concepts of equality and freedom. While the Enlightenment certainly had a role to play in the development and institutionalisation of these values, it did not create them *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). Many scholars have shown that the roots of these values run much deeper and that their substance and inspiration can be traced long before the Enlightenment – to Christianity.

Dignity

Let's begin with the first of these prized values of modernity, namely, human dignity. The idea of human dignity is so foundational and universal that it is affirmed in modern ethics, law and politics, and underpins human rights discourse and democratic values. However, despite its prominence, the concept of dignity in modernity is complex and multifaceted and has been defined in many ways.

Nevertheless, the dominant narrative is that the concept of human dignity and its emphasis in our times arose from the influence of the Enlightenment. More specifically, according to this view, the modern concept of dignity is indebted to the work of Immanuel Kant, especially his 1785 work, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals.* This view is advanced by scholars such as Michael

Rosen in his influential book, *Dignity: Its History and Meaning* (2012). In addition, scholars such as Jürgen Habermas and Jeremy Waldron have also argued that Kant's concept of dignity has shaped modern human rights discourse.

It is important to note, however, that the concept of human dignity has a much longer history, dating back to ancient Greek and Roman thought. In Greek philosophy, dignity is associated primarily with those who have the ability to live rationally and virtuously, and was therefore not considered as intrinsic to every human being. In *Republic*, Plato taught that the dignity of the individual soul has to do with its capacity to govern the body through reason in such a way that reflects the order of harmony and justice. Aristotle argued in *Nicomachean Ethics* that dignity is the *telos* (purpose) of every human being as they live their lives rationally and in accordance with virtue. However, for Aristotle dignity is not equally distributed because not every human being is capable of achieving virtue and reason in the same measure. In Roman thought, dignity is often associated with the political and the social. Even Cicero, who arguably was one of the first to propose the universality of dignity in human beings in *On the Republic*, placed a strong emphasis on social hierarchy.

The Judeo-Christian tradition introduced a radical redefinition and transformation of the concept of dignity. It teaches that every human being – regardless of abilities or social status – possesses inviolable dignity because it is a gift from God. This implies that every human being is endowed with intrinsic worth by their Creator – not because of natural abilities or merit, but purely due to divine grace and calling. The Christian concept of human dignity is based on at least two important doctrines of the Church: the doctrines of man and Christ. Let's examine each in turn, albeit very briefly.

The Christian concept of human dignity is grounded in the revelation that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, their Creator (Genesis 1:26-27). Throughout the history of Christian thought, the concept of the image of God has been variously interpreted by theologians. Some theologians maintain that the image has to do with some substantial aspect in humans such as rationality, while others interpret it in relational terms. Still others argue that the image of God in man relates to the mandate that God gave to them to serve as stewards of the created order. Regardless of the interpretation one wishes to favour, all theologians agree that the image distinguishes humans from the rest of God's creatures, giving them a unique dignity.

Theologians also emphasise that the concept of the image applies universally to all human beings regardless of sex, ethnicity and social status.

Furthermore, the image characterises the essence of what it means to be human. This means that this unique privilege cannot be taken away by any contingent circumstances such as behaviour, level of consciousness, health, social status, etc. Even the Fall and human sin cannot fully deface or remove the image of God. This idea that human beings possess inviolable dignity because they are bearers of the divine image is consistently taught in the Church. It is the theological basis for the Christian understanding of ethics, law and social relations.

The second foundation for the Christian understanding of human dignity is Christology or the doctrine of Christ. Following the Bible, the Church teaches that the eternal Word of God took upon himself human flesh – became incarnate – 'for us and for our salvation' (John 1:14). That the eternal Son of God, through whom all things were made, would take on human nature demonstrates and validates the worth and nobility of humanity. Through his life, passion, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, redeemed fallen humanity – thus demonstrating again how much God values his creatures who bear his image.

The Incarnation also affirms the dignity of the poor, the weak, and the marginalised. Jesus was not born into wealth or privilege but in very humble circumstances – he was laid in a manger, was raised in an obscure village, and crucified as a criminal. Through his ministry, Jesus reached out to the poor, tax collectors, prostitutes and outcasts, showing that those whom society has marginalised and ostracised also possess dignity. This idea is powerfully expressed by the late pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Spe Salvi* (2007):

> Man is worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to suffer with man in an utterly real way – in flesh and blood – as is revealed to us in the account of Jesus' Passion. Thus, in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering with us …

This concept of the inviolable dignity of the human being has inspired and motivated the ministry of the Church since its inception. It is seen especially in the Church's preferential option for the poor, which is a central principle in Christian social ethics. As we have seen in our discussion of Christianity's influence on social institutions, the Church has reached out and ministered to the poor, weak and vulnerable since its inception. The Church's ministry to the marginalised is not only because of obedience to Christ's command but also due to the profound understanding of the dignity of human beings created in the divine image.

Early Christian theologians and bishops such as Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa (335-395) have taught that human dignity is the basis for ethical responsibility and mutual respect for one another. The Christian concept of human dignity has also served as the moral foundation for the Church's fight against slavery. To be sure, the Church has in some ways been complicit in slavery throughout its history. But contrary to popular accounts which maintain that Christians have been silent about the practice until the abolitionist movements in the 18th and 19th centuries, many Christians in the early Church have spoken against it.

Paul's declaration that 'there is neither slave nor free … for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28) is a radical statement in its time. It serves as the foundational text for later Christian critiques of slavery. In *his Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes*, the great Cappadocian Father and bishop, Gregory of Nyssa denounced slavery in these famous words:

> If man is in the likeness of God, who can be his master? Who is the seller, and who the buyer? … You condemn man to slavery, whose nature is free and autonomous!

Melania the Younger (383-439), Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Isidore of Seville (560-636), Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) in similar vein, have condemned the practice.

The Enlightenment did not introduce the concept of universal human dignity to human civilisation, but inherited it from Christianity. However, it secularised the concept of dignity by discarding its theological basis and grounding it instead in human rationality and autonomy. Dignity is no longer grounded in the *imago Dei* but on human self-determination. 'Autonomy,' Immanuel Kant famously writes in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 'is thus the ground of the dignity of the human and of every rational creature.'

Time does not allow us to examine the full consequences of detaching dignity from its theological and metaphysical foundations. One obvious outcome when dignity is stripped from its Christian roots is that it becomes a concept that is devoid of sufficient ontological grounding. This has in turn resulted in what scholars such as Ruth Macklin have called 'dignity inflation' or 'dignity fragmentation'. This is a situation where the concept is used prolifically in ethics and political rhetoric but whose meaning remains ambiguous, making it a hollow or useless concept.

Be that as it may, the point that I am making is simply this. While the Enlightenment helped popularise the language of dignity in law and politics, the substance of the concept – especially its universal, intrinsic, and inviolable

character – has deep roots in the Christian tradition. Far from being a modern invention, human dignity is a theological truth that is revealed in Scripture.

Liberty

Another value which the modern world highly prizes greatly is liberty or personal freedom. Many writers have argued that personal freedom is extremely important because it serves as the foundation for other freedoms such as political, economic, and religious freedom.

It is customary to attribute the championing of individual and personal freedom to the Enlightenment and the great thinkers associated with it. The philosophers of the Enlightenment have indeed devoted much effort to developing the concept of freedom. Great thinkers such as John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire and Immanuel Kant have proposed and developed influential theories on liberty based on the supposition of the inherent autonomy and rationality of the individual. Their ideas have contributed to the rise of constitutional government and the development of human rights discourse.

However, it must be pointed out that while the Enlightenment has contributed to the development of the idea of freedom in the modern world, the idea itself did not originate from it. Although some authors have tried to portray the 18th century intellectual and cultural movement as the crucible from which the modern idea of liberty emerged, this narrative must be challenged.

To argue that the Enlightenment is the sole or even primary source of the idea of liberty is to suggest that prior to it this idea was either underdeveloped or misconstrued. This assumption, however, is increasingly being challenged by scholars. Historians have shown that there existed a very robust and sophisticated understanding of personal liberty that did not only predate the Enlightenment but also informed the theories of its philosophers.

Many scholars now hold that the modern idea of personal liberty can be traced to the contributions of the Judeo-Christian tradition and not to 18th century Enlightenment rationalism.

However, there are those who would object to this proposal. These scholars may agree that the claim that it was the Enlightenment that resulted in the development of the concept of liberty is overstated and perhaps even quite wrong. But they also question the thesis that the modern idea of liberty has its origins in the Judeo-Christian tradition. They might ask: does not this idea have its roots in the Greco-Roman world, especially as it is exemplified in its laws?

The answer to this question will perhaps surprise many. In the Roman world, freedom is not universal but defined in relation to one's political rights, legal standing and honour. The boundaries of freedom were drawn along lines of citizenship, gender and class. In ancient Rome, only males born to Roman citizens – freeborn citizens (*Cives Romani*) – had full political and legal rights under Roman law. They could vote, marry legally and serve in the military. Women, on the other hand, were under the authority of a father or husband, even though they were legally free. They could own property but had no political rights. Slaves have no freedom at all and are considered the property of their owners.

This limited and hierarchical understanding of freedom contrasts sharply with the later Christian perspective. This has led the 19th century historian, Charles Schmidt, to write quite categorically in *The Social Results of Early Christianity* that 'True liberty, individual right, and respect for human personality found no place in Greece or Rome.'

In *The Evolution of the West*, Nick Spencer concurs, writing that 'the ancient world was anything but secular, tolerant, free, or equal.' It was Christianity that introduced the radical idea of personal liberty to the ancient world. Comparing the Christian emphasis on the importance of the individual person and the attitude of the ancient world, Alvin Schmidt writes: 'The high value that Christianity, from its inception, placed on the individual person was in stark contrast to the Greco-Roman culture in which the individual was always subordinate to the state.'

What about religious freedom?

The notion of religious freedom – the right of individuals to choose, practise or reject religion without coercion – has become foundational in modern democracies. It has often been claimed that it was the Enlightenment that first introduced this critical idea to Western civilisation.

To be sure, the Enlightenment did play an important role in shaping the notion of religious freedom in the modern sense. In 1689, John Locke published his seminal work *Letter Concerning Tolerance* which emphatically argued that the state has no authority over the consciences of individuals.

The influential Enlightenment philosopher, Voltaire, championed tolerance in his *Treatise on Tolerance* published in 1763. This famous book, written in response to the judicial murder of the Protestant Jean Callas, argued that religious fanaticism and persecution must be brought to an end. And Immanuel Kant wrote persuasively on the importance of the autonomy of the

individual. In his celebrated *What is Enlightenment?* (1784), Kant famously argued that religious freedom has to do with the courage to think freely.

However, historian Robert Louis Wilken in his *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom* (2019) points out that religious freedom did not originate in the eighteenth century, but in the third. The idea of religious freedom did not come from the pen of Locke but that of Tertullian, a third century Latin Church Father. In his short apologetic letter to Scapula Tertullus, the Roman proconsul of Africa, Tertullian said that:

> it is the fundamental right, a privilege of nature, that every man should worship according to his own convictions … to which freewill and not force should lead us.

In the fourth century, the Christian apologist and theologian Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius (250-325) also defended the freedom of religious belief in his writings. In *The Divine Institutes* (*Divinae Institutiones*) – one of the earliest systematic expositions of the Christian Faith in Latin, he writes:

> It is religion alone in which freedom has placed its dwelling. For it is a matter which is voluntary above all others, nor can necessity be imposed upon any, so as to worship that which he does not wish to worship.

It must be acknowledged that the Church has not always been consistent in its practice of religious freedom. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the late fourth century under Theodosius I, the adherents of pagan religions often faced persecution by Christians and legal suppression. Even great theologians such as Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who initially opposed coercion, later argued that compulsion could be regarded as a form of loving correction.

Although the 16th century Reformation greatly prized the conscience of the individual, the early Protestants did not extend liberty to those who did not belong to their denomination. The Peace of Augsburg of 1555, for example, empowered Lutheran and Catholic rulers to enforce religious uniformity in their territories based on the principle, 'whose realm, his religion' (*cuius regio, eius religio*).

However, these examples do not detract from the fact that Christianity was the major formative influence for the concept of freedom. It provided an ontological foundation for human liberty which is based on the biblical truth that all human beings are created in the divine image.

Equality

The third value that I would like to briefly discuss is that of equality. Few would dispute the assertion that equality is one of the most significant values in modern society. The concept of equality underpins social, political, and legal systems in democracies across the globe.

Again, many commentators have argued that the modern conception of equality is largely shaped by the Enlightenment, especially through the works of thinkers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. To be sure, the Enlightenment played an important role in developing the concept of equality. This is evident in the way its chief thinkers challenged the traditional hierarchies they had inherited such as the aristocracy and inherited privileges. It is also seen in the way in which the Enlightenment reinforced the idea of the universality of equality and transformed it into a political principle with revolutionary social ramifications.

However, the idea of human equality did not suddenly emerge in a vacuum in 18th-century Europe. Two millennia before the Enlightenment appeared on the horizon, the idea of equality had already existed. Some writers have traced the idea to the ancient Greco-Roman world. In ancient Athens, for example, concepts such as 'equality under the law' (*isonomia*) and 'equality of speech' (*isegoria*) were promoted as democratic ideals as early as the 5th century BC.

However, upon closer inspection, the idea of equality in Greco-Roman society and culture presents itself as something of a paradox. On the one hand, philosophical and political developments had laid the groundwork for the concept of equality – especially civic equality. As the philosopher Martha Nussbaum has observed in *The Therapy of Desire*, the Stoics believed that all human beings possess equal capacities for virtue because they possess the *logos*, or divine reason.

But on the other hand, ancient Greek and Roman societies were deeply hierarchical. They were structured around distinctions of class, gender, citizenship, and slavery – as we have seen in our discussion on dignity. Even the great Greek philosophers did not agree on whether equality is truly universal. For example, in his influential work *Politics*, Aristotle argues that some people are 'natural slaves' because they are incapable of exercising reason independently.

In any case, the notion of universal equality was largely alien in Greco-Roman society. As the writer Tom Holland puts it sharply in *Dominion*:

> That every human being possessed an equal dignity was not remotely self-evident a truth. A Roman would have laughed at it.

The celebrated British political philosopher and historian, Sir Larry Alan Siedentop, has argued persuasively in his book *Inventing the Individual* that it was Christian theology that introduced the idea of moral equality to the West. Scholars such as Rodney Stark, Tom Holland, and Alvin Schmidt concur with this view. 'Once again,' Schmidt writes, 'as with the many other influences that Christianity has contributed to Western civic freedoms, the concept of equality has definite Christian roots.' As it is with dignity and freedom, the Christian concept of universal human equality is grounded in the truth that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. As Tom Holland has arrestingly put it:

> The divine was to be found as much in the pauper, the convict or the prostitute as it was in the gentleman with his private income and book-lined study.

In the Christian tradition, treating all human beings as equals is the basic requirement of justice. As Lactantius clearly explains in his *Divine Institutes*,

> The second constituent of justice is equality. I mean this … in the sense of treating others as one's equals … For God who gives being and life to men wished us all to be equal.

The evidence of the Church's belief in the universal equality of all human beings is found in its concrete ministry to the poor and vulnerable. I have already cited some examples of how the early Christians reached out to the poor and sick because of their belief that these too are bearers of the divine image.

But they also reached out to them because they had learned to see Christ in them (Matthew 25:40). In a moving passage in his treatise *On the Love for the Poor*, the Cappadocian theologian Gregory of Nazianzus explains it like this:

> Reflect on who they are, and you will understand their dignity; they have taken upon them the person of our Saviour. For he, the compassionate, has given them his own person.

This is also evident in the way in which Christians treated their slaves. In Galatians 3:28, the apostle Paul emphasized the fundamental equality and unity that Christians share in Christ that transcends all social and societal barriers and prejudices.

> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

This led to the practice of the freeing of slaves in the early Christian community. In his book *Pagan and Christians*, the historian and English classicist Robin Lane Fox states that the early Christians 'were most numerous in the setting of urban households where freeing [of slaves] was most frequent.' He adds that 'the freeing of slaves was performed in church in the presence of the bishop.'

The 19th century Irish historian William Edward Hartpole Lecky provides us with deeper insight into this practice in his book, *History of European Morals*.

> St. Melena was said to have emancipated 8,000 slaves; St. Ovidius, a rich martyr of Gaul, 5,000; Chromatius, a Roman prefect under Diocletian, 1,400; Hermes, a prefect under Trajan, 1,200. [And] many of the Christian clergy at Hippo under the rule of St Augustine, as well as great numbers of private individuals freed their slaves as an act of piety.

Although the practice of the manumission of slaves can also be found among pagans, it must be reckoned separately from the Christian practice. This is because the Christian practice is based on the understanding of the equal dignity and status of the slaves. This is seen in a moving passage from Paul's letter to Philemon regarding Onesimus, Philemon's slave who had run away. In verse 16, we read these remarkable words from the apostle's pen:

> He is no longer a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

This stands in stark contrast with what Aristotle wrote in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

> … a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave … Therefore, there can be no friendship with a slave as slave.

To summarise, while the Enlightenment has indeed reframed the idea of equality in the principle of autonomy, political legitimacy, constitutions, and concepts of human rights, it is not its originator. The roots of equality lie primarily in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Universal equality is grounded in the theological truth that human beings are made in the image of God, which is unique to Christianity.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by restating the purpose of this lecture: to recover and highlight the profound influence that Christianity has had on modern culture. In recent centuries, this influence has often been obscured by dominant narratives that attribute our cherished values – human dignity, liberty, and equality – solely to the European Enlightenment of the 18th century. While the Enlightenment undeniably played a pivotal role in articulating and developing these ideals, their roots run deeper. They were planted long before the Age of Reason, in the fertile soil of Christian theology and practice, and grew through the unfolding of Christian history in Western civilisation.

We have considered two broad areas where this influence is most evident. The first area is the realm of social institutions, which, as we saw, play such a significant role in ensuring the stability and flourishing of society. We discussed institutions such as education, healthcare, the legal system, and the scientific enterprise. Time does not permit us to discuss Christianity's influence on politics, economics, and the arts. However, I hope that what I am able to sketch in this lecture has shown convincingly the enormous, if sometimes forgotten, role that Christianity has played.

The second area that we discussed is the values that modern society holds dear: dignity, liberty, and equality. Again, we saw that while the Enlightenment has indeed developed our understanding of them in significant ways, it cannot claim credit for introducing them. The origins of these values as we broadly understand them today were profoundly shaped by Christianity, which grounded them in its unique theological anthropology – the belief that every human being bears the image of God. To the list of values that I have discussed, we can add tolerance, rationality, and progress – all of which are highly prized by modernity, and all of which owe their inspiration to Christianity.

As the title and subtitle of my lecture suggest, the purpose of the lecture is to address the cultural amnesia that moderns sometimes suffer with regard to the origins of their ideals. There is a tendency to think that values such as dignity, liberty, and equality are self-evident truths detached from any particular tradition. Or there is a tendency to attribute their origins to reason, and to the ingenuity of the Enlightenment. History, however, tells a different story. These ideals and values were introduced, shaped, nurtured, and safeguarded by the Christian imagination and moral vision.

I think to forget this is not simply to misread the past. It is to risk losing our bearings for the present. So, the task before us is not simply to acknowledge

Christianity's historical contributions – although this is an important first step. It is to recover the rich moral and spiritual sources that gave rise to the institutions, morals, and ideals that we cherish. Only by doing so can we guard not only against forgetting where we came from, but also against losing sight of the kind of future we are building.

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