



# Christian Book Summaries



Volume 3 . Issue 34  
August 2007

## How Christianity Changed the World

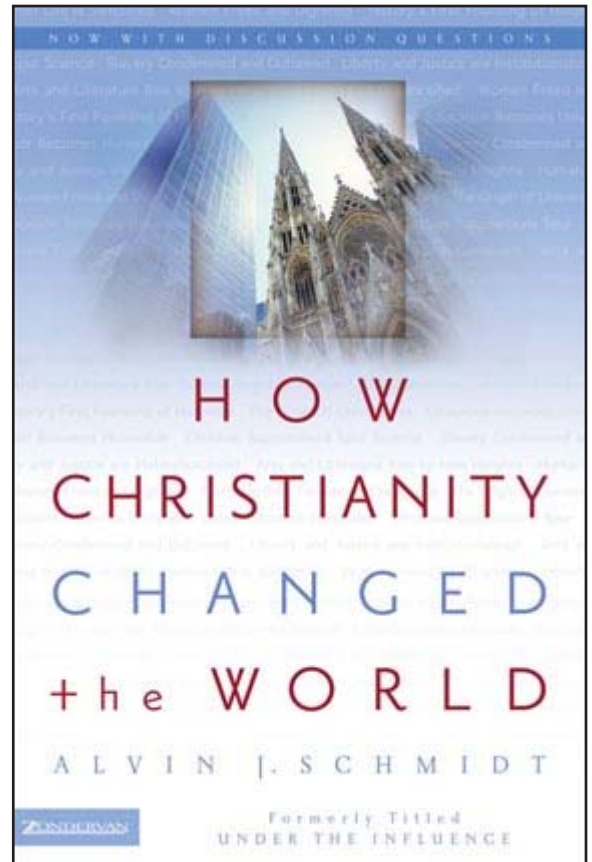
### A Quick Focus

#### The Book's Purpose

- Surveys and illustrates 2,000 years of influence that Christianity has had on the world
- Reveals how not only individuals, but all of civilization has been transformed by Christ
- Warns that the current culture of secularism and pluralism has clouded the truth of Christ's influence on Western civilization

#### The Book's Message

Jesus Christ~His birth, life, death, and resurrection~has had a profound influence on human life. Through His example, Western civilization has attained a higher level from which human beings, most unknowingly, benefit today.



by Alvin J. Schmidt  
Zondervan  
ISBN: 0-310-26449-9

#### COUNCIL OF REFERENCE

- Dr. Richard Averbeck
- Rev. D. Stuart Briscoe
- Dr. Paul Cedar
- Mr. Dave Coleman
- Dr. & Mrs. Larry Crabb
- Mr. Roger Cross
- Rev. Samuel Farina
- Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel
- Rev. & Mrs. Lud Golz
- Dr. Howard G. Hendricks
- Mr. Olan Hendrix
- Dr. David Jeremiah
- Rev. Knute Larson
- Dr. John C. Maxwell
- Dr. Bruce McNicol
- Mr. Dean Merrill
- Mrs. Elisa Morgan
- Dr. Ray Ortlund
- Dr. Luis Palau
- Dr. Gilbert A. Peterson
- Rev. Wes Roberts
- Rev. & Mrs. Jamie Rassmussen
- Mr. Jim Warren
- Dr. Rick Warren

#### Publishers

Catherine & David Martin

#### Editors

Cheryl & Michael Chiapperino

### Eight Main Points

Christ profoundly influenced:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ● Transformation of people . . . . . 2                        | ● Liberty and justice, labor and economic freedom . . . . . 7 |
| ● Value of human life . . . . . 3                             | ● Science . . . . . 7   |
| ● Charity, compassion, hospitals, and health care . . . . . 5 | ● Art, architecture, literature, music . . . . 8              |
| ● Education . . . . . 6                                       | ● Holidays, words, symbols, expressions 8                     |

# TRANSFORMATION of PEOPLE

“On the basis of the historical evidence, I am fully persuaded that had Jesus Christ never walked the dusty paths of ancient Palestine, suffered, died, and risen from the dead, and never assembled around him a small group of disciples who spread out into the pagan world, the West would not have attained its high level of civilization, giving it the many human benefits it enjoys today.”

## People Transformed

They were ordinary Jewish citizens—several fishermen, a despised tax collector, and other low-ranking occupations. Among them existed a variety of self-serving personality characteristics—overconfident, attention-seeking, skeptical, and miserly. These same individuals, because of Jesus Christ, were transformed into devoted followers who produced social, political, economic, and cultural changes that affect human life even to this day. Yet, they chose to sleep rather than comfort Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane; Peter—the overconfident one—denied knowing Him and, all but John, hid in fear as Jesus was crucified. When Christ died, it appeared to the disciples that all they had witnessed and experienced was over as they feared for their lives. They had spent three years seeing Him, hearing Him—living in His actual physical presence—and, in spite of that, they failed to remember His explicit words: “the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Luke 9:22).

On the third day, there was an empty tomb, an appearance to Mary, and an appearance to ten of the disciples in a tightly closed room. But, Thomas, who was not one of those ten, refused to believe. He wanted absolute evidence—to touch Christ’s wounded hands and side. Eight days later, with Thomas present, Jesus appeared again and asked Thomas to touch his hands and side. As he touched Jesus, Thomas cried, ‘My Lord and my God!’ (John 20:28).

“His confession, the most significant one in the entire Bible, declared that this risen Jesus was not just a man but also God.”

Christ appeared at least 20 additional times. He reassured His followers that he was not just a spirit—He had flesh and bones and He ate with them. Christ’s physically resurrected body transformed the disciples from fear to assurance, from doubt to certainty. They understood His words, spoken before the crucifixion, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25–26), and, “everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40). It became clear to them that someday, as believers in Christ and His resurrection, they, too, would be raised from the dead and live with Him forever.

They understood. They were transformed and, by this transformation, they were motivated to take this message to the world. They were no longer afraid. Over the years that followed, they were threatened by Roman authorities. In response, Peter and John fearlessly asserted, “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). They had lived this historical fact and were willing to die to share it. All but the Apostle John died a bloody death for their testimony.

“Men do not die for stories they contrive.”

## TRANSFORMATION OF PEOPLE

continued from page 2

Christ's power to transform individuals did not end with His disciples. Through His presence and/or that of His disciples, many others were transformed, and in turn, left their marks on history. Strengthened by the examples of Stephen, James, and Saul (Paul), hundreds and then thousands of Christians suffered severe persecution that often led to execution during the first three hundred years after Jesus' death. At the hands of Roman Emperors like Nero (54–68 A.D.), Domitian (81–96 A.D.), Antonius Pius (138–61 A.D.), Marcus Aurelius (161–80 A.D.), Valerian (253–60 A.D.), and others, many Christians were persecuted, tortured, and killed. Robin Lane Fox has noted that during this time, Christians were “not known to have attacked their pagan enemies; they shed no innocent blood, except their own.”

The early Christians did not set out to change the world. The world was affected as a by-product of believers' transformed lives. They rejected the pagan gods and refused the immoral lifestyle of the Greco-Romans. They knew that Jesus made no promises of an easy and pain-free life. On the contrary, he had predicted that they would be hated and despised for their belief in Him.

Believers continue to be transformed in the post-New Testament era; for example, John Hus, Martin Luther, Johann Sebastian Bach, William Wilberforce, David Livingstone, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and C. S. Lewis. These individuals made the world a more humane and civilized place because they, like many Christians before them, lived their lives according to the words of Jesus Christ: “Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

CBS

# VALUE of HUMAN LIFE

## Human Life Sanctified

The early Christians were shocked by the extremely low value the Romans and Greeks placed on human life. The Christians believed that man was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27)—the crowning glory of God's creation! Human life was to be protected and honored regardless of its form or quality. They actively opposed the depravity of the Greco-Roman society on such issues as infanticide, child abandonment, abortion, human sacrifices, and suicide.

Babies born deformed or frail were killed. Infant girls were especially targeted. This behavior was not unique to the Greco-Roman cultures—infanticide was also common in India, China, and Japan. It also took place in the Brazilian jungles, among the Eskimos, in parts of pagan Africa, and among various Native Americans of both North and South America.

The early Christians called infanticide murder based on God's commandment, “You shall not kill.” Their response was true to the words of Paul, written shortly before being executed by Nero, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2) If unwanted babies

were not directly killed, they were frequently abandoned. Christians not only condemned child abandonment, they took these children into their homes. Although severely persecuted, Christians never stopped promoting the sanctity of human life. It took half a century of pressure before Valentinian, a Christian emperor who was influenced by Bishop Basil of Caesarea in Cappadocia, outlawed infanticide and child abandonment in 374.

Abortion was also a common practice of the Greco-Roman culture. This practice was used to rid evidence of sexual indiscretion and to remain childless. Long before the birth of Christ, philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Celsus helped to validate the practice of abortion. Plato stressed that “**it was the prerogative of the city-state to have a woman submit to an abortion so that the state would not become too populous (Republic 5.461).**” Early Christians, as was true of the faithful Jews long before the birth of Christ, believed in the sanctity of human life, including life in the womb.

**“The early church's opposition to abortion, along with its condemnation of infanticide and child abandonment, was a major factor in institutionalizing the sanctity of human life in the Western world... The sanctity of life, with the exception of abortion, is still largely present today.”**

Human sacrifice, gladiatorial shows, and a general acceptance, if not glorification, of suicide were also common practices. Over time, these, too, were outlawed as a result of Christian opposition based on the sanctity of human life.

continued on page 4

## Sexual Morality

Early Christians stood against the immoral sexual activities of the Greeks and Romans. Motivated by Christ's words, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15), and God's commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," they absolutely rejected the immoral behavior. Consequently, they were despised and persecuted even more.

**"By opposing the Greco-Roman sexual decadence, whether it was adultery, fornication, homosexuality, child molestation, or bestiality, and by introducing God-pleasing sexual standards, Christianity greatly elevated the world's sexual morality. It was one of its many major contributions to civilization, a contribution that too many Christians today (who nominally comprise about 83 percent of the American population) no longer seem to appreciate, much less defend, as feverish efforts are underway to bring back the sexual debauchery of ancient paganism."**

## Women Receive Freedom and Dignity

As seen in present-day Islamic countries, women, in cultures without Christian influence, are still without freedom and dignity. The ancient Athenians of Greece treated women in much the same way. Women were not permitted to leave the house without a male escort. They were not allowed to eat or interact with their husbands' male guests. Discrimination against women began when they were children. Many female infants were killed at or shortly after birth. Those who survived were not permitted to attend school. Throughout their lives, women were not allowed to speak in public and were strongly encouraged to remain silent in the home. They were deemed inferior to men and often equated with evil. Roman women had slightly more freedom but had none of the rights and privileges of Roman men.

In contrast, the actions and teachings of Christ raised the status of women to a level that had never before existed.

**"By word and deed, he went against the ancient, taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that defined woman as socially, intellectually, and spiritually inferior. True to his own words, he once said, 'I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10). If any group of human beings was in need of a more abundant life, spiritually and socially, it was the women of his day."**

Jesus defied the cultural norms by accepting and honoring women, as seen in the examples of His response to the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-29), His defense of Mary in the Mary-Martha incident (Luke 10:38-42), His words to Martha (John 11:25-26), and His appearance to women after His resurrection (Matthew 28:10). The Apostolic Church went on to accept women in prominent leadership roles as seen in the examples of Apphia (Philemon 2), Nympha (Colossians 4:15), Priscilla (1 Corinthians 16:19), and Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2).

Unfortunately, after the Apostolic Church era, which ended about 150 A.D., some church leaders—those who had been deeply engrained in the pagan practices of the time—reverted to the practice of excluding women. This contradicted the teachings, actions, and spirit of Christ, His disciples, and the early Church. In spite of this setback, Christ's way prevailed. Eventually, women in western cultures enjoyed freedom and dignity including being seen as individuals rather than property, having control over their own property, receiving right of guardianship over their children, choosing who and when to marry, and refusing to be physically mutilated according to the custom of their culture.

Although Christ and the early Christians never preached revolution on behalf of women, His followers reflected His example in their relationships, assuring women dignity, freedom, and rights unknown to them previously.

## Slavery Opposed

The abolition of slavery and the rejection of segregation are rooted in the early teachings of Christianity. Christianity was not restrictive. It was freely offered to all individuals, classes, and nations. At the time of Christ, 75 percent of the population in ancient Athens and over half of the Roman population were slaves. Paul, in Galatians, told Philemon that he was to no longer keep Onesimus as a slave. He was to treat Onesimus as a brother. Paul told the Galatian Christians that they were "neither Jew

## VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE

continued from page 4

nor Greek, slave nor free...for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Opposing slavery was not popular during the Greco-Roman era; nor was it popular in England or America in the 1800s. Throughout history, it took incredible courage and conviction on the part of Christians to free the slaves.

**"Early in the fourth century Lactantius (the "Christian Cicero") in his Divine Institutes said that in God's eyes there were no slaves. St. Augustine (354-430) saw slavery as the product of sin and as contrary to God's divine plan (The City of God 19.15). St. Chrysostom, in the fourth century, preached that when Christ came he annulled slavery. He proclaimed that 'in Christ Jesus there is no slave.... Therefore it is not necessary to have a slave....Buy them, and after you have taught them some skill by which they can maintain themselves, set them free' (Homily 40 on 1 Corinthians 10)."**

In spite of these admonitions, which were based on the words of Christ, slavery continued—even by Christians—for over a thousand years. That Christians continued this sinful behavior indicates that they were either ignorant of or deaf to Paul's words, blindly following the prevailing culture, or choosing not to heed Christ's words regarding how to be in the world but not of it.

Through the incredible work, courage, and leadership of William Wilberforce, slavery was ended in English colonies.

**"[Wilberforce's] biographer, John Stoughton, says, 'He believed in Jesus Christ as the image of the invisible God; he believed that we are saved by grace; he believed in justification by faith; he believed in the work of the Holy Spirit; he believed in the world to come. These beliefs with their practical consequences and applications were as dear to him as life.'"**

On July 26, 1833, just a few days before his death, Wilberforce received word that Parliament passed the Abolition Act, freeing 700,000 slaves.

In America, slavery continued for an additional thirty years. Men and women of great courage, such as Elijah Lovejoy, who was shot for his convictions; Edward Beecher, who opened the doors of Illinois College to black students; Harriet Beecher Stowe, who published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; John Hersey, who published *Appeal to Christians on the Subject of Slavery*; Julia Ward Howe, who wrote "Battle Hymn of the Republic;" and many others worked, fought, and died to end it. Finally, in 1863, Abraham Lincoln ended slavery in America by issuing his Emancipation Proclamation.

**"Thus, the effort to remove slavery, whether it was Wilberforce in Britain or the abolitionists in America, was not a new phenomenon in Christianity. Nor were the efforts by Martin Luther King Jr. and the American civil rights laws of the 1960s to remove racial segregation new to the Christian ethic. They were merely efforts to restore Christian practices that were already in existence in Christianity's primal days."**

CBS

# CHARITY, COMPASSION, HOSPITALS and HEALTH CARE

## Charity

In the Greco-Roman era, offering care to the poor, ailing, or dying was not common. In the pagan culture, people gave at times, but something was expected in return. In the Christian culture, believers gave offerings for the economic or physical relief of the recipient, with nothing expected in return. Christian giving reflected John's words, "This is love: not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:10-11) and Paul's words, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4). The charity practiced by Christians was noticed by those around them.

## Compassion

Human compassion was rare within ancient cultures—it went against the teachings of their philosophers. Plato and others held that a poor

man should be left to die if he could no longer work. The Greco-Roman considered the hungry, sick, and dying not worthy of humane assistance.

Jesus demonstrated an entirely different approach. "He had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14). Following Christ's admonition, the early Christians sought to give compassion to the sick and dying with no thought of anything given in return. This

continued on page 6

## CHARITY, COMPASSION, HOSPITALS AND HEALTH CARE

continued from page 5

was done not only for the sick and dying as well as for the orphans and the aged as well.

Charity and compassion continue to this day both privately and collectively through organizations such as fraternal benefit societies, service clubs, YMCA, and YWCA. In most cases, those on welfare have no idea that the assistance they receive is given because of Christianity's influence.

**"In short, every time charity and compassion are seen in operation, the credit goes to Jesus Christ. It was he who inspired his early followers to give and to help the unfortunate, regardless of their race, religion, class, or nationality.... These early Christians set a model for their descendants to follow, a model that today's modern secular societies seek to imitate, but without Christian motivation."**

### Hospitals and Health Care

In Matthew 25:45, Jesus said, "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." Heeding His words, Christians not only opposed infanticide, abortion, and abandoning children, they cared for the sick. Their particular circumstance or who they were—Christian or pagan—made no difference. They followed Christ's example of healing the blind, lame, deaf, palsied, and lepers. In every healing, Christ was also concerned for the individual's spiritual well-being. This was in drastic contrast to the Greco-Roman world. **"Dionysius, a Christian bishop of the third century, described the existing behavior of the pagans toward their fellow sick human beings in an Alexandrian plague in about A.D. 250. 'The pagans,' he said, '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'"** (*Works of Dionysius, Epistle 12.5*).

Because of the severe persecution during early Christianity, for three centuries Christians could only care for the sick as they found them. It was not until A.D. 369 that the first hospital was built. Evidence indicates the hospital included rehabilitation units and workshops that allowed unskilled patients to learn a trade during recuperation. This shows an even higher level of humanitarian awareness, further exemplifying the spirit of Christ in His followers.

More Christian hospitals were built either as separate units or attached to monasteries and, by 750, had spread from Continental Europe to England. The average hospital today is no longer based on charity.

**"The precedent that the early Christian hospitals set not only alleviated human suffering but also extended the lives of multitudes of people, whether rich or poor. Moreover, these institutions reflected Christ's love for mankind. Today this innovative humanitarian contribution—the hospital—is unanimously appreciated throughout the world."**

Christianity also initiated the establishment of mental institutions, professional medical nursing, and the Red Cross. Fielding Garrison, a physician and medical historian, remarked, **"The chief glory of medieval medicine was undoubtedly in the organization of hospitals and sick nursing, which had its organization in the teachings of Christ."**

CBS

## EDUCATION

Jesus Christ, the greatest teacher the world has ever known, taught so that those He instructed would go on to teach others. He told His disciples, "Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28: 19–20). They took the admonition seriously as shown in the words of Luke, "they never stopped teaching... that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

Teaching continued after the death of the apostles. At first, instruction took place in teachers' homes. It was in 150 A.D. that Justin Martyr established catechetical schools in Ephesus and Rome. Over time, these schools included reading, writing, and other subjects, in addition to religion. There were struggles in the beginning since the teachers were also a product of the culture but, true to the teachings of Christ, these schools ultimately included both boys and girls regardless of class or ethnicity—unheard of in the culture of that era.

By the mid 1500s, Martin Luther and John Calvin had convinced civic authorities to implement tax-supported, universal, compulsory education. By the 1700's education was expanded to include the deaf; by the 1800s—the blind.

The Greco-Roman culture had their philosophers of higher education but they had no permanent buildings or libraries. The origin of universities was in the monastery. The first was the Benedictine order in the monastery at Monte Cassino, Italy, in 528. More monasteries were built in other locations. They all placed great value on literature—particularly those of antiquity. The Benedictines developed the first library system by collecting books and manuscripts.

Although the libraries and monasteries were not full universities, they were the inspiration by which, in the twelfth and thirteenth cen-

continued on page 7

## EDUCATION

continued from page 6

turies, the first true universities were built. Today most Americans do not realize that all colleges and universities established in the colonies before the Revolutionary War—with the exception of the University of Pennsylvania—had Christian origins. It is ironic that in the secular Western society of today, so few individuals realize the contributions Christianity has made to the education they treasure so highly. **CBS**

# LIBERTY AND JUSTICE, LABOR and ECONOMIC FREEDOM

## Liberty and Justice

The concept of Natural Law was deeply engrained in the Greco-Roman culture. This law held that human beings could perceive, based on a natural process of sound reasoning, what was morally right and wrong. It was seen as the absolute foundation of all human laws. Christians had a different perspective. They believed that “natural law” was part of God’s created order by which rational human beings are aware of right and wrong. God’s order is expressed clearly in the Ten Commandments.

Countries, such as the United States of America, where Christianity is engrained, demonstrate a much greater improvement in liberty and justice than countries where non-Christian religions dominate. **“Alexis de Tocqueville recognized the connection when he said, ‘There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America.’”**

## Labor and Economic Freedom

The Greco-Roman culture did not value physical work. Manual labor was to be performed by slaves and the lower classes. It was looked upon as demeaning for anyone else to perform these tasks.

On this subject, the beliefs of the Christians and the current culture clashed. Christians assigned dignity and honor to work. Their role model, Jesus, worked as a carpenter. Paul was a tent maker—a trade skill that supplemented his income while traveling. This Christian attitude did not sit well with the Romans, who despised manual labor, and resulted in even harsher persecution.

In addition, Christians reinforced that a laborer should be paid, based on the words of Jesus, “the worker deserves his wages” (Luke 10:7). Paul, in his words to the Thessalonians, made it clear that working was the right thing to do, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Prior to the Christians dignifying work and labor, there had been no middle class in the Greco-Roman culture. People were either rich or poor and the poor were generally slaves. However, the Christians prevailed and the middle class—an integral part of all Western societies—arose, greatly reducing the former widespread poverty.

This new work ethic and the resulting prosperity (as compared to the extreme poverty levels of earlier times), made possible individual freedoms not previously known—economically, politically, and socially. The concept of private property rights was intrinsic to these newly found freedoms. The commandment, “You shall not steal” reinforces the concept of private property rights.

Economic freedom was also demonstrated in the teachings of Christ. While some of His followers sold all they had and shared with those in need, **“there is not a single reference in either the Old or New Testament in which God denies economic freedom to people, as do fascism, socialism, and communism. The parables of Jesus that touch on economic issues are always couched in the context of freedom”** such as in Matthew 25:15–30 where the individuals could choose to invest or not invest the talents they were given, totally free of coercion.

The dignity of labor and the spirit of individual and economic freedom, so engrained in Western culture, are products of Christian ethics. **CBS**

## SCIENCE

Without the Christian belief in one God, there would be no science. God is a rational being and man was created in His image; therefore, man must also follow rational processes to study His creation. On this presupposition, Christian philosophers developed the empirical, inductive method. Prior to the time of Christ, knowledge was to be acquired through deductive means. Only the mind was to be used; manual activity was unacceptable, relegated only to slaves and the lower class.

Christians, the pioneers of science, branched out into many areas of discovery. Some areas of science and the Christian individuals involved include: physiology and biology through the work of Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564), and Gregor Johann Mendel (1822–1884); astronomy through the work of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), and Galileo (1564–1642); physics through the work of Isaac Newton (1642–1727),

continued on page 8

## SCIENCE

continued from page 7

Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), Andre' Ampere (1775–1836), and Michael Faraday (1791–1867); chemistry through the work of Robert Boyle (1627–1691), John Dalton (1766–1844), and George Washington Carver (1864–1943); and medicine through the work of Paracelsus (1493–1541), Ambroise Pare (1509–1590), and Louis Pasteur (1822–1895). In addition to the individuals mentioned above, many other Christian scientists have greatly impacted scientific process and discovery and, therefore, the quality of human life.

CBS

## ART, ARCHITECTURE, LITERATURE

## Art

The impact of Christianity on the art, architecture, literature, and music throughout history is unquestionable. Contrary to the “nature” focus of the Greco-Roman era, Christian art—whether from the early years, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, or the Reformation era—focused on human life. The scenes illustrated an awareness that God, either by the Spirit or through His Son, Jesus Christ, was always with them. As exemplified in Masaccio's *The Expulsion from the Garden*, Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, Tintoretto's *Christ with Mary and Martha*, Durer's *Knight, Death, and the Devil*, Raphael's *Christ Bearing the Cross*, and Rembrandt's *Christ Healing the Sick*, Christianity has made a great contribution to the world of art.

## Architecture

Preoccupied by the persecutions they suffered, Christians did little architecturally in their first three centuries. Since then, Christians have made incredible architectural contributions, from the Church of the Nativity (Bethlehem) built in the Basilica era (320–1000) to the U.S. Air Force Academy Chapel (Colorado Springs) built in the Contemporary era (1900–2000). Of these, the greatest Christian addition to world architecture is thought to be the European cathedrals built in the Gothic era (1150–1600). The tall pointed arches, ribbed vaults, and flying buttresses inspired Salvadori to say that the “**unfathomable height expressed the aspiration of humanity toward a God to be loved...**”

## Literature

Christianity has produced notable contributions to literature and has been its ardent supporter. Even some works of the pagan Greco-Roman writers were translated, not to promote paganism, but to make available insight into this alternative view of the drama of human life. Martin Luther supported studying these items even though he referred to them as heathen books. As mentioned earlier, it was the monastery that developed the library system in order to log their extensive collection of books and manuscripts.

The early development of Christian literature (A.D. 100–426) took the forms of exhortations (exhorting the readers to cling to Jesus Christ), polemics (refuting and disputing religions with controversial principles and practices), and apologetics (defending the Christian faith and teachings). Since then, many hallmarks of literature have been produced beginning with the *Ecclesiastical History* by Eusebius (ca. 280–339). Later works include *The Screwtape Letters* and *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis. In between, exceptional works such as *Utopia* by Thomas Moore, *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, and

## Music

It is widely accepted that the Greco-Roman era did not play a role in musical progress; however, Christians, starting with the singing of biblical psalms, praised and honored God through music and song. With a monophonic beginning and a polyphonic change in the tenth century, Christian music developed into various forms including the motet, madrigal, anthem, oratorio, symphony, sonata, cantata, and concerto. Composers, such as Ambrose, Bach, Handel, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Stravinsky, and Vaughn Williams, created their masterpieces inspired by Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Concerning modern music, in many instances it appeals to sensual pleasure and rebellion against God, biblical values, and society. In place of the beauty and dignity of sacred music is the defiant tone and beat of rock music. Soft rock is gentle rather than deafening, sexual, rebellious, or political and can be used to God's glory. Christian rock, sometimes referred to as “contemporary Christian music” is often weak in the area of Christian theology. In Romans 12:2, Paul instructs, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Are we mindful of this instruction regarding today's Christian music?

CBS

HOLIDAYS, WORDS,  
SYMBOLS, EXPRESSIONS

## Holidays

The origin of the word *holiday* is in the religious expression *holy days*. Christmas Day, Easter, Good Friday, and Pentecost were celebrated as holy days to honor what God, through His Son Jesus Christ, had done for them. Sunday, the “Lord's Day,” was set aside as the day of worship because Christ physically rose from the dead on the first day of the week. Even New Year's Day had religious meaning since, at eight days after birth, it is

continued on page 9



## HOLIDAYS, WORDS, SYMBOLS, EXPRESSIONS

continued from page 8

the day Jesus was circumcised. Historically Christians have viewed New Year's Eve as symbolic of the end of their lives and a reminder to always be ready to meet the Lord. Halloween began as All Hallow's Day—a day for church members to honor their deceased members. Thanksgiving began when Pilgrims formally gave thanks to God.

### Words and Symbols

Many words commonly used in Western languages had their beginnings in early Christianity. Examples include A.D. (in the year of the Lord), B.C. (before the birth of Christ), creed, heresy, martyr, Santa Claus, and trinity. Examples of symbols include the fish, cross, and Chi-Rho cross—the early Christian cross that included Chi, an abbreviation for Christ and Rho, the symbol for the shepherd's staff; meaning Christ, the Good Shepherd.

### Expressions

Many familiar sayings and expressions were gleaned from the words and teachings of Jesus Christ such as “a good Samaritan,” “brother,” “doubting Thomas,” “the gospel truth,” “rob Peter to pay Paul,” “turn the other cheek,” and “thorn in the flesh.” Also, many common names originated in the Bible; examples include David, Aaron, Michael, Daniel, Adam, Joseph, Jacob, Samuel, Mary, Martha, Joanna, Sarah, Rebekah, Ruth, Naomi, and Rachel.

### Conclusion

The contributions made by Christianity to Western society are immeasurable. In the words of Carsten Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona,

**“The [Christian] Gospels are the very building blocks of our civilization. Without them Giotto would not have painted his frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua; Dante would not have written *Divine Comedy*; Mozart would not have composed his *Requiem*; and Wren would not have built St. Paul's Cathedral. The story and message of these four books—along with the Judaic tradition of the Old Testament—pervade not only the moral conventions of the West but also our system of social organization, nomenclature, architecture, literature and education, as well as the rituals of marriage and death which shape our lives...Christians and non-Christians alike.”**

**CBS**



Volume 3, Number 34

**Publisher**

Catherine & David Martin

**Editors**

Cheryl & Michael Chiapperino

Published on the World Wide Web at  
**ChristianBookSummaries.com.**

The mission of Christian Book Summaries is to enhance the ministry of thinking Christians by providing thorough and readable summaries of noteworthy books from Christian publishers.

**The opinions expressed are those of the original writers and are not necessarily those of Christian Book Summaries or its Council of Reference.**

How Christianity Changed the World by Alvin J. Schmidt, copyright 2001 by Alvin J. Schmidt. Summarized by permission of the publisher, Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530. 441 pages. \$18.99 U.S. ISBN 0-310-26449-9. Available at your favorite bookstore or online bookseller.

**The author:** Alvin J. Schmidt is retired as professor of sociology at Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois, where he still lives. He is the author of several books, including *The Great Divide: The Failure of Islam and the Triumph of the West*, and served as a consulting editor for *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult*.

**Summarized by:** Bonnie Church is a website content manager, editor, freelance writer, avid gardener, mother of three, and grandmother of five. She is a graduate of University of Minnesota. Bonnie, her husband, and their family live in Colorado Springs, Colorado.