

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

The Impact of Christianity on Civilization

Part I - In the Image of God

October 24, 2003

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

“Christian-bashing is a popular indoor sport”

-Pat Buchanan

- fashionable in “post-Christian” era to bash Christians & the Church
 - emphasis on negative aspects of Church history
 - fault Christianity for all the ills of society
 - characterization of Christians (esp. evangelicals) as authoritarian, repressive, fundamentalist fanatics

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

- overwhelming positive impact of Christianity on civilization largely downplayed, ignored, or denied
- those who condemn Christianity today often unaware of all the benefits they presently enjoy because of the massive transforming effects of Christ and Christianity on civilization over the past 2000 years

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

- the impact of Christ on civilization includes:
 - transformation of the dignity and sanctity of human life
 - elevation of women
 - establishment of ministries of charity and compassion
 - transformation of ethics and morality
 - establishment of civil liberties and codes of justice for all (not just the rich)
 - literacy and education for all
 - establishment of universities

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

- the impact of Christ on civilization includes:
 - development of science and medicine
 - establishment and development of hospitals
 - development of free market system
 - inspiration of great works of art, music, and literature
 - countless lives transformed

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

"All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that one solitary life."

J.A. Francis
in *One Solitary Life*

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

- a topical series examining how Christianity has transformed civilization
- topics to include:
 - the image of God - the impact of Christianity on the dignity and worth of human life
 - the impact of Christianity on education
 - the impact of Christianity on science & medicine
 - the impact of Christianity on the arts
 - Christianity and civil liberties

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

- References

D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994)

Alvin J. Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001)

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

- Today:

In the Image of God

- The transforming impact of Christianity on
 - the sanctity of human life
 - women
 - charity and compassion

In the Image of God

- **Scriptural Foundations**

- All human beings created in God's image

- “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image...

- So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Genesis 1:26-27

In the Image of God

- **Some implications - Sanctity of life**
 - Creation in God's image forms the basis of the Christian view of the sanctity of human life, which has permeated Western thought and civilization for over 1500 years
- “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.”

Genesis 9:6

In the Image of God

- **Some implications - Sanctity of life**

- life is 'sacred', from conception to grave

- countered prevailing practice of abortion, infanticide

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made..."

Psalm 139:13-14

- led to abolition of gladiatorial games
- resulted in abolition of human sacrifices
- implications today for abortion, euthanasia, etc.

In the Image of God

- **Some implications - Men & women**

- Creation in God's image forms the basis for the equality in dignity and worth which women in much of the world enjoy today

"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; ***male and female He created them.***"

Genesis 1:27

In the Image of God

- **Some implications - Men & women**

- Christ's redemption is equally for men and women

- “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:28

- “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life...”

1 Peter 3:7

In the Image of God

- **Some implications - Charity & compassion**
 - Creation in God's image means that the poor and weak are not to be oppressed, but helped

"He who oppresses the poor show contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God."

Proverbs 14:31

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

James 1:27

In the Image of God

- **Some implications - Charity & compassion**
 - Christianity introduced many innovations in ministries of mercy and compassion:
 - care of widows & other needy persons (blind, insane, etc.)
 - voluntary associations & institutions to help the poor
 - provision for orphans (adoption, orphanages)
 - homes for the aged
 - hospitals
 - virtually all charitable organizations today are derived from the longstanding Christian practice of charity

The Sanctity of Human Life

"I have come that they may have life..."

Jesus, in John 10:10

The Sanctity of Human Life

- The Romans' low view of life (pagan depravity)
 - Human life considered cheap and expendable
- "The individual was regarded as of value only if he was a part of the political fabric and able to contribute to its uses, as though it were the end of his being to aggrandize the state."

Will Durant

The Sanctity of Human Life

VERSUS

- Infanticide
- Abandonment
- Abortion
- Gladiators
- Human sacrifices
- Cannibalism
- Suicide
- Burial/cremation

Infanticide: the way it was

- Refers to the killing of newborn infants
 - “Infanticide was one of the deepest stains of the ancient civilizations.” - W.E.H. Lecky
- Seen particularly in Greek and Roman societies
 - Also in India, China, Japan, Brazilian jungles, Inuit groups, pagan Africa
- Esp. babies who were deformed, physically frail, and/or female
- Killed by drowning or sold for money then killed

The way of Christ

- Infanticide = murder
 - Infants are creatures of God, redeemed by Christ
 - Jesus says:
 "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."
- Matthew 19:14
- 10 commandments: "You shall not murder."
(Exodus 20:13)
 - "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world..." (Romans 12:2)

Infanticide: Phasing out

- Early Christian literature condemned infanticide
 - Didache (ca. 85 and 110)
 - Epistle of Barnabas (ca. 130)
 - Callistus of Rome (d. ca. 222)
- Valentinian (Christian emperor of Rome) formally outlawed infanticide (A.D. 374)
- Condemnation of infanticide maintained even after the fall of the Roman empire
- Today, most parts of the world have anti-infanticide laws

Abandonment: the way it was

- "exposti": infants left and tossed away
- In Rome
 - *Columna Lactaria*
 - Mythology (Romulus and Remus)
- Why was this practiced?
 - Undesirable infants
 - Symbolic ritual of grief, e.g. over the assassination of Emperor Caligula

Abandonment: the way it was

- In Greece
 - In Sparta, newborns taken to elders of tribe, who then decided whether the child would be kept or abandoned.
 - Euripides (Greek poet, 5 B.C.) writes of infants thrown in rivers, manure piles, exposed on roadsides, prey to birds/beasts
 - Mythology: Oedipus Rex
- Greco-Roman plays often featured famous characters/heroes who were abandoned as children (? soothe guilty consciences)

The Christian response

- Opposition and condemnation of abandonment
 - Clement of Alexandria (late 2nd century) condemned Romans for saving and protecting young birds while abandoning their own children
 - Tertullian (ca. 200; African church father)
 - Lactantius (church father): to expose = to kill
 - 6th century: church canon pronounced parents who abandoned their children as murderers

The Christian response

- Practice of adoption
 - Callistus of Rome gave refuge, placed abandoned children in Christian homes
 - Benignus of Dijon, in late 2nd century, provided protection and nourishment for abandoned children, some of whom were deformed due to failed abortions
 - Afra of Augsburg (converted prostitute in late 3rd century) ministered to abandoned children of prisoners, thieves, runaway slaves, etc.

Abandonment: Phasing Out

- Valentinian, Christian emperor of Rome, criminalized child abandonment in A.D. 374
- Honorius and Theodosius II (5th century emperors) ruled that a foundling child is to be announced to people in the church; if not claimed, finders keepers
- 9th century Council of Rouen (France): instead of abandoning children, women asked to place them in front of church door for church to look after them
- 11th century
 - King Haroldsson of Norway fined parents who exposed their child
 - His successor, King Magnus, charged these parents with murder

Abandonment: Phasing Out?

- The practice of abandonment did not completely end after it was outlawed.
- A priest in the 16th century still lamented that “the latrines resound with the cries of children who had been plunged into them.”
- Today, Germany has established “project Findelbaby” for foundling babies, i.e. a “baby flap” drop-box for unwanted infants
- America is considering a similar practice

Abortion: the way it was

- Refers to the termination of a pregnancy
- Why was this practiced in ancient Rome?
 - Food shortage, poverty (??)
 - Lack of honor/respect for marriage
 - Juvenal: a chaste wife was almost nonexistent
 - Seneca: unchastity = “the greatest evil of our time”
 - Thus, rampant adulterous relations bred widespread abortions
 - Desire to be childless
 - Greedy fortune hunters treat childless people with special courtesy and attention with an eye on their wealth/inheritance
 - Depraved view of human life as cheap and expendable
 - Depraved Roman rulers enjoyed gory displays of torture; abortion was not unusual in this cultural context

The Christian response

- Galatians 5:20
"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: ...**witchcraft**..."
- Revelation 21:8
"But the ...sexually immoral, those who practice **magic arts**...their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur."
- ***Pharmakeia*** (Greek): making & administering potions
- Medicinal potions were a means of inducing abortions among the Greco-Romans
- This **connection** is supported by Plutarch (pagan), the Didache, Clement of Alexandria, etc.

Abortion Through the Ages

- By the early 4th century, Christian opposition to abortion went beyond the theologians and was also voiced by the church
- West (Spain):
 - Synod of Elvira (ca. 305) condemned abortion
 - Excommunicated women who had abortions and did not accept repentance for their acts until their final hour of life
- East (present day Turkey):
 - Council of Ancyra (A.D. 314) opposed abortion
 - Canons of St. Basil opposed abortion and the guild of abortionists (which provided abortifacients, surgical devices, and sold aborted bodies to manufacturers of beauty creams)
 - Basil helped minister to women facing unwanted pregnancies and influenced Emperor Valentinian to outlaw abortion in 374

Abortion Through the Ages

- "...those who pay no attention to pregnant women and do not spare the tender fetus are murderers and parricides." – Martin Luther
- "The unborn child...though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being...and should not be robbed of the life which it has not yet begun to enjoy." – John Calvin
- "Destruction of the embryo in the mother's womb is a violation of the right to live which God has bestowed upon this nascent life." – D. Bonhoeffer
- Liberalism and secularism have preserved abortion on demand in Western societies today

Gladiators

- Further illustrates depravity of ancient Rome and influence of stoicism, a philosophy that had no compassion for the weak and the oppressed
- Slaves, condemned criminals, etc. are expendable
- "There is scarcely any single reform so important in the moral history of mankind as the suppression of the gladiatorial shows, a feat that must be almost exclusively ascribed to the Christian church."
(W.E.H. Lecky)
- Christian emperors Theodosius I (reigned 378-395) and Honorius (404) terminated the shows

Human Sacrifices

Canaanite Baal worshipers and
Elijah (1 Kings 18:16-40)

Jeremiah condemns this practice
in 7 BC (Jeremiah 7:31)

King Ahab in 8 BC (2 Kings 21:6)

The Irish sacrificed POWs to war
gods, newborns to harvest gods

St. Patrick brings the gospel to
Ireland

Pagan Prussians, Lithuanians

Until Christianity came in 13th/14th
centuries

In Mexico

- Aztec Indians
 - also practiced cannibalism
- Maya Indians
 - gruesome practices

Conquistadors (Hernando Cortes,
Bernal Diaz del Castillo)

Suicide

- Roman Stoicism
 - Death was not an evil, so the “power of self-destruction is an inestimable privilege”
- Romans’ low view of life
- “open your veins” – Nero

The Christian response

- "...the LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." (Job 1:21)
- Martyrs are not suicide cases; their lack of resistance is similar to that of Christ on the cross
- However, some persecuted Christians did commit suicide

The Christian response

- 4th century Synod of Elvira condemned Christians who went out of their way to be martyred
- Speaking to Donatists, who committed suicide *en masse* because they believed there was no forgiveness of sin after baptism, St. Augustine in the 5th century made several points:
 - 10 commandments: you shall not murder
 - Christ told disciples to flee in times of persecution
 - No suicide cases among the Patriarchs, OT prophets, NT apostles

The Christian response

- In the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas taught that it was morally wrong to commit suicide:
 - One sins against self, community, God
 - One cannot repent of this sin
- What about physician-assisted suicide today?
 - Are we going backwards?
 - Oregon's "Death with Dignity" (1994, 1997)

Burial vs. Cremation

- Cremation was a common practice in ancient Rome
- Christians have traditionally supported burial rather than cremation
 - Resurrection of the body
 - But God can resurrect a cremated body!
 - "...for dust you are and to dust you will return."
(Genesis 3:19)
 - "...for a time is coming when all who are in their **graves** will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." (John 5:28-29)

Burial vs. Cremation

- Christians often burned by Romans after execution as a form of mockery
- *Koimeterion* (Greek) = dormitory where people slumbered
 - present-day term “cemetery” has Christian roots
- Cremation on the rise
 - USA ~22% in 1996, estimate up to 40% in 2010
 - Why?
 - Ignorance of former reasons for choosing burial
 - “permissive church posture” (accepted by Roman Catholic church in 1963, Church of England in 1969)
 - And what is done with the ashes? (bizarre)

The Sanctity of Human Life

- "the value and sanctity of infant life...broadly distinguished Christian from pagan societies." (W.E.H. Lecky)
- "The intrinsic worth of each individual man and woman as a child of God and an immortal soul was introduced by Christianity." (Ferdinand Schenck)

The Sanctity of Human Life

During WWII on a remote island in the Pacific, an American soldier met a native who could read, and the native was carrying a Bible. Upon seeing the Bible, the soldier said, "We educated people no longer put much faith in that book." The native, from a tribe of former cannibals, replied, "Well, it's good that we do, or you would be eaten by my people today."

Women Receive Freedom & Dignity

*"There is neither...male nor female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

Galatians 3:28

Women in Ancient Greece

- *Gynaecium*: segregated women's quarters
- *Hetaera*: mistress who accompanied married man to events outside his home
- Social status like that of a slave
- Not allowed to speak in public
- Only male children are educated
- Women blamed for evil (reflected in Greek plays, poetry, mythology – Pandora)
- Many female babies were killed (infanticide)
 - “economic liability, a social burden”
- A male offspring validated a woman's worth

Women in Ancient Rome

- *Manus* law: husband has absolute control of wife; he owns her and her possessions
 - He can divorce her for going out without a veil
 - She can never divorce him or tell his slave what to do
 - She is prohibited from inheriting property

Women in Ancient Rome

- *Patria potestas* – the rights of a married man
- *Paterfamilias* – man has supreme, absolute power over his wife
 - Women prohibited from speaking in public
 - No property rights
 - A man can chastise, execute, kill his wife – consultation with extended family not required if wife has been adulterous
- *Infamia* – label for woman appearing on public stage (taboo)
- *Coemptio* – father sells daughter to her husband
- Women seen as dominating, cruel
- Human anger seen as womanish trait
- Women were the slaves of man's passions

Hebrew Women

- Rabbinic oral law forbade women to speak publicly
 - Women could not testify in court
- *Michetza* in synagogue segregated women from the men
 - Women were not allowed to sing

Enter: Jesus Christ

Samaritan woman (Jn 4:5ff)	Rabbinic oral law: "he who talks with a woman in public brings evil upon himself" and "one is not so much as to greet a woman"
Mary/Martha (Lk 10:38ff)	"Let the words of the Law [Torah] be burned rather than taught to a woman...If a man teaches his daughter the law, it is as though he taught her lechery."
(Jn 11:25-26)	Jesus spoke the heart of the Christian gospel to a woman! ("I am the resurrection and the life...")
Easter (Mt 28:10)	Women were chosen to relay the news of Jesus' resurrection from the dead – exclusive selection of women to spread the word (c.f. Lk 13:30)
Women followers	Mark 15:41; Lk 8:1-3

Women in the early church

- Apphia (Philemon 2)
- Nympha (Colossians 4:15)
- Priscilla (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom 16:3)
- Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2)
- Lydia (Acts 16)
- Euodia, Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3)

Women now have equal access to baptism and the Lord's supper

Historically and presently, many important missionaries and evangelists are women

Anomalies

- Clement of Alexandra (d. 215)
 - Women should blush for being a woman
- Tertullian (d. ca. 220)
 - " You [Eve] are the devil's gateway...you destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die."
- Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 368)
 - "Let her pray, let her lips move, but let not her voice be heard."

Anomalies

- St. Augustine (d. 430)
 - Woman's image of God inferior to man's
 - Apart from her husband, a woman does not possess the image of God
- Thomas Aquinas (13th century)
 - The image of God is different in women than in men

These church fathers did not follow Jesus' or Paul's examples in their treatment of women.

The Way of Christ

- Restoring the family
 - “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy...” Ephesians 5:25
 - “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:4
 - Emperor Valentinian I repealed *patria potestas* in AD 374, which then disassembled the cultural mores of *manus* and *coemptio*
 - Women gained property/ownership rights and guardianship over their children
 - Marriage without paternal consent validated

The Way of Christ

- Bridal freedom
 - Child brides common in ancient societies: Babylon, Greece, Assyria, Rome
 - Christians married later, with a choice as to whom they married (vs. *patria potestas*)
 - Christian men learned to see their wife as a partner
 - Child brides no longer exist in most parts of the world today

The Way of Christ

- Veil removal
 - Married women of many cultures used veils
 - Greece: veil was like a wedding ring
 - Only the single women, prostitutes, and low class women were unveiled
 - The church took some time before allowing this freedom
 - Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, St. Chrysostom
 - Synods (official regional assemblies)
 - Pope Nikolaus (AD 866) – last formal announcement
 - Practice of veils gone by end of 1st millenium
 - 1 Corinthians 11:5-16 vs. 1 Timothy 2:8-9

The Way of Christ

- Nullifying polygyny
 - Practiced esp. in Middle East (e.g. OT – Abraham, Jacob, Elkanah, David, Solomon, etc.)
 - “...and the **two** will become one flesh...” (Matthew 19:5)
 - “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his...**wife** and children...he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26)
 - “Now the overseer must be...the husband of but **one wife**...” (1 Timothy 3:2)
 - 1890s: Utah (Mormons) required to outlaw all polygynous marriages before acceptance into Union
 - Irony: feminists expressing strong hate for Christianity often fail to realize the impact of Christianity on their status to date.

The Way it was

- Widows: the way it was
 - Suttee (or Sati), esp. in India
 - Wife of deceased husband mounts husband's funeral pyre to be cremated with him
 - She cannot refuse (otherwise her sons will force her)
 - Some of these women were young girls (child brides)
 - Widows were considered "nonpersons" with multiple restrictions (e.g. 1 meal/day, head shaved monthly, cannot sleep in a bed, attend wedding/religious ceremonies, be seen by a pregnant woman)

The Way of Christ

- Honouring widows: Jesus' example
 - Compassion on widow of Nain and her son (Luke 7:11-15)
 - Chided Pharisees for taking advantage of widows (Mk 12:40)
 - Commended poor widow's offering (Lk 21:2-3)
 - 1 Timothy 5:3-4 – honour widowed mothers
 - James 1:27 – look after widows

 - 2nd century: Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch was the protector and friend of widows
 - 1829: British outlawed the practice of suttee
 - 1856: Indian widows allowed to remarry

The Way of Christ

- Outlawing foot-binding of Chinese women
 - Young girls (5 years old) had their feet bound
 - In order to please men (walked seductively)
 - Social pressure (or else not eligible for marriage)
 - 1912: outlawed by Chinese government, under the influence of Christian missionaries
- Outlawing genital mutilation of girls
 - Esp. African countries (5-99% incidence)
 - Outlawed in countries with Christian influence
 - E.g. Canada, France, Sweden, England, USA

Women Receive Freedom & Dignity

“...neither Christ nor the early Christians ever preached an outright revolution. Rather, it was his example that his followers reflected in their relationships with women, raising their dignity, freedom, and rights to a level previously unknown in any culture.”

Alvin J. Schmidt

Charity & Compassion

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. ...I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me."

Jesus, in Matthew 25:35-36, 40

Charity & Compassion

- **The way it was....**
 - with rare exceptions, organized charitable efforts virtually unknown in the Greco-Roman world at the time of Christ
 - acts of charity typically viewed with suspicion as an act of weakness
 - widely considered dishonorable to associate with the poor, the weak, the downtrodden

Charity & Compassion

- The way it was....
 - what little there was, was typically only for citizens (usually those who were well off) or for those who could later serve in the army
 - *liberalitas* - giving to receive a favor back later.
 - Why support those who had nothing to give back or to contribute to the state?
 - “You do a beggar bad service by giving him food and drink; you lose what you give and prolong his life for more misery.”

Plautus, *Trinummus* 2.338-39

Charity & Compassion

- **The way of Christ....**
 - in contrast to the prevailing lack of charity in the Roman world, charitable giving was expected of all Christians, whether rich or poor, according to their ability
- “And now, brothers, I want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.”

2 Corinthians 8:1-2

Charity & Compassion

- **The way of Christ....**

- in contrast to the prevailing attitude of the day, the poor and weak were not to be despised, since they too were created in God's image

“He who oppresses the poor show contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.”

Proverbs 14:31

Charity & Compassion

- **The way of Christ....**

- a new motive for giving – love

- “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.’”

Matthew 25:40

- “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

1 John 3:17-18

Charity & Compassion

- **The way of Christ....**

- giving not limited to “useful” people, or even to Church members, but to all who had need
 - *caritas* - giving without expectation of return

“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?”

Matthew 6:46-47

“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind...”

Luke 14:13

Charity & Compassion

- **The way of Christ....**

- Christian love and compassion widely noted within the Roman world

- responsible in large part for phenomenal spread of Christianity in the face of severe persecution, as people saw the difference and were drawn to Christ

“For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg and the impious Galileans [i.e. Christians] support both their own poor and ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.”

Julian the Apostate

Charity & Compassion

- **Christian innovations in ministries of mercy**

A BRIEF Overview

- care for widows and orphans
- associations and institutions to help the poor
- institutions for the disabled
- homes for the aged
- hospitals

Charity & Compassion

- **Orphans**

- prior to 313 A.D., orphans often taken into and provided for in Christian homes
- first orphanages (*orphanotrophia*) established in 4th century, after Edict of Milan gave Christianity legal status in 313 A.D.
 - Order of the Holy Ghost operated >800 orphanages by end of 13th century
 - George Mueller's orphanages - cared for >8000 children in 1898, the year he died

Charity & Compassion

- **Widows**

- weak, powerless, despised in ancient world
- Church established the diaconate to care for widows who did not have family support
(c. 37 A.D. - Acts 6:1-7)
 - regular financial support for widows in need
(1 Timothy 5:3-8)
 - gave widows a position of dignity and service
(1 Timothy 5:9-10)

Charity & Compassion

- Homes for the aged
 - *gerontocomia* first established by Christians in 5th century
 - established the foundations for what has become a major social institution today

Charity & Compassion

- **Care for the poor and disabled**
 - Church-wide giving to the poor already prevalent in early 1st century AD (e.g. Acts 2:44-45; Romans 15:25-26)
 - formed voluntary associations (collegia or factionis) to help the unfortunate, 2nd-3rd century AD
 - operated institutions for the poor (ptochia), 4th century AD
 - established institutions for the blind (typholocomia), 7th century AD

Charity & Compassion

- **Some more recent examples...**
 - The Salvation Army
 - distinctly Christian organization established in 1887 by William Booth to help the poor and homeless in London, England
 - currently the largest charitable organization of its kind worldwide (*Philanthropy 400*)

Charity & Compassion

- **Some more recent examples...**
 - Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)
 - established in 1840s by George Williams "to improve the spiritual condition of young men engaged in the drapery and other trades"
 - helped young men who went to London from rural areas to find work
 - original objectives: "the winning of young men to Jesus Christ, and the building in them of Christian character."

Charity & Compassion

- **Some more recent examples...**
 - The International Red Cross
 - established in 1864 by Henry Dunant, an evangelical Christian, "to bring aid to the wounded in time of war."
 - truncated red cross chosen as symbol allowed by all nations for neutral assistance
 - idea adopted in Turkey in 1876 - Red Cross changed to Red Crescent

Charity & Compassion

- Many Christian organizations today continue the long tradition of charity
 - World Vision
 - World Relief
 - Samaritan's Purse
 - Yonge Street Mission
 - Toronto City Mission
 - Out of the Cold

Charity & Compassion

- Many 'secular' organizations serving the poor today had explicitly Christian roots
 - Daily Bread Food Bank
 - Goodwill Industries International
 - YMCA, YWCA
 - United Way
 - Covenant House

Charity & Compassion

- At least 6 of the top 10 non-profit organizations in the USA in 2000 had Christian roots
 - Lutheran Services in America
 - The National Council of YMCAs
 - Salvation Army
 - American Red Cross
 - Catholic Charities USA
 - Goodwill Industries International

from *NonProfit Times 100*, 2001

Charity & Compassion

- virtually all charitable organizations today are the direct or indirect result of this Christian heritage
 - even secular atheists who engage in charitable work today do so, however unconsciously, as a result of the shift in mindset effected by Christianity over the past 2000 years with respect to the poor and weak
- though good works (e.g. giving alms to the poor) are part of other religions, Christianity introduced charity on a scale not previously seen and still not paralleled in any other major world religion

Charity & Compassion

"I want to tell you something else that I, as an Orthodox Rabbi, am enormously struck by; and that is that when one travels around the world, every single time there is a calamity, every time there is a natural disaster, who is on the spot? Numerous American, religious, Christian-driven charities bringing relief; that is where it is coming from."

Rabbi Daniel Lapin

In Summary...

*What if Jesus Had Never
Been Born?*

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

1. You might never have been born

- Christianity transformed thinking regarding the sanctity of human life
- substantial curtailment of infanticide (esp. female infants), abortion, human sacrifice, etc., in the Roman world and beyond
- unfortunately, as Christianity's influence diminishes in the Western world, the sanctity of life is being eroded and these practices are appearing once again

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

2. You might wish that you had never been born

- despite what feminists claim, Christianity has resulted in freedom and dignity for women, which was unknown in ancient times and still remains unknown today in many parts of the world where Christian influence is weak or absent

“Had Jesus never come, Gloria Steinem, had she survived childhood, might very well be wearing a veil today!”

D.J. Kennedy & J. Newcombe

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

2. You might wish that you had never been born

- Christianity has resulted in a “kinder, gentler” world in areas which Christianity has permeated widely
 - Establishment of ministries of mercy
 - Transformation of attitudes towards the poor and weak
 - Foundation – whether recognized or not – of the countless religious and secular charitable organizations which operate throughout the world today to make the world a better place to live

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

2. You might wish that you had never been born

- we would have no hope

"...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace...."

Ephesians 2:12-14

What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

The Impact of Christianity on Civilization

Part I - In the Image of God

October 24, 2003