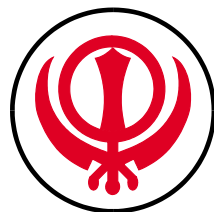


Multiculturalism ignores an ingredient essential to the culture of the Western world

# Christianity on the Shelf

By Marshall J. Leggett



Multiculturalism reigns in the United States. It teaches that one culture is just as good as another, each adjusting to its own environment. Therefore, the culture of the Sudan is equal to the culture of England, the culture of Afghanistan equal to that of Canada, and the culture of New Guinea is equal to that of the United States. The suggestion that the culture of England is superior to that in the Sudan is counted as bigotry by the multiculturalists.

Thomas Sowell, an African-American syndicated columnist, sees some problems in multiculturalism. “What ‘multiculturalism’ boils down to is that you can praise any culture in the world except Western culture,” he writes, “And you cannot blame any culture in the world except Western culture.”<sup>1</sup> Sowell uses a commemoration service on a university campus to show how multiculturalism can be both ridiculous and dangerous:

The world in general, and multiculturalism in particular, ignores an ingredient essential to the culture of the Western world: Christianity.

Among the many commemorations of the September 11th anniversary, the one at Berkeley was unique. The American flag was banned because it might offend people from other countries. “The Star Spangled Banner” was banned because it was considered too militaristic, while “God Bless America” was not regarded as an acceptable substitute because God is politically incorrect in Berkeley.<sup>2</sup>

Someone should ask multiculturalists a few questions. Why do Western nations enjoy more freedom? (Name one true democracy in the Arab world, or any other country, that did not model itself after Western governments.) Why do Western nations have greater economic prosperity? Where do you find the best universities, hospitals, and science laboratories? Why have the great inventions of the last five centuries come from the

Western world? Why do immigrants flock to the shores of America and Western Europe?

The world in general, and multiculturalism in particular, ignores an ingredient essential to the culture of the Western world: Christianity.

Christianity has been put on the shelf. Children grow up with little knowledge of how Jesus Christ blesses them. No public school teacher dares to make the case for Jesus being a positive influence on society. It is considered politically incorrect to criticize any religion—Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism—while Christian faith “bashing” is in vogue.

Others have joined Sowell in the rebuttal to multiculturalism. Paul L. Maier, a professor of ancient history, writes, “No other religion, philosophy, teaching, nation, movement . . . has so changed the world for the better as Christianity has done.”<sup>3</sup> Alvin

J. Schmidt in his book, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization*, concurs. He says, “. . . Civilization itself was transformed by Jesus Christ. In the ancient world his teachings elevated brutish standards of morality, halted infanticide, enhanced human life, emancipated women, abolished slavery, inspired charities and relief organizations, created hospitals, established orphanages, and founded schools.”<sup>4</sup>

Some of the blessings Jesus brought into the world are obvious to those with any degree of objectivity. Others are subtler. They are the result of the “salt” that preserves the good and brings flavor to life. Consider a few of them.

## Freedom

Slavery is a horrible practice of inhumanity, but it is not unique to the Western world. “Slavery has existed from the dawn of history, in the most primitive of human societies and in the most civilized. There is no region on earth that has not at

some time harbored the institution.”<sup>5</sup>

What is not generally recognized is that it was the Western world that stopped slavery. Dinesh D’Sousa is an Indian who came to the United States at 16. He is a person of color who has observed:

Abolition is an exclusive Western institution. . . . Never in the history of the world, outside the West, has a group of people eligible to be slave owners mobilized against the institution of slavery. . . . The uniqueness of this Western approach is confirmed by the little-known fact that African chiefs, who profited from the slave trade, sent delegations to the West to protest the abolition of slavery.<sup>6</sup>

Study the abolition of slavery in the West and you will find the names of many prominent Christians in the forefront. In the United States there were such persons as Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and whose father and two brothers were Protestant clergy. In England there was William Wilberforce, who contemplated the ministry, but whose mentor convinced him he could do more good in politics. He became prime minister and spent 30 years leading his country to abolition. Later the British and American navies took to the high seas and stopped the slave trade.

Western nations now enjoy the most democratic governments along with the best records in human and civil rights. Jesus said, “. . . Know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). His apostle concurred saying, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

## Prosperity

Ancient people did not hold work in high regard. The Greeks despised it. In Athens, there were five times as many slaves as free persons (the latter group gave themselves to contemplation). The Middle Ages had no strong systems of economics. Then came the Reformation with its Protestant work ethic, one of the pillars upon which the Reformation was founded.

Martin Luther introduced what he called *Christian vocation*. It taught that a laborer was to do his work to the glory of God. He repudiated the medieval notion that all calling was to the monastic life. Persons were called to be Christian farmers, carpenters, and merchants. There was to be the

priesthood of believers in which all professions were to be ministries.<sup>7</sup>

John Calvin carried the concept of Christian vocation further. He taught Christians could and should attain prosperity and wealth, both of which he saw as a sign of divine blessing, and as being of God’s elect. Calvin’s Christians were to work hard, live frugally, and be honest. Puritans brought this work ethic to America.

Christian vocation opened the door for capitalism, or the free market economy, the financial system that has brought to the Western world unprecedented prosperity. Rabbi Daniel Lapin observes, “It is no accident that a capital market has never risen indigenously in any non-Christian country.”<sup>8</sup> Schmidt says, “Individual freedom and economic freedom are inseparable. Both are products of the Christian ethic.”<sup>9</sup>

Capitalism has its roots in Scripture. The Ten Commandments say, “Thou shalt not steal,” and “Thou shalt not covet,” which imply ownership of private property. In the parable

of the talents, Jesus said the unprofitable servant should have at least put his money into the bank and received interest (Matthew 25:27).

## Science

Christianity is the “mother” of science. It sounds like an oxymoron to say out of the womb of Christianity came science with all the controversy between the two over “origins.” But in what part of the world has science flourished?

Alfred North Whitehead, mathematician/philosopher, saw the connection. He contended that the origin of science required Christianity’s “insistence on the rationality of God.”<sup>10</sup> Others agree with Whitehead. Lyle T. White wrote that only in Christian thought, which posits “the existence of a single God, the Creator and Governor of the universe, [one that] functions in an orderly and normally predictable manner, is it possible for science to exist and operate.”<sup>11</sup> “From the thirteenth century onward into the eighteenth, every major scientist, in effect, explained his motivation in religious terms.”<sup>12</sup>

Some contemporary scientists now evaluate the universe in terms of *design*. Paul explains design

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in theological terms. He says, speaking of Jesus, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth . . . and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16, 17, *New International Version*). Jesus, whom John calls “the Word,” created the universe in an orderly fashion and holds the cosmos together in an orderly way. Therefore, science can study the universe with predictability.

### Education

Christianity has fostered education since Jesus said, “Make disciples.” Renowned American universities had their infancy in Christian cradles: Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, even flagship state universities such as Kentucky, Tennessee, and, believe it or not, California at Berkeley. The same can be said of Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, Heidelberg, and Basel in Europe.

Public schools came from the same cradle. “As best can be determined, the concept [public schools] first came from the mind of Martin Luther. He believed the country needed public schools, supported by funding from the public treasury.”<sup>13</sup> Philipp Melancthon, Luther’s principle coworker, helped further Luther’s educational desires when he successfully persuaded the civic authorities to implement the first public school system in Germany.

Luther insisted on compulsory education. He wrote, “I hold that it is the duty of the temporal authority to compel its subjects to keep the children in school.”<sup>14</sup> The state was to pass laws to enforce it.<sup>15</sup>

Calvin promoted his Geneva Plan. It included “a system of elementary education in the vernacular for all, including reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, and religion, and the establishment of secondary schools for the purpose of training citizens for civic and ecclesiastical leadership.”<sup>16</sup>

D. James Kennedy observes, “Every school you see . . . public or private, religious or secular . . . is a visible reminder of the religion of Jesus Christ. So is every college and university.”<sup>17</sup>

The multiculturalist should take Christianity down from the shelf, study its accomplishments, and say, “Thank you.” Even the byproducts of the Christian faith are a blessing. Jesus said, “. . . believe in what I have done, even if you don’t believe me. Then you will realize that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father” (John 10:38, *New Living Translation*).

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Sowell, “A Little Bit of This and a Little Bit of That,” *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Sowell, “Elites Practice One-Upmanship, Others Practice Survival,” *pp. cit.*

<sup>3</sup>Alvin J. Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 9.

<sup>4</sup>Schmidt, *op. cit.*, 8.

<sup>5</sup>Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), vii.

<sup>6</sup>Dinesh D’Sousa, *What’s So Great About America?* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2002), 55.

<sup>7</sup>Wilfred E. Garrison, *A Protestant Manifesto* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1957), 126, 127.

<sup>8</sup>Schmidt, *op. cit.*, 215.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: MacMillan, 1926), 18.

<sup>11</sup>Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Martin Luther, “To the Councilmen . . .” in *Luther’s Works*, 45:350.

<sup>14</sup>Schmidt, *op. cit.*, 179.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>Schmidt, *op. cit.*, 177.

<sup>17</sup>D. James Kennedy, *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 191.

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# Ambiguity

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It’s astonishing to think that these are students in just one relatively small class, a class as unique as any other.

Who are these people? They’re folks like you and me, busy discarding an old identity outside of Christ. Some of them are in a period of wilderness wandering and confusion, desiring not only to jettison the chaos of our times for the fullness of life in Jesus, but desperately wanting to give this faith away. They’re people who’ve grown up with the exploding space shuttle Challenger as a defining moment in their corporate lives, to be followed by people whose defining moment will be the school shootings in Littleton, Colorado, to be followed by the 9-11 generation. It’s not getting any easier. The greatest needs of these good students are for communal caring and personal attachment, not merely to a great cause—and we have the greatest—but to a great person. And we have that too. Or, better, He has us.

Yes, He has us, gathered here on Solomon’s porch, watching the Spirit at work healing people and exorcising old demons, listening to the voice of the apostles as it thunders from the text, praying and mulling over profound personal and relational transformations we witness in the lives of members of our campus community every day. Waiting to see when some of the seekers will cross the line from open inquiry to settled belief, the line from musing to ministry. Praising God for the solid nucleus of the faithful who’ve long since done so.

It’s so exciting. Some days I step onto the “porch” and it’s about all I can do just to hang on.