

HAS CHRISTIANITY HAD A BAD INFLUENCE ON HISTORY?

by Alvin J. Schmidt

No, Christianity hasn't had a bad influence on history. Christian beliefs and practices—that is, those consistent with Christ's teachings—have produced countless positive by-products in history. This is true even though evil actions of erring Christians, especially prominent leaders (some probably not even truly Christian), are regularly recorded in history books, leading many to believe that Christianity's influence has been mostly harmful. Commonly cited examples are the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the medieval witch persecutions, the executions of Hus and Savonarola, and the Roman Catholic Church's silencing of Galileo. These acts were sinful and morally wrong—highly inconsistent with Christ's teachings.

Christianity has had numerous positive influences on history. Largely unknown in today's world, even to countless Christians, it elevated the sanctity of human life. In ancient Rome and other pagan societies, human life was cheap and expendable. The early Christians, motivated by the gospel, opposed abortion, infanticide, child abandonment, suicide, and gladiatorial contests—all legal and widely practiced in the Roman era. Fifty years after the legalization of Christianity in AD 313, the now-Christianized Roman emperors outlawed these inhuman acts. Infanticide and child abandonment are still illegal in most Western countries, and while abortion has unfortunately made a comeback in the West, nobody has yet suggested that gladiators be brought back for popular entertainment.

In the fourth century Christianity introduced hospitals to the world. Greeks and Romans had no such institutions of compassion. Christians, moved by Christ's words "I was sick and you took care of me" (Mt 25:36), built hospices as early as 325 and hospitals in 369—first in the East and then in the West. The names of numerous hospitals still reflect this Christian origin: St. John's Hospital, Lutheran Hospital, Presbyterian Hospital, etc.

Before Christianity appeared, women were practically slaves, having little or no freedom and dignity. Not so in the Christian church! Women were baptized and instructed along with men and took communion along with men. Adultery was no longer defined in terms of a woman's marital status; a married man having sex with a single woman now was also guilty of adultery. Christianity permitted a woman to reject a male suitor and inherit property. She no longer had to worship her husband's pagan gods.

Here are other positive effects:

- Countries where Christianity has had the greatest presence were the first to abolish slavery. By contrast, slavery is still present in many Islamic countries.
- The principle that no man is above the law originated with St. Ambrose. In 390 he demanded that Emperor Theodosius repent for wantonly killing 7,000 people. He told the emperor he wasn't above the law. In 1215 the Magna Carta expanded this Christian concept of liberty and justice.

- Christian teachings resulted in economic, political, and religious freedom.
- Universities grew out of the church's medieval monasteries.
- Christian theology, not pagan pantheism, motivated early scientists to explore God's natural world.
- Christianity inspired the invention of the musical scale and great musical compositions.

Finally, Christianity's influence is present in many of the West's social institutions and in its nomenclature, literature, and education, shaping much in the daily lives of people—both Christians and non-Christians.¹

¹ Eugene H. Merrill, "[Deuteronomy](#)," in *CSB Apologetics Study Bible*, ed. Ted Cabal (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 220.