



# The CSF Morality Series, Part 4: The Supposed "Judeo-Christian" Foundation of Western Civilization

One of the most common claims by Christian apologetics, conservative politicians and bloggers alike is that “Judeo-Christian” values form the foundation of Western Civilization or that the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) built Western Civilization. The high profile Canadian Clinical Psychologist, Jordan Peterson, also sings loudly from this same song sheet, but he takes it one step further by claiming, rather patronizingly, that secularists today can only act morally by acting out these “Judeo-Christian” values, even though they do not realize that.

The fact that large numbers of people seem to believe these often repeated claims, as well as the unwavering certainty they're made with, provide good reason to bring thorough rational scrutiny to them in Part 4 of our in-depth CSF Morality Series.

The previous articles in this series can be found here:

The Series: [Morality Series - The CSF](#)

[The CSF Morality Series, Part 1: Introduction to the CSF Morality Series - The CSF](#)

[The CSF Morality Series, Part 2: Does Christianity have an Objective Morality? - The CSF](#)

[The CSF Morality Series, Part 3: The Holocaust and Christian Morality - The CSF](#)

## 1. Defining Terms

### 1.1 The so-called “Judeo-Christian” Tradition

The “Judeo-Christian Tradition” term is a recent, quite mythical and problematic one with strong political overtones. It only appeared in the 20th century and is problematic for several reasons

- There is no monolithic Christian morality. There are large-scale differences on morality within Christianity and Christian morality changed fundamentally over its history. This article should highlight just how relevant that is
- Attempting to bring two different religions together under one umbrella is obviously even more problematic, as there are even bigger differences on morality between these two religions than within each of them
- “Simply put, then, there is no such thing as the "Judeo-Christian tradition." It is a modern invention. There always has been a Jewish tradition *and* a Christian tradition — or, more accurately, varieties of Jewish and Christian traditions... As Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits puts it, "Judaism is Judaism because it rejects Christianity, and Christianity is Christianity because it rejects Judaism."” [1]

- This is exacerbated by
  - Christianity's long history of antisemitism, going back to the New Testament and which came to culmination in Nazi Germany. See Part 3 of the CSF Morality Series for more details here: [The CSF Morality Series, Part 3: The Holocaust and Christian Morality - The CSF](#)
  - Even where there was limited antisemitism, Jews still faced a general lack of religious freedom (including discrimination and even persecution) from Christianity in most of Europe:
    - In Britain they only received religious freedom with Parliament passing the Jews Relief Act of 1858 [16]
    - The first measure to provide religious freedom for Jews in a Catholic country (and lift some commercial discrimination) was the Edict of Toleration of Jews on 2 Jan 1872 by Emperor Joseph II of the Habsburg Empire [19] [20]
- For the rest of this article I will focus on Christianity's role, or lack thereof, in the forming of Western Civilization's values.

## 1.2 Five Fundamental Values of Western Civilization

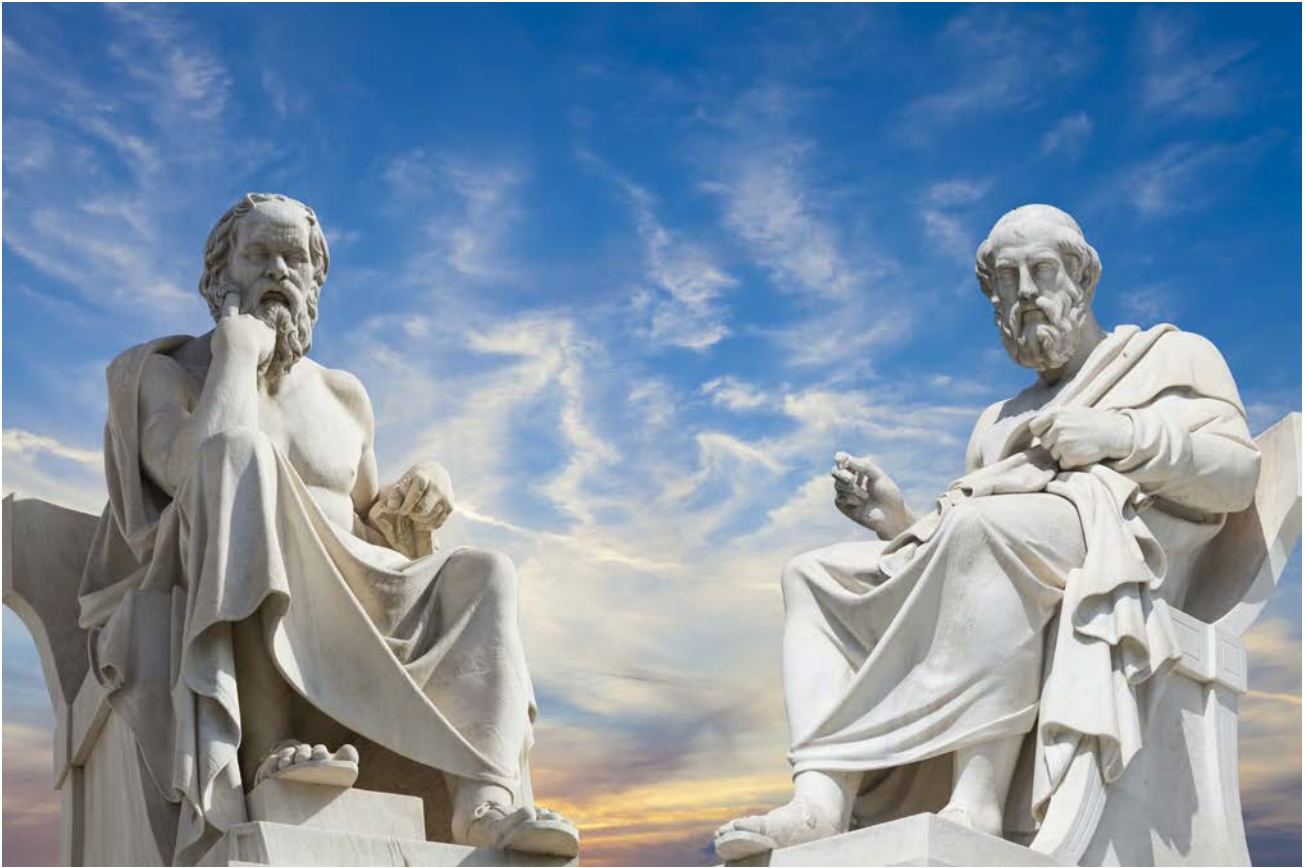
Western Civilization is characterized by specific, civilized values, which led to democracy and relative progress. For the purpose of this article I selected 5 values that are in my view fundamental to current Western Civilization; a selection which I don't expect to be controversial

- Freedom of Religion
- Freedom of Speech
- Individual Liberty
- Equality
- The Rule of Law

Democracy itself is underpinned by these 5 values. There is an overlap between these values and they did not develop in isolation from each other. This article is not arguing that these values should be the basis of Western Civilization, nor that they're fully implemented. Likewise, it is not arguing for democracy or passing judgment on how functional or dysfunctional Western democracies are. It is simply asserting that these 5 values are largely supported by the majority of people in the West and that they are characteristic of Western Civilization.

## 1.3 Historical Terms

- **Ancient Greek Philosophy** spans the period from the 6th century BCE to the death of Aristotle in 322 BCE (covering both Ancient Greece and Classical Greece). The foundation of Western Philosophy was laid here when the first philosophers started investigating the natural world and morality without relying on the Greek gods as explanations. The 3 most influential Ancient Greek Philosophers were Socrates (circa 477-399 BCE), Plato (circa 428-348 BCE) and Aristotle (384-322 BCE) [2] [3]



*Statues of Socrates and Plato at the Academy in Athens, Greece [Image credit: Dreamstime]*

- For the purpose of this article **the Middle Ages** is regarded as the period from the fall of Rome (and the western Roman Empire) in 476 until the fall of Constantinople (and the Byzantine Empire) in 1453. This is often more roughly defined as the 1000 years from 500 - 1500 [4]
  - For almost the last 100 years of the western Roman Empire (380 - 476) the Catholic Church was its official and compulsory state religion, with enormous political power
  - They retained and consolidated this power in Europe during the Middle Ages
- The **Protestant Reformation** was only started by Martin Luther in Germany on 31 Oct 1517 and he was excommunicated by Pope Leo X on 3 Jan 1521 [5]. So for the entire Middle Ages Christianity was synonymous with the Catholic Church (or “the Church” for short, and abbreviated as the RCC in this article)
- **The Renaissance** was the period of cultural revival which started towards the end of the Middle Ages (14th century) until the 17th century [6] [7]
  - It was characterized by a renewed interest in Greek science and philosophy, as well as the classical Latin literature
  - It led to a big revival in art and music, some first advances in science (like the Copernican Revolution in 1543), the invention of the printing press which spread literacy and information more widely, the origins of humanism, the first challenges to the authority of the Church and laying the ground work for the Enlightenment
  - The Church still retained most of its power during the Renaissance
- **The Enlightenment** was roughly the period from the end of the 17th Century to the end of the 18th century, when significant intellectual developments took place (see Section 2.3 below). After the Enlightenment the power of Christianity was greatly reduced.

## 1.4 Approach

- I'm working on the assumption that if Christianity provided the foundational values of Western civilization:
  - Those values will be present in their religious scriptures, which are claimed to be a revelation
  - They would have instilled those values in the first 1000 years or so of their existence
- For this reason, I'm going to investigate the Bible for explicit references to these values, and I'm going to focus on the history of the West until the end of the Middle Ages in 1453
  - This is about 1400 after the beginning of Christianity
  - It's also includes 1,073 years of them having full political power in the West (from 380 - 1453)
  - It is not possible to draw firm lines when looking at historical periods. For this reason my investigation will in some cases cross over into the century or 2 following the Middle Ages
- I will then explore how and when these values emerged in the West and investigate the response of the Christian churches to these developments.



[Image credit: Dreamstime]

## 2 Freedom of Religion

The majority of Christians today strongly support freedom of religion now that their political power is dwindling, and in most cases seem to think that it is a Biblical or Christian concept. Let's investigate.

### 2.1 The Bible

- Old Testament

- The Old Testament advocates the opposite of freedom of religion, the compulsory worship of the “right” god punishable by death. Israelites who did not worship the right god (Yahweh), had to be killed, even by their own family (Deut 13: 6-10)
- The prophets of Baal had to be killed (I Kings 18: 36-40)
- Israelite men had to be killed if they participated in Moabite religious rituals (Num 25: 1-5)
- “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Ex 22:18)
- New Testament
  - Jesus and the New Testament are silent on freedom of religion, which is odd in itself, since god apparently completely changed his mind on this fundamental issue, without revealing that to anybody.

## 2.2 Christianity before the Enlightenment

- Christianity did not support freedom of religion for most of its history. Since Christianity became the official and compulsory religion of the Roman Empire with the Edict of Thessalonica in 380, it brutally persecuted pagans, “witches”, heretics (fellow Christians who disagreed with the Church dogma of the day), scientists, etc. for 1,500 years. See this CSF “Historic Moments” article for more details: [Christianity starts its 1,500 years of Persecution - The CSF](#).
- After the Reformation, the Protestant Churches in Europe also took a strong line against protestant heretics and witches
  - Michael Servetus, a Spanish physician and Christian theologian who escaped the Spanish Inquisition, was burnt at the stake in Switzerland on 27 Oct 1553 as a heretic because he disagreed with the doctrine of the Trinity on Biblical grounds. John Calvin requested his initial arrest in Geneva, was active in his trial and advocated the death penalty for him [8]
  - They were especially active in witch trials, based on Exodus 22. Academic estimates put the executions of “witches” from 1450-1750 to over 50,000, with a climax reached in protestant Germany in the 17th century [9]
- [Note: When I write about the brutal persecution by the Church during the Middle Ages or the barbaric morality they enforced, it is neither an indication of emotive language due to bias, a rhetorical device for melodramatic effect, nor an exaggeration. It is just a sad, accurate, well-documented and highly relevant, historical fact. Section 7 in this Morality article goes into details, if you’re unfamiliar with the history of Christianity: [The CSF Morality Series, Part 2: Does Christianity have an Objective Morality? - The CSF](#)]
- After the Reformation a series of religious wars were waged between Christians in Europe during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries [10]
  - The Scottish Reformation involved a series of violent conflicts from 1560, including the destruction and looting of churches and friaries
  - The French Wars of Religion between French Catholics and Protestants (mainly Reformed) raged from 1562 to 1598 [11]. The death toll is estimated between 4 million and 12 million
  - The Eighty Years’ War (1568 - 1648): Protestants against Catholics in the Low Lands
  - The Thirty Years’ War in Germany (1618 - 1648): Protestants (mostly Lutherans, Reformed and Hussites) against Catholics to prevent Matthias King of Bohemia to be succeeded by his staunchly Catholic cousin, Ferdinand
  - Several other wars had a religious component to it (like the English Civil War)
  - There were numerous religious rebellions and even more religious riots during these 3 centuries of conflict between Catholics and Protestants.

## 2.3 The Emergence of Freedom of Religion in the West

- This only started to change with **the Enlightenment** and the weakening of the political power of Christianity

- A great source on the Enlightenment is “Secularism - A Very Short Introduction” by Andrew Copson (in the Oxford University Press’ “Very Short Introductions” series)
- It describes the Enlightenment as follows: **“The age of Enlightenment in European thought runs from the late 17th to the late 18th century and is characterized by the growth of science and by the challenging of dogma and pursuit of freedom in academic, political, and personal life”** [12]
- Philosophers like John Locke (1632-1704) and John Stuart Mill (1806 - 1873) in England, David Hume (1711-1776) and Adam Smith (1723-1792) in Scotland, as well as Montesquieu (1689-1755), Voltaire (1694-1778) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) in France (among others) paved the way for the acceptance of Freedom of Religion and the other core Western values covered below
- A number of ideologies (like Liberalism and Feminism) came from the Enlightenment, and in conjunction with science starting to blossom, played a big role in eventually emancipating ordinary people from the iron fist of both the Church and nobility



*Bust of the English Enlightenment Philosopher, John Locke, in the Trinity College Library in Dublin, Ireland [Image credit: Dreamstime]*

- The 18th century was clearly an especially significant century of change in the Western World, which had a major impact on the foundations of Western Civilization as we know it
  - The main **Enlightenment Philosophers**, listed above
  - The **French Revolution** (1789-1799), with its world-famous motto **“Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite”** (“Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”), was one of the most significant historical developments in the West. They tried, and then executed King Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, abolished the French monarchy, heavily criticized the Church, laid the foundation for the secular society of France, formally separated Church and State in 1795 and generally made a major contribution to establishing all 5 the fundamental Western values we are investigating
    - Their **Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen** on 26 August 1789 articulated all of these core values [13]

- Clause 10 applies to Freedom of Religion: “10. No one should be disturbed for his opinions, even in religion, provided that their manifestation does not trouble public order as established by law.”
- There are no religious arguments or substantiating Bible verses used in this historic declaration
- The RCC was a strong opponent of the Enlightenment Philosophers and especially the French Revolution, which decimated its influence in France. In 1791 Pope Pius VI condemned the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen as “against the social order ordained by God” and “a conspiracy against the Church” [14]



A set of paintings depicting the leadership of the French Revolution, including Robespierre, de Lafayette and Danton [Image credit: Dreamstime]

- The **US Constitution** (1788), and especially its 1st Amendment ratified as part of the **Bill of Rights** in 1791, was an important turning point regarding Freedom of Religion
  - 1st Amendment: “**Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof**; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”
  - Some of the Founding Fathers were heavily influenced by the Enlightenment, especially John Locke
  - Despite this 1st Amendment there are still 7 states in the US with constitutions which include religious tests that effectively prevent atheists from holding public office (Arkansas, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas) [15]
- Christianity gradually started to accept Freedom of Religion from the end of the 17th Century
  - The Church of England
    - John Locke, an early and influential Enlightenment Philosopher in England, wrote his “A Letter Concerning Toleration” in 1685. It formed the basis of the **Toleration Act** passed by the British Parliament in 1689 [16]
    - Prior to the Act religious dissenters (heretics) were persecuted and excluded from official office
    - With this 1689 Act most Christian dissent was legalized, but the following exclusions still existed:
      - Christians rejecting the Trinity doctrine (finally granted with the Unitarians Relief Act of 1813)
      - Roman Catholics (partially granted with the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829, but some legal discrimination remained)
      - Jews (granted with the Jews Relief Act of 1858)

- Atheists
- The Church of England became the first Christian Church to accept some Freedom of Religion
- It is important to note that it was based on the writings of John Locke and that the lead was taken by the British Parliament
- The Roman Catholic Church
  - In France the Edict of Nantes was issued by King Henry IV in 1598, which granted protestants freedom of religion in France and ended the French Wars of Religion [17]. It was revoked by Louis XIV in 1685 [18]
  - In the Habsburg Empire the first steps towards Freedom of Religion were introduced by Emperor Joseph II. He was a Catholic, a supporter of the Enlightenment and issued many edicts to reform the RCC within his Empire [19] [20]
    - On 13 Oct 1781 he issued the **Patent of Toleration**, which gave Lutherans, Calvinists and the Orthodox Church the legal right to hold “private religious exercises”
    - He followed that on 2 Jan 1782 with the **Edict of Toleration for Jews**, which extended religious liberties to them too and which also allowed them access to commercial professions and trades. Some discrimination remained
    - Pope Pius VI visited the Emperor in March 1782 to personally convey his opposition to these reforms
    - It is important to note that these first steps towards Freedom of Religion in the RCC were the initiatives of the state and opposed by the Pope
  - As recently as 8 Dec 1864 Pope Pius IX officially issued “The Syllabus of Errors” in which he listed and condemned 80 heresies [21]
    - Articles 15 and 78 listed Freedom of Religion as one of these heresies, in line with their views and actions over the previous 1,500 years.
    - Article 55 listed the separation of church and state as another heresy. Until about 40 years earlier they still executed people for heresy and blasphemy.
  - **The RCC only officially accepted freedom of religion on 7 Dec 1965** at the 4th Session of the 2nd Vatican Council, with 70 cardinals voting against it [22]. In my own lifetime!
  - A CSF Historic Moments article “The RCC accepting Freedom of Religion” is scheduled for 4 Nov 2022.
- Protestant Churches in the US
  - In “America’s True History of Religious Tolerance” Kenneth Davis writes “The idea that the United States has always been a bastion of religious freedom is reassuring—and utterly at odds with the historical record” [23]. He points out that:
    - The Puritans fleeing to the US for religious freedom only wanted this freedom for themselves and were utterly intolerant even towards other Christians
    - Even after religious freedom was included in the new US Constitution and Bill of Rights (see below), there were many examples of religious discrimination, including institutionalized discrimination.



[Image credit: Dreamstime]

## 3 Freedom of Speech

### 3.1 The Bible

- Old Testament
  - Advocates the death penalty for blasphemy (Lev 24:16)
  - False prophets had to be killed (Deut: 18:20), which negates both Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Religion
  - “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Ex 22:18), likewise applying to both Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Religion
  - It actually does not even allow freedom of thought. According to the 10th commandment in Ex 20:17, Israelites were not allowed to covet the house or wife of their neighbours, even if they did not express these thoughts or acted on them.
- New Testament
  - “Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” (Matt 5: 22)
  - Mark 3:29 states that “whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin”
  - Matt 12:36: “But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken”
  - And Matt 5:28 continues the concept of thought crimes: “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (even if it was not verbally expressed or acted upon).

### 3.2 Christianity before the Enlightenment

- For most of its history Christianity did not allow freedom of speech at all. People could not criticize the Church or the Pope, they could not “blaspheme”, they could not interpret the Bible in a different way than the orthodoxy of the time and scientists could not even publish research results contradicting the ignorant cosmology we find in the Bible
- Most of this was punishable by death
- The RCC instituted 4 different Inquisitions from 1184 onward (the Medieval Inquisition, the Spanish Inquisition, the Portuguese Inquisition and the Roman Inquisition) [24]. They were the absolute antithesis of freedom of speech, using the justification that propagating something other than Church dogma could lead people to hell, in other words they argued they were saving souls with their violent persecution
  - These inquisitions brutally tortured and executed hundreds of thousands of pagans and Christian heretics over the next 7 centuries
  - The last execution by the Spanish Inquisition for blasphemy was in 1826
- Without Freedom of Speech, true scientific investigation is not really possible. It is no coincidence that science only blossomed since the Enlightenment and the decline of the political power of Christianity

### 3.3 The Emergence of Freedom of Speech in the West

- Classical Greece was the birth place of freedom of speech [25]. Two strong proponents of freedom of speech among the Ancient Greek Philosophers were:
  - Euripides (480 - 406 BCE)
  - Demosthenes (384 - 322 BCE)
- The English Bill of Rights (1689) established the right of ordinary people to petition the king and of free debate in Parliament [26]
- The French Revolution (1789-1799)
  - Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 26 August 1789 [27]
  - Clause 11 applies to Freedom of Speech: “11. The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may therefore speak, write, and print freely, if he accepts his own responsibility for any abuse of this liberty in the cases set by the law.”
- US 1st Amendment (1791):
  - “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances”



1st Amendment to the US Constitution [Image credit: Dreamstime]

- Even though the Enlightenment was successful in emancipating people from the grip of the Church, the influence of the Church lingered on for centuries. For example, blasphemy laws continued in the West long after the Enlightenment [28]:
  - Germany and Italy (not abolished yet)
  - Ireland (2020)
  - Canada (2018)
  - The Netherlands (2014)
  - UK (2008)
  - Australia abolished blasphemy laws on the federal level in 1995 but 4 of its States still have blasphemy laws today
  - Sweden (1970)
- The RCC still has not yet fully accepted Freedom of Speech or Freedom of the Press [29]:
  - The RCC openly demonstrated their resistance to Freedom of Speech during the Enlightenment in the 18th century by adding all the books of prominent Enlightenment Philosophers like Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hume and others to their official list of Prohibited Books.
  - In 1850 Pope Pius IX classified freedom of the press and freedom of association as “intrinsically evil”
  - On 20 Dec 1926 Pope Pius XI stated “Catholics may not support, favor, or read papers which are edited by men whose writings are in notable opposition to Catholic doctrine in faith and morals ...”
  - To this day they still have elaborate mechanisms in place for censorship and to boycott unfriendly literature.



*The Statue of Liberty on Staten Island in New York [Image credit: Dreamstime]*

## 4 Individual Liberty

I am going to spend more time on Liberty than on the other values, because this is such a big topic, it is a good case study for our thesis, and there are many biased/misleading articles about it. Since I cannot allocate too much space to this section, a dedicated follow-up CSF Article **“Slavery and the Catholic Church” is scheduled for 21 Oct 2022**, to cover it in more depth and especially address Catholic apologetics who attempt to rewrite history with the highly selective and disingenuous use of historical facts.

### 4.1 The Bible

- Old Testament
  - Does not only condone slavery, but provides explicit instructions on how to:
    - Buy slaves (Lev 25: 44-46)
    - Take slaves (including sex slaves) as spoils of war (Num 31: 1-54)
    - Sell your daughters into slavery (Ex 21: 7-11)
    - Treat slaves, including the divine instruction that it is acceptable to assault and kill your own slaves because they are your property, as long as they don't die on the same day (Ex 21: 20-21)
- New Testament
  - **“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ”** (Eph 6:5). This is a very strong and explicit endorsement of slavery. See also Col 3: 22

### 4.2 Christianity before the Enlightenment

- So it should come as no surprise that slavery was an inherent part of the Western world for most of its history
- The Roman Empire had a big slave class, which continued unchanged after Christianity became the official and compulsory state religion in 380
- The RCC has a very long and well-documented history of supporting and justifying slavery. Two exceptionally thorough and objective sources are [30] [31]
- Here is a list of the most common Biblical and theological justifications the RCC used for more than 1500 years [32]
  - Several explicit Biblical passages: the Apostle Paul's endorsement of slavery in the New Testament (Col 3: 22-4: 1, Eph 6: 5-9, I Tim 6: 1-2, Titus 2 : 9-10), the Curse of Ham in Gen 9: 18-27 and the Servant of God title in Isaiah 53: 1-12 [33]
  - The authority of several earlier Church Councils which accepted slavery, like the Council of Gangra (345), the Council of Carthage (419), the Council of Chalcedon (451), the Council of Orleans (549) and the 4th Council of Toledo (633) [34]
  - The authority of the early Church Fathers who all approved of slavery, like St Basil of Caesarea (329-379), St Ambrose of Milan (330-397), St Gregory of Nyssa (335-395), St John Chrysostom (347-407) and St Augustine of Hippo (354-430). They all regarded slavery as a justified and penal institution from their god due to original sin [35]
  - Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was probably the most influential Catholic theologian in history. He agreed with the unanimous views of the early Church Fathers, but he added additional justifications for slavery [36]
    - Following Aristotle he argues that some people are not as wise and strong as others, and that it is for their benefit, and that of the social order, that they are ruled by others. That would make slavery acceptable, even if there were no sin
    - Aquinas promoted the "just war theory" as a justified means to acquire slaves
    - "This thomistic justification of both slavery and the just war theory was entirely accepted by the Church" [37]



*A mural of St Thomas Aquinas on the Church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, Italy [Image credit: Dreamstime]*

- After supporting slavery for its entire history the RCC was also instrumental in the new Transatlantic Slave Trade (1418 - 1839), a very dark chapter in the history of the West
  - Initially the two main countries involved in the Transatlantic slave trade were both Catholic countries (Portugal and Spain) and they acted on the initiative of their Catholic kings. All the other major participants were Christian-majority countries: Britain, France, The Netherlands and Denmark.
  - The Catholic King of Portugal, King John I, came up with the plan for an “African Crusade” to expand his territory, get control of lucrative trade routes in Africa, to fight Muslim infidels and to take the Christian message to Africa [38]
    - He acquired the approval and blessing of Pope Martin V for his plan, which he received with the official Papal Bull “Sane Charissimus” on 4 April 1418 [39]
    - With this Bull the Pope assumed authority over Africa and the expansion of Portuguese territory and classified black Africans on another continent as “enemies of the Christian religion”
    - Prince Henry the Navigator (son of King John I) gifted 10 slaves brought back from the 1st expedition in 1421 to Pope Martin V for his support as “he wanted to proclaim this good news to pope Martin V”
  - As early as 1444 we witnessed the first Portuguese expedition to Africa with the sole purpose of capturing slaves, as well as the first public auction of African slaves. Two slaves from this expedition were not auctioned but gifted to the Church “as a thanks-offering to God for the success of the venture” [40]. Some people regard this date as the real start of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.
  - The 14 Popes from 1417 to 1537 (the so-called Renaissance Popes, starting with Martin V) all had some level of involvement with the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and they issued numerous official Papal Bulls in support of the slave trade from 1418 to 1514 [39]. Later Popes and contemporary apologetics completely ignore these Bulls. Two good examples
    - Papal Bull “Dum Diversas” issued in 1452 by Pope Nicholas V
      - An excerpt from this Bull: “We grant to you by these present documents with our Apostolic authority, **full and free permission to invade, search out, capture and subjugate the Saracens and pagans and any other unbelievers and enemies of Christ wherever they may be, as well as their kingdoms, duchies, counties, principalities, lands, towns, villas and other properties... and to reduce their persons into perpetual slavery.**” [41]
      - The Bull ended with a threat of excommunication for anybody who challenged it
    - Pope Paul III’s decree on 9 November 1548 (Motu Proprio “Confirmatio Statutorum Populi Romani super Restitutione Servorum in Urbe”). In this decree Paul III declares both the slave trade and slavery as legal and that anybody can participate in that, including clerics:
  - The RCC was a big slave owner in different territories and also benefitted directly from the slave trade
    - According to the British historian, Charles Boxer, “The Church itself was, and continued to be **a slave-holding institution on a massive scale** in the Iberian colonial empires.” [43]
    - The Jesuit Order was slave owners in the US (see below “Slavery in the US”)
    - **Multiple Popes bought slaves for their Galleys**, like Pope Urban VIII in 1629, Pope Innocent X in 1645, and Pope Alexander VII in 1661 [44]
  - On 20 June 1686 official guidance was issued by the Holy Office in Rome under Pope Innocent XI in response to a question from the Catholic Church in Ethiopia: “**Slavery itself, considered as such in its essential nature is not at all contrary to the natural and divine law**, and there can be several **just titles of slavery** and these are referred to by approved theologians and commentators of the sacred canons” [45]

### 4.3 The Emergence of Individual Liberty in the West

- Although slavery was a widely accepted practice in Ancient and Classical Greece, we once again find the roots of individual liberty there
  - Solon became the Chief Magistrate of Athens in 594 BCE. He canceled all debts in Athens, freed all debt slaves and effectively put an end to the practice of enslaving Greek citizens [46]
  - The Ancient Greek Philosopher, Alcidas, went 1 step further in the 4th century BCE by arguing that that slavery was not natural and that "*nature has made nobody a slave*" [47]
- The Enlightenment
  - Enlightenment Philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806 - 1873) argued that human freedom was required for progress in all human endeavours, like science, politics and law
  - The French Revolution (1789-1799)
    - Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 26 August 1789 [48]
    - Clause 1 applies to Individual Liberty and Equality: "1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on common utility."
  - The US Bill of Rights (1791)



[Image credit: Dreamstime]

- The gradual termination of the Transatlantic Slave Trade from 1807 under the influence of the British Government
  - The British Government took the initiative to ban their slave trade in 1807 with the Slave Trade Act [49]
  - They subsequently embarked on a concerted political and diplomatic campaign to have the Transatlantic Slave Trade completely abolished and was instrumental in [50]
    - Sweden banning it in 1813
    - The Netherlands banning it in 1814
    - France signing a treaty in 1814 to ban it within 5 years
    - The Vienna Declaration of 1815 in which most European powers condemned the slave trade.
  - In 1833 the British Government passed the Slavery Abolition Act which abolished slavery as an institution in the British Empire and all its colonies

- Portugal, continued its lucrative slave trade despite Britain's efforts [51]:
  - In 1836 Portugal eventually banned the slave trade
  - They only abolished slavery in their African colonies in 1869
  - And they finally abolished it in their last colony (Brazil) in 1888
- Two official Papal Bulls eventually condemned
  - The Transatlantic Slave Trade: “In Supremo Apostolatus” issued by Pope Gregory XVI in 1839
  - Slavery as an institution: “Encyclical on Slavery to the Missions” by Pope Leo XIII on 20 Nov 1890
- However, both these Bulls were quite selective in how they use historical facts and both were much too late. Catholic apologetics follow the examples of these Popes by selectively using historical facts in the same way, and they also find these 2 Papal Bulls very useful to quote, without the proper historical context
  - When **Pope Gregory XVI** finally issued the first ever Papal Bull condemning the Atlantic Slave Trade in **1839 (“In Supremo Apostolatus”)** [52], the historical context is quite important:
    - By then the slave trade was already abolished, even by Portugal (but there were still indications of some slave expeditions going ahead despite the official bans)
    - There was not a single Pope who explicitly denounced it during its more than 400-year existence
    - The few Papal Bulls condemning slavery during this time were applicable to the enslavement of Indians in the West Indies by Spain or the enslavement of Christian natives in the Canary Islands, both regarded as “unjust slavery” by the Church
    - An example: Papal Bull “Sicut Dudum” by Pope Eugene IV in 1435 about enslavement of Christian natives in the Canary Islands. In the next 7 years he issued 3 other Bulls in support of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Guess which of his 4 Bulls are quoted by Catholic apologetics?
    - Britain approached Pope Gregory XVI for his support in 1838 through their Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston [53]. He did not issue this Bull on own initiative, just like he did not speak out against the slave trade in the preceding 7 years of his Papacy
    - His Bull was only against the slave trade and not against slavery as an institution
    - The Pope is guilty of an attempt to rewrite history by selectively using historical facts with this Bull [54]
      - Adiele, a contemporary black Catholic Theologian who did more thorough and objective research on slavery than anybody, politely accuses the Pope of lying about the Church’s “constant fight” against enslavement
      - And historian Jeremy Watts points out “Beyond In Supremo's misuse of anti-slave trade sources in Catholic history, the Bull also omitted mention of past papal commendations of the African slave trade”
      - To which I would add that he also completely ignores the entire history of his Church issuing official theological and Biblical justifications for slavery
  - And when **Pope Leo XIII** issued his “**Encyclical on Slavery to the Missions**” on **20 Nov 1890** and became the first Pope to condemn slavery as an institution [55]:
    - He is also guilty of selectively using facts in this Encyclical
      - He starts by saying: “As you know, venerable brother, the Church from the beginning sought to completely eliminate slavery, whose wretched yoke has oppressed many people”. This is simply not true, and there is a mountain of evidence, including a large number of official Church documents, proving it to be untrue
      - He lists 12 of his predecessors who “stand out” for their efforts to abolish slavery. Maxwell states “With the greatest respect to Pope Leo XIII this is historically inaccurate”, he points out that 5 of the 12 are on record for supporting slavery, that the other 7 only condemned what they regarded as “unjust” slavery, and he laments this whitewashing of the Church's involvement in slavery [56]

- He also ignores the entire history of his Church officially justifying slavery
  - Like with the Transatlantic Slave Trade, this was also after the fact and much too late. Slavery ceased to be a major problem by 1888 and the RCC lagged well behind Western governments abolishing it. The RCC followed, they did not lead.
- Slavery in the US
    - RCC
      - The RCC in the US did not condemn slavery before it was abolished
      - The Jesuit Order was a slave owner with about 400 slaves in 1820. This was partially used to fund the construction of their Georgetown University. There is record of them selling 272 slaves in 1838 [57] [58]
    - Protestant Churches made Biblical arguments for slavery in the US even during the 19th century [59]:
      - The Baptist Church in the South was the most vocal supporter of slavery
      - Several other churches were also involved, like the Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Lutheran Church. This involvement included slave-owning by the institution or the clergy, theological support for slavery, or financial benefit from slavery.
      - Protestant Churches in the US used many of the same justifications for slavery as the Catholic Church.
    - Abolition
      - The new US Constitution and its Bill of Rights accepted in 1791 eloquently advocates freedom, while continuing to practice slavery
      - The US banned the import of slaves from 1 Jan 1808, shortly after Britain banned their slave trade in 1807
      - The abolition of slavery as an institution in the US with the ratification of the 13th Amendment on 6 Dec 1865, without the RCC in the US condemning it [60]
  - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): “Art. 1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” [61]. The influence of the French Revolution is clearly visible in this clause.



[Image credit: Dreamstime]

## 5 Equality

### 5.1 The Bible

- Old Testament
  - Gays did not have equal rights, they had to be killed (Lev 20: 13)
  - Women were by no means equal and were treated as the property of men:
    - A woman should be stoned to death if she cannot prove that she was a virgin on her wedding night (Deut 22: 20-21)
    - Deut 22: 28-29. Rape did not make the 10 Commandments and was regarded as a transgression against the property of another man with a fine to be paid to him as a suitable punishment, and transfer of ownership to the rapist (while the death penalty was enforced for disrespectful kids or picking up sticks on the Sabbath)
    - Women ruled by their husbands (Gen 3: 16)
    - The vows of a woman could be nullified by her father or her husband (Num 30: 4-8)
  - Slaves were neither free, nor equal (see Section 4, above)
  - Deut 22: 1 - 3: "No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the LORD. 2 No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. 3 No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation."
- New Testament
  - Women should be submissive to men, and men are the head of the household (1 Cor 11: 6-9, Eph 5: 22, Titus 2: 3-4)

- “I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.” (I Tim 2: 12). Also I Cor 14: 34-35.

## 5.2 Christianity before the Enlightenment

- A quick historical note to start with: **The Code of Ur-Nammu** is the oldest legal code which survived, and its fragments are on display in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. It is from Mesopotamia and is credited to King Ur-Nammu of Ur (2112 - 2095 BC) [62]. **It predates the Code of Hammurabi by about 3 centuries and the 10 Commandments by about 8 centuries** [63][64].
  - It outlawed murder, robbery, adultery and rape as capital offenses
  - It not only predates the 10 Commandments, but was superior to it since it established rape as a capital offense too
  - And it shows that neither Judaism nor Christianity introduced even basic morals not to kill to our species and our planet
- Gen 1: 27 is part of the Biblical creation myth and it states “So God created man in his own image”. Since the Bible also contains a large number of other verses advocating slavery, women as the property of men, and other discrimination, it is clearly not the foundation of social equality or of the Enlightenment value of Equality. Christianity’s long history of misogyny, inequality, racism and discrimination confirms that
- The Feudal System was in place in Europe for most of the Middle Ages. It was a strict hierarchical political, economic and social system with 3 social classes: Clergy, Nobility and Serfs [65]”.
  - The large majority of people were serfs, bound to the land and in service of their lord, who controlled every part of their lives. In addition, the lords were ruled by an autocratic king (and of course the Church).
  - Equality of all people was a preposterous idea in the Christian Middle Ages [66]
- The position of women was even worse:
  - They could not have any position of power in the Church; they could only become nuns. Women actually still cannot even be ordained as priests in the RCC
  - Although there were cases of noble women becoming queens with political power, that was the exception rather than the rule. Land and power typically passed from father to son
  - And female serfs had all the same restrictions than male serfs, but they were also subservient to their fathers, husbands and often other male family. Their lord often had full power over their marriages
  - The Middle Ages was a time of “**tremendous gender discrimination**” [67]
- Women had more freedom and empowerment in Viking society than in Christian Europe [68]
- Slaves were, of course, not equal either. And Black slaves, suffering the supposed curse of Ham, were at the bottom of the social hierarchy under Christianity

## 5.3 The Emergence of Equality in the West

- Although Classical Greece by no means supported equality in the modern sense of the word, the concept of equality was nevertheless hotly debated and implemented to some degree [69]
  - Aristotle extensively wrote about equality in his Nicomachean Ethics. He distinguished between numerical (identical) equality and proportionate equality
  - The Stoics developed the concept of universal, moral equality of all rational beings.
- Thomas Hobbes asserted in 1651 that individuals possess equal rights
- The French Revolution (1789-1799)
  - Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 26 August 1789 [70]
  - Clause 1 applies to Individual Liberty and Equality: “1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on common utility.”

- The US Bill of Rights (1791), but it has to be added that steps like these were small first steps on a long journey. Some of the US Founding Fathers, who passionately wrote about freedom and equality, were slave owners in a country where women could not vote
- Despite the fact that slavery was abolished in the US in 1865, there was still a long road ahead to achieve equality for Black Americans. The Civil Rights Movement had its heyday from 1950 - 1964 [71]
  - The Civil Rights Act of 1964 contained comprehensive measures to dismantle segregation and racial discrimination
  - The Voting Rights Act of 1965 contained measures to combat black disenfranchisement
- Blacks, women and the LGBTQI+ community had a very long struggle for equality in the West. This is by no means over, as a matter of fact it looks like the Christian Right in the US has a concerted agenda to roll back civil liberties
  - Sociology Professor, Kehinde Andrews, states point-blank that “The West was built on racism. It’s time we face that” [72]
  - Historically there was a strong correlation between Christianity and racism, with many churches actively promoting racism and white supremacy
    - The RCC and numerous Protestant Churches interpreted the Curse of Ham in Gen 9: 18-27 in racial terms and used it as Biblical justification for slavery and racism
    - White supremacy and Neo-Nazism still exist among Christians world-wide and also seems to be on the rise again, notably in Europe, the USA and Russia. There are numerous Christian groups involved with them. One of the influential ones is Christian Identity [73]
    - Apartheid in South Africa had strong support from white Afrikaans churches, which explicitly used Biblical justification for apartheid and discrimination. The first free and fair elections there, with full black participation, were only held in 1995
  - Robert Jones, author of “White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity”, and a white US Christian himself, argues that White Supremacy is “in the DNA of white Christianity”. He also compiled very interesting statistics (including a Racism Index) based on the PRRI Surveys in 2018 [74]:
    - “Compared to nonreligious whites, white Christians register higher median scores on the Racism Index, and the differences among white Christian subgroups are largely differences of degree rather than kind”
    - “The relationship between holding racist views and white Christian identity is actually stronger among more frequent church attenders than among less frequent church attenders”
- The influential activist for women’s suffrage, women’s property rights and the abolition of slavery, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), wrote: “**The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of women’s emancipation.**” [75]



A 1948 US Postage stamp depicting Elizabeth Stanton, Carrie Catt and Lucretia Mott [Image credit: Dreamstime]

- In most Western countries women only received the right to vote in the 20th century [76]:
  - Italy (1945)
  - France (1944)
  - Canada (1940, with Aboriginal women in 1960)
  - UK (1928)
  - USA (1920, with full legal protection in 1965)
  - Australia (1902, and 1962 for indigenous women)
- Women still do not have equality in many Christian churches [77][78]
  - The RCC and the Eastern Orthodox Church still do not ordain women to this day
  - The Church of England (CoE) started ordaining women in 1994 and consecrated its first female bishop in 2015
  - The Church of Denmark was the first Lutheran Church to ordain women in 1948
- The ordination of women is a good case study to illustrate how Christianity continues to change to fit in with civilization
  - There are vehement differences between the Christian churches on the equality of women in their churches
  - The RCC succeeded in ignoring explicit passages about slavery in the New Testament, but not passages about the inequality of women (yet)
  - Those who now accept equality for women, only started doing that in the last few decades and by ignoring (or reinterpreting, which amounts to exactly the same thing) explicit New Testament passages prohibiting it
  - However, they like to use more sophisticated theological rationalizations for their dogmatic and moral changes. Let's use the ordaining of women in the CoE as an example of this time-tested approach in action :

- By the 1970s and 1980s the Enlightenment value of Equality had broad acceptance across Europe. In the UK Margaret Thatcher was the first female PM from 1979 - 1990, while they also had Queen Elizabeth II on the throne
- By the 1980s a majority of members of the CoE was in favour of ordaining female priests, but the CoE then still did not allow that on Biblical grounds. This resulted in a loss of members because they were seen as irredeemably patriarchal [79]
- This was the catalyst for soul searching in the early 1990s, during which “theologians revisited Christian scriptures and traditions” [79]
  - It brought them to the realization, at that exact moment in time, that the explicit New Testament injunctions, like I Tim 2: 12, were actually “culturally and temporally specific”
  - They also decided that other much more vague passages, like Gen 1: 27 (a part of the Old Testament creation myth), were not culturally specific and discovered that these passages were quite useful to make a theological argument for the Enlightenment value of Equality
  - And so they ordained their first 32 female priests on 12 March 1994 at Bristol Cathedral [78]
- They followed, they did not lead, and went out of their way to find theological and Biblical justifications for following public opinion, which in turn was formed by the legacy of the Enlightenment.



*The Rule of Law Gallery at the Ohio Supreme Court, Columbus, Ohio, USA [Image credit: Dreamstime]*

## **6 The Rule of Law**

### **6.1 The Bible**

- Old Testament
  - The Rule of Law is completely foreign to the Old Testament

- Instead it promotes theocracy, where the final power rests with their god, kings are appointed by this god, they rule on his behalf and therefore have a divine right to authority (the so-called Divine Right of Kings)
- This led to absolute power based in the king, the exact opposite of the Rule of Law. It also concentrated enormous power in the hands of those claiming to speak on behalf of their deity and claiming to know who this deity wanted anointed as king.
- I Sam 10: 1 (Samuel anointing King Saul on behalf of god), I Sam 16: 13 (Samuel anointing David as king on direct personal instruction of god), Deut 17: 14-15 (their god selecting the king)
- New Testament
  - No Rule of Law in the NT either, but a continuation of the Divine Right of Kings
  - Rom 13: 1-7 (explicitly claiming that all political power is from their god), and John 19: 10-11 (Jesus telling Pontius Pilate that his political power as Roman Governor is from god)

## 6.2 Christianity before the Enlightenment

- The Church did not advocate the Rule of Law at all before the Enlightenment
- “Originating in Europe, the divine-right theory can be traced to the medieval conception of God’s award of temporal power to the political ruler, paralleling the award of spiritual power to the church.” [80]
- During the Middle Ages the Divine Right of Kings was accepted on Biblical grounds. This right was based in the office of kingship
- Despite some power struggles between kings/emperors and the Pope, there largely was synergy. The Church legitimized the King, unified his subjects and promoted his authority. The King, in turn, protected the Church and provided it with political power/influence
- Neither the Church nor the nobility advocated the rights of the ordinary citizens, providing the background to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment
- “By the 16th and 17th centuries, however, the new national monarchs were asserting their authority in matters of both church and state” [80]
  - The English Parliament passed the first Act of Supremacy in 1534. It asserted the independence of the Church in England from Rome and Henry VIII as the “Supreme Head of the Church of England”. This reduced the political power of the RCC and Christianity, but entrenched the King’s power and the Divine Right of Kings
  - Charles I of England used this doctrine and claimed that the Divine Right was based in the person of the king and not just in the office
  - Louis XIV of France was also a strong proponent of the Divine Right of Kings.

## 6.3 The Emergence of the Rule of Law in the West

- The roots of the rule of law is once again to be found in Classical Greece. Aristotle (384 - 322 BCE) introduced the concept of the rule of law in his work “Politics” published circa 350 BCE, several centuries before Christ [81]:
  - He raised the question whether it is better for a society to be governed by a good man or good laws
  - He pointed out risks of abuse of power and tyranny if there is no rule of law. “Aristotle stated that “the rule of law . . . is preferable to that of any individual.” This is because individuals possess flaws and could tailor government to their own individual interests, whereas the rule of law is objective.” [82].
- The Rule of Law is the only fundamental value of Western Civilization, which started to emerge before the Enlightenment. It can be traced back to the Magna Carta, a very historic document signed by King John of England on 15 June 1215 when he accepted the demands of his revolting noblemen [83]
  - They revolted against his poor reign characterized by excessive abuse of power. Its 63 clauses mostly deal with the many practical grievances of his noblemen, but also include some values which challenge the autocracy of the king

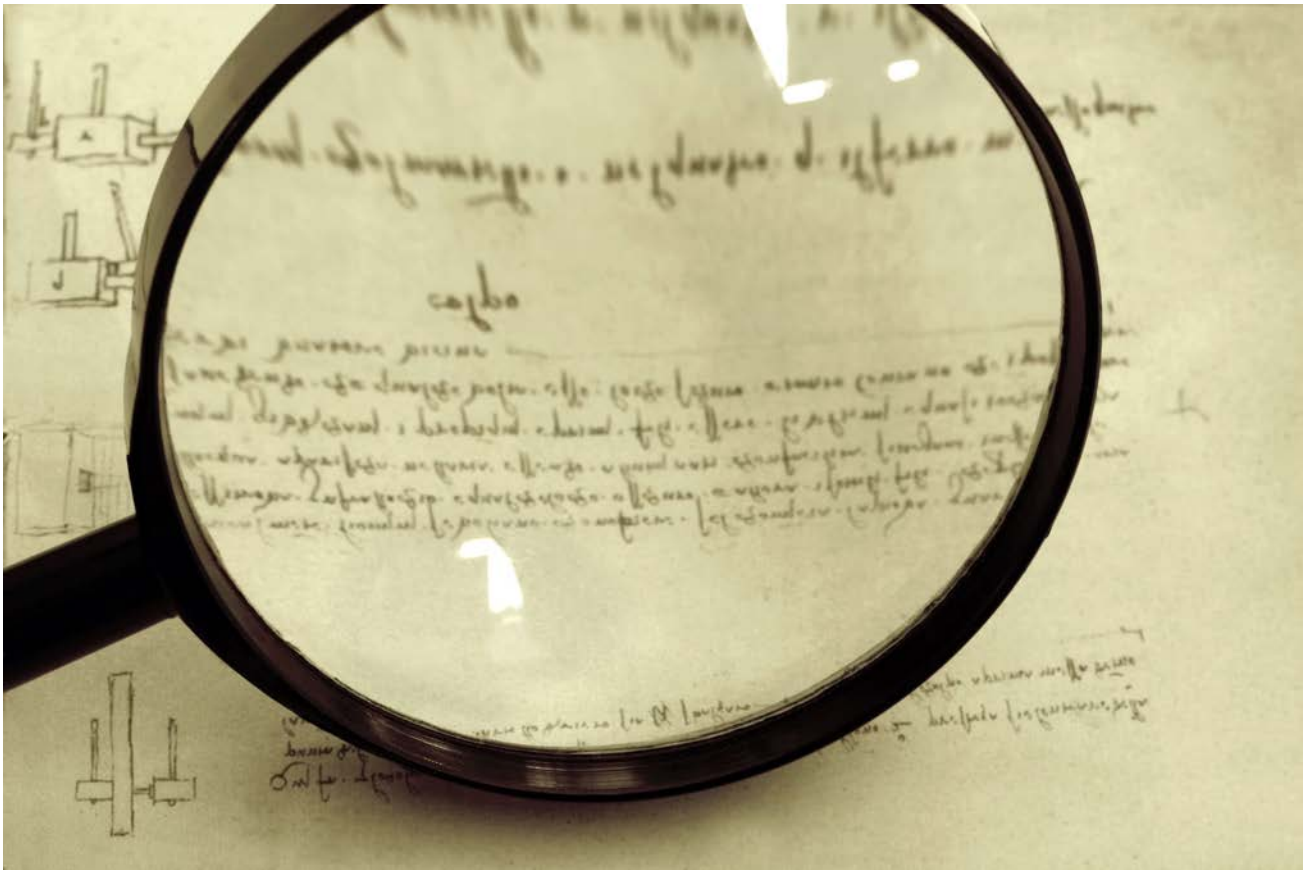
- **The Magna Carta established the principle that everybody is subject to the law, even the king**
- Revised versions were issued in the name of the young King Henry III and in 1225 when he turned 18 he issued a much revised version which became a historic document of great significance [84]



*Effigies of the barons behind the Magna Carta, outside Salisbury Cathedral, Wilshire, England [Image credit: Dreamstime]*

- “Some of Magna Carta’s core principles are echoed in the United States Bill of Rights (1791) and in many other constitutional documents around the world, as well as in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the European Convention on Human Rights (1950).” [83]
- It is important to note a few things:
  - In the entire original Magna Carta there is not a single religious argument used for their demands and not a single Bible verse quoted in support of their demands (apart from a reference to “God” in the preamble). The entire document is about changes to abusive autocratic political practices which they regarded as unfair.
  - Although this value emerged earlier than the other 4, it was still more than 1100 years after the start of Christianity and 835 years after Christianity acquired political power
  - **Pope Innocent III annulled the original Magna Carta** with a Papal Bull within 2 months on 24 August 1215. This Bull calls the Magna Carta “shameful, demeaning, illegal and unjust” and decrees it to be “null and void of all validity for ever” [85]
- John Locke advocated the Rule of Law instead of arbitrary decrees in his “Second Treatise of Government” in 1690
- The Glorious Revolution (1688–89) effectively put an end to the Divine Right of Kings doctrine, while the French Revolution and the American Revolution (1775–1783) completely finished it off [80]
- The French Revolution (1789–1799)
  - Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 26 August 1789 [70]

- It formulated the principle that **everybody should be equal before the law** and it confirms the basic principle of the Magna Carta that nobody is above the law
- Clause 6: “6. The law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to take part, in person or by their representatives, in its formation. It must be the same for everyone whether it protects or penalizes. All citizens being equal in its eyes...”
- Clause 15: “15. Society has the right to hold accountable every public agent of the administration.”
- Only by 1870 did all the countries in the West have the Rule of Law in place, until the rise of Fascism in the 20th century - for less than 70 years [86]. This could only be achieved by defeating the Divine Right of Kings doctrine, mostly violently
- The Modal Box below, shows how the RCC still seems to regard their Church hierarchy as above the law
  - The official political system of the Vatican City State is indicated as “Vatican City State is governed as an **absolute theocratic elective monarchy**” [87]
  - If one looks at how they officially handled the child abuse scandal over decades (if not centuries) in the Vatican, but also in numerous Western countries, one cannot avoid the impression that they see the Church and its hierarchy as above the law. The comprehensive report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in England and Wales [88] and the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse [89] provide good evidence of systematic cover-ups pointing in this direction (both published in 2017)
    - Protection of the clergy involved, and enabling their crimes by quietly transferring them
    - Stonewalling legal cases
    - Not reporting these crimes to legal authorities using the “Seal of Confession” as justification
    - One of the recommendations of the Australian Royal Commission in 2017 was for the state to enforce the reporting of crimes: "We have concluded that the importance of protecting children from child sexual abuse means that there should be no exemption from the failure to report offence for clergy in relation to information disclosed in or in connection with a religious confession" [90]
    - The Catholic Church in Australia strongly resisted this citing freedom of religion, which we know they only accepted as doctrine in 1965
    - “The archbishop of the archdiocese of Melbourne, Denis Hart, said he would risk going to jail rather than report allegations of child sexual abuse raised during confession, and that the sacredness of communication with God during confession **should be above the law**” [91]
      - No other institution can get away with arguing that they should not have a legal obligation to report criminal behaviour. And given their track record they should be the last people with such an exemption
      - Interesting to see how they like to paint themselves as martyrs, while they have been the perpetrators.



[Image credit: Dreamstime]

## 7 Conclusion

The Western World did not become civilized as a result of Christianity but **despite Christianity**

### 7.1 Conclusion 1: Christianity was only responsible for the moral foundation of the West up to the Middle Ages, by enforcing a barbaric Bronze Age morality from the Old Testament

- As outlined above, there was none of the current freedoms, “witches” were burned alive, pagans were persecuted and even large numbers of Christians were tortured and executed by the Church for heresy and blasphemy. This persecution by Christianity lasted from 385 to 1826
- They justified, supported and practiced slavery until the 19th century, and was instrumental in the new Transatlantic Slave Trade
- What is especially tragic about this, is the vast political power they still had in the 15th century when they enabled the slave trade. If they really supported the values of modern Western Civilization they could have easily prevented the slave trade and influenced the direction of history for the better. They did the opposite
- They led with this morality, they did not follow. And they explicitly and consistently used the Bible as justification.

### 7.2 Conclusion 2: The Enlightenment was largely responsible for liberating the West from the power of the Church and built a new civilized moral foundation for it

The foundations of modern Western Civilization are threefold:

- Ancient Greek Philosophy. It is significant to note how much more sophisticated Greek Philosophy was compared to Christianity even though Jesus lived several centuries later than the famous Greek Philosophers
- Basic culture of the Roman Empire (like its legal system, architecture, language, literature and education). Christianity did not create this culture, but helped preserved it and in this sense made some cultural contribution
- The Enlightenment
  - Building on the Renaissance and reintroducing the value of Ancient Greek Philosophy
  - Producing many prominent Philosophers pursuing free thinking, which directly led to the acceptance of the fundamental values of Western Civilization
  - Producing a number of ideologies (like Liberalism and Feminism), which, in conjunction with science starting to blossom, played a big role in eventually emancipating ordinary people from the iron fist of both the Church and nobility.



[Image credit: Dreamstime]

### 7.3 Conclusion 3: Claims that Western Civilization is built on “Judeo-Christian” values is therefore not only completely false, the exact opposite is true

- The Western World did not become civilized as a result of Christianity but **despite Christianity**
  - The **Bible does not promote any of the 5 fundamental values** of Western Civilization, it advocates the exact opposite
  - **Judaism and Christianity did not even introduce basic morals to our species and our planet.** The Code of Ur-Nammu is the oldest legal code which survived, it outlaws murder, robbery, adultery and rape as capital offences and it predates the 10 Commandments by 8 centuries
  - **Christianity did not introduce or promote any of these 5 civilized values.** It took 1700 - 1800 years since the start of Christianity before these fundamental Western values emerged, and for more than 1200 of these

1800 years Christianity had full political power. They had plenty of time and opportunity to bring civilized values to the world, but did not

- **Christianity actively and violently suppressed these values**, especially Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Speech
- **When these values were introduced later on by other sources, like the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and Western Governments, Christianity strongly resisted their emergence.** Some examples:
  - Pope Innocent III quickly **annulled the original Magna Carta** on 24 August 1215 as **“shameful, demeaning, illegal and unjust”**
  - The Holy Office in Rome under Pope Innocent XI responded to the Church in Ethiopia about Slavery in 1686 **“Slavery itself, considered as such in its essential nature is not at all contrary to the natural and divine law”**
  - The RCC added all the books of prominent Enlightenment Philosophers like Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hume and others to their official list of Prohibited Books, and prevented David Hume from getting an academic position in Scotland to limit his influence. See this [“Secular Thinkers”](#) article for more information:  
[David Hume - The CSF](#)
  - They were strong opponents of the French Revolution. In **1791 Pope Pius VI** condemned the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen as **“against the social order ordained by God”**
  - Not only did Catholics and Protestants not even allow Freedom of Religion to each other within the same religion, but they fought **3 centuries of wars** until the 18th century
  - When Emperor Joseph II issued two Edicts to allow freedom of religion in his (Catholic) Habsburg Empire (the **Patent of Toleration** in Oct 1781 which gave Lutherans, Calvinists and the Orthodox Church the legal right to hold “private religious exercises” and the **Edict of Toleration for Jews**, in Jan 1782, which extended religious liberties to Jews too), Pope Pius VI quickly visited the Emperor in March 1782 to personally convey his opposition to these reforms
  - The British Parliament passed the **Roman Catholic Relief Act in 1829** and the **Jews Relief Act in 1858**, which allows Catholics and Jews respectively freedom of religion. Looking at that in conjunction with the Edict of Toleration for Jews which Joseph II issued in his Habsburg Empire in 1782, it is abundantly clear that **the notion of a combined “Judeo-Christian” tradition which brought values like Freedom of Religion to the West, is not only at odds with the historical record, but patently absurd**
  - In **1850 Pope Pius IX** classified **freedom of the press and freedom of association as “intrinsically evil”**
  - **Pope Pius IX** reconfirmed in 1864 that **Freedom of Religion** was a **heresy**

[Pope Pius IX reconfirmed in 1864 that Freedom of Religion was a heresy](#)

- Subsequently, **Christianity fundamentally changed its morality** and gradually adopted most of the new Enlightenment values. Christianity did not lead with civilized values, they followed slowly and reluctantly
  - By 1965 when the RCC officially accepted Freedom of Religion, the majority of Christianity was finally and more or less on board with the bulk of Enlightenment values of Western Civilization - only in the 20th century
  - To do that they had to ignore/reinterpret an increasing number of barbaric passages in both the Old and the New Testament and rather focus on applying more palatable, generic verses like “Love thy neighbour” or everybody created in their god’s “image”. They typically provide elaborate theological rationalizations for these changes
  - This became the standard playbook of Christianity, to continue changing their dogmas and morality to stay acceptable and relevant in a civilizing world, and not only provide rationalizations for this but also make concerted efforts to rewrite history. See this CSF Article for more details:  
[The Secrets to Christianity's Historical Success - The CSF](#)

[Christianity did not lead with civilized values, they followed slowly and reluctantly](#)

- There are good reasons why the most historic documents laying the foundation of modern Western Civilization (like The Magna Carta, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen) did not use any religious arguments and did not use any supporting Biblical quotes:
  - There is no explicit Biblical support for these values (with explicit support for the opposite)
  - This was a hard-fought battle against the Church
  - This is in stark contrast with the Catholic Church using explicit Biblical passages over centuries for their justification of slavery, declaring freedom of religion a heresy, denying women equal rights, etc.

#### **7.4 Conclusion 4: Western civilization would have been far more advanced if it were based from the start on Ancient Greek Philosophy instead of Christianity**

- Greek Philosophy was so much more advanced than the Bible and the teachings of Jesus
- At least 1500 years of development opportunity was lost, progress stunted and resources diverted to wasteful endeavours, like Church politics, dogma, persecutions, and building opulent cathedrals to worship imaginary deities (all based on the teachings of Jesus who preached poverty, pacifism and humility)
- The damage done by Christianity, the loss of life and human suffering they caused, the roadblocks they provided to progress and the lost opportunity by far outweigh the contributions they made.

#### **7.5 Conclusion 5: Why Christianity succeeds in painting themselves as the foundation of Western Civilization, when it is so blatantly untrue**

- After accepting most of the Enlightenment values they also started promoting these values, and in this sense made a moral contribution of sorts, later on. For example, there are many churches today horrified about their past, making reparations for slavery, working for racial reconciliation, actively promoting equality for women, strongly in favour of Freedom of Religion, etc.
- Most people seem to have almost no historical knowledge or perspective, and these people seem oblivious of Christianity's history, how much worse their lives would have been under the rule of the Church during the Middle Ages or how recently their churches accepted the Enlightenment values
- Christians with some historical knowledge continue to interpret reality, facts and half-truths through the lens of their faith, instead of applying critical thinking
- Christianity's blatant and continued attempts to rewrite history, with
  - Christian apologetics often being highly selective and disingenuous with historical facts
  - Classifying efforts to call them out on this as "secular propaganda"
  - Applying elaborate censorship, within the RCC for example.

#### **7.6 Conclusion 6: A warning is appropriate**

It is not only completely false to regard Christianity as the moral foundation of Western Civilization, it is also dangerous

- Parts of Christianity seem to have quite an open strategy to regain political power, with which they can conceivably succeed. If they do, they're unlikely to uphold Enlightenment values. History contains many red lights in this regard, with the bottom line that monotheistic religion and political power are a deadly combination, while Christianity has a proven track record how dangerous they are with political power
- We can see many signs that the RCC still does not fully embrace these values, and that political power is likely to see them reverting to their real values. Additional signs of concern:
  - When they had full political power they had no use for Freedom of Religion. The fact that they only accepted it after they lost most of their power seems quite opportunistic and a cause for concern

- The blatant way in which they try to rewrite history
- The fact that the Vatican still regard themselves as an “absolute theocratic elective monarchy”
- The Religious Right in the US has a well-organized and well-funded agenda to roll back civil liberties, while they’re getting more extreme. They can drag us back towards the Middle Ages, its lack of freedom and its religious wars.



*Jordan Peterson [Image credit: Wikimedia Commons]*

### **7.7 Conclusion 7: Why Jordan Peterson can act morally as a Christian today**

Jordan Peterson's claim that secularists who succeed in living moral lives today only because they were shaped by the “Judeo-Christian” tradition even though they do not realize it, is not only patronizing and completely untrue, it is also quite ironic

- If he lived 400 years ago in Europe (when Christianity was in charge and built the moral foundation of Medieval Europe), it is highly likely that he would have gathered dutifully on the town square to participate in burning witches alive at the stake in obedience to both the Church and the Bible
- There seems to be two main reasons why he is able to act morally as a Christian today, even though he does not realize that:
  - Moral intuitions (which David Hume and Adam Smith already eloquently wrote about during the Enlightenment), with a mountain of exciting scientific research from several disciplines over the last few decades not only confirming the concept, but also confirming these intuitions as the result of evolution
  - The fact that the Enlightenment was ultimately (and thankfully) quite successful in challenging the barbaric Christian morality enforced for 1500 years

- This caused Christianity to gradually adopt a more civilized morality which Jordan was consequently raised with
- This leaves him free to ignore large parts of the Bible and interpret the rest through the lens of the Enlightenment values
- And it also allows his moral intuitions to function without being overridden by Biblical commands to kill witches, gays, non-believers, prophets of other religions, disrespectful kids or people picking up sticks on the wrong day of the week.



[Image credit: Dreamstime]

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**Next article in the CSF Morality Series, scheduled for 23 Dec 2022 "Part 5: Are Religious Societies Morally Superior?"**

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