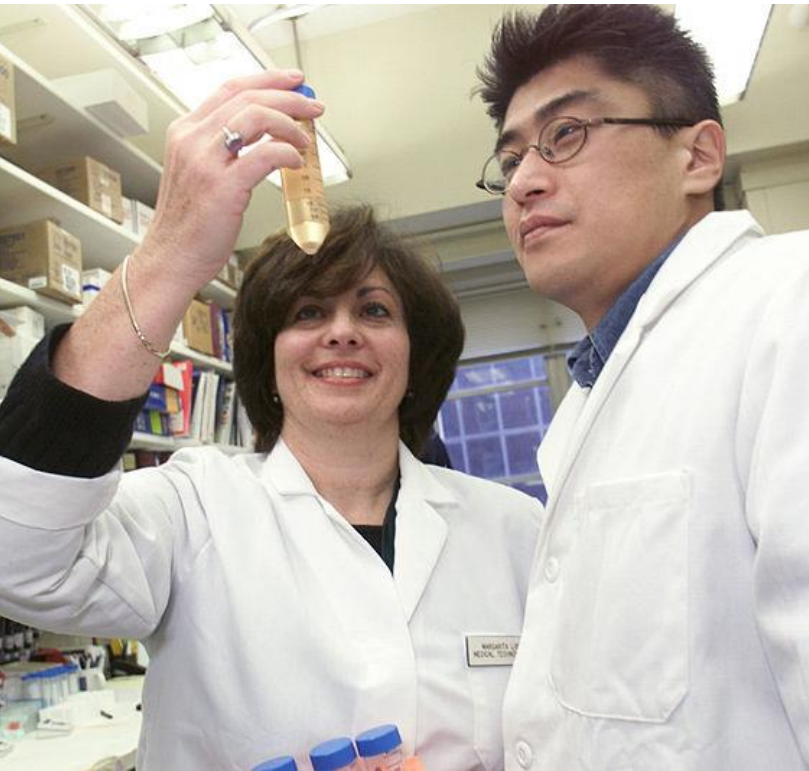




The Effects of Christianity



When Jesus laid down His life so that those who believe in Him can enter into an eternal relationship with God, He changed the lives and eternal destinies of billions of people. Through the lives of those who believed in and followed Him, He brought great change to the whole world.



Human Value

Jesus was born at a time in history when the Roman Empire ruled much of the known world. As such, the moral standards of Rome permeated much of society. The Romans held a low view of human life. A person was regarded as having

value only if he contributed to the political fabric of society. This is seen in several ways in the Roman world, such as the practices of gladiatorial games and suicide.

The early Christians, on the other hand, held a more sacred view of human life, as they believed what Scripture teaches about the value of life and that human beings are made in the image of God.

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. (Psalm 8:5)

They understood that God honored human life by sending His Son to become incarnate as a human being:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son

*from the Father,
full of grace and
truth. (John
1:1,2,14)*

Because God values human life, the early Christians understood that life was to be honored and protected.

Human Sacrifice

Throughout Old Testament times, we read of societies which practiced human sacrifice. Child sacrifice was common among the followers of Baal in Canaan. Some fallen kings in Israel turned away from God and sacrificed their own sons to the Canaanite god Moloch. (2 Kings 16:3, 21:6)

While human sacrifice was outlawed throughout the Roman Empire by Jesus' time, Christians encountered it centuries later in pagan lands. For example, before the gospel was brought to them by St. Patrick, the Irish people sacrificed prisoners of war to war gods. Human sacrifice was common among pagan Prussians and Lithuanians until the thirteenth century. This came to an end because of Christian influence.





The dignity and status of women

Throughout the reign of the Roman Empire, women lived under the law of *patria potestas*, which declared that the *paterfamilias* (male head of the family) had absolute authority over his children, even adult ones.

Married women remained under the authority of their father unless the marriage was a *manus* marriage, which meant that the woman ceased to be under the authority of her father and came under the control of her husband. As such, a husband could legally physically chastise his wife. If she committed adultery, he could kill

her; if she committed some other serious offense, the husband was generally required to get the consent of his extended family before killing her. A *manus* marriage gave the man complete authority over his wife, so that she only had the legal status of an adopted daughter.

Women were not allowed to speak in public settings. All places of authority, such as city councils, the senate, and legal courts were only accessible to men. If women had any legal questions or complaints, they had to convey them to their husbands or fathers, who would take the matter to the proper authorities on the woman's behalf, as women were required to remain silent on such matters. In general, women were held in very low regard.

In the Jewish culture throughout the rabbinic era (400 BC to 300 AD), there also existed a strong bias against women. They weren't allowed to testify in court, as they were considered unreliable witnesses. They were likewise barred from all public speaking. They weren't allowed to read the Torah out loud in the synagogues. One rabbinic teaching proclaimed that it was "*shameful*" to hear a woman's voice in public among men. Synagogue worship was conducted by men. Women in attendance were separated from the men by a partition.

Some Jewish women were confined to their homes, and didn't even approach the outer door of their homes. Young women remained in parts of the house specified as the women's quarters to avoid being seen by men, and when they had (women) visitors, they would host them only in these parts of the home. Married women in rural areas had a bit more freedom of movement, as they helped their husbands do the farming. However, it was considered inappropriate for them to work or travel alone. Any income a married woman may have received, including inheritances, belonged to her husband.



Throughout the Gospels, we find that Jesus had a very different attitude toward women than was customary at that time, one which raised their status. Through both His teachings and actions, He rebuffed the common beliefs and practices which espoused that women were inferior to men. One example is His interaction with the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John. At that time, Jews didn't interact with the Samaritans at all, yet Jesus requested that she give Him a drink from the well. She was surprised and wondered why He would ask her to give Him a drink, as *the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans*. (John 4) Jesus not only ignored the fact that she was a Samaritan, but He also spoke with a woman in public, which contravened the oral law (Jewish religious laws which were not included in the original Laws of Moses but were added over the centuries): *He who talks with a woman [in public] brings evil upon himself*. A similar rabbinic teaching stated that a man *may not converse with a woman in the marketplace*.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record that women followed Jesus, which was very unusual at that time, as other Jewish teachers and rabbis did not have women disciples.

The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. (Luke 8:1-3)

There were also women [at His crucifixion] looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem. (Mark 15:40-41)



After His resurrection, Jesus appeared first to women, and instructed them to tell the rest of His disciples that He had risen.

After the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ... But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said." ... And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." (Matthew 28:1, 5-6, 9-10)



The early church followed Jesus' precedent, ignoring cultural norms regarding women. Women played an important role in the church, as seen in the Epistles of Paul stating that they had churches in their homes. In the letter to Philemon, he addresses *Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house. (Philemon 1:1-2)* Nympha was a woman who had a church in her home in Laodicea. (Colossians 4:15) He referred to Prisca and her husband Aquila, who had a church in their house, as *my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. (Romans 16:3. See also 1 Corinthians 16:19)*

In the book of Romans, Paul wrote: *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae. (Romans 16:1)* The Greek word translated as *servant* is *diakonos*, which is sometimes translated in the

Epistles as *deacon* and other times as *minister*. Paul refers to himself as *diakonos* numerous times in the Epistles. *Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace. (Ephesians 3:7)* Paul used the same Greek word *diakonos* when referring to his co-workers and co-leaders. He referred to Tychicus as a faithful minister in the Lord (Ephesians 6:21) and Epaphras as a faithful minister of Christ. (Colossians 1:7) So when he commended Phoebe as a *diakonos* of the church, it appears that Paul was acknowledging that she was a deacon or minister within the church.

Paul made the point that within Christianity, *there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)* Jesus, Paul, and the early church worked against the concept of keeping women secluded, silent, subservient, and segregated in worship.

Early church historians maintain that generally women were more active in the church than men were. St. Chrysostom, in the fourth century, said:

The women of those days [early apostolic church] were more spirited than men.

German church historian and theologian Leopold Zscharnack wrote:

It was the evangelistic zeal of women in the early years of the church, and later, which won the weak and the mighty.

For the first 150 years of Christianity, women were highly regarded within and very important to the church. Sadly, after that time, some of the church leaders began to revert to the practices and attitudes of the Romans relating to women, and women were slowly excluded from leadership roles within the church. Over the next three centuries, church leaders incorporated views of the inferiority of women into general Christian understanding. These attitudes were both misguided and wrong.



Hospitals

There is some evidence of a concept of healthcare facilities prior to the rise of Christianity. In ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt (5000–2000 BC), some sort of hospitals existed, and as early as the 5th century BC in India, the Buddhist religion had institutionalized healthcare facilities. In Roman times there were military hospitals for soldiers, but these were not available to the public.

Once Christianity was legal and could be freely practiced, beginning in 324 AD, Christians were in a much better position to provide institutional care for the sick and dying. The church council of Nicaea in 325 AD instructed bishops to establish a hospice in every city that had a cathedral. The purpose of a hospice was not only to care for those who were ill, but also to provide shelter for the poor and for Christian pilgrims. This aligned with what Jesus taught.



I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did

we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:34-40)

The first hospital was built by St. Basil in Caesarea, Cappadocia (Eastern Turkey), about 369 AD. The next was built in a nearby province, Edessa, in 375 AD. The first hospital in the West was built in Rome about 390 AD by Fabiola, a wealthy widow who was an associate of St. Jerome, an important Christian teacher. She founded another hospital in 398 AD, about fifty miles southwest of Rome. St. Chrysostom (d. 407) had hospitals built in Constantinople in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. By the sixth century, hospitals had become a common part of monasteries. In the ninth century, during the reign of the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne, numerous hospitals were built. By the mid-1500s there were 37,000 Benedictine monasteries that cared for the sick. By that time, hospitals were plentiful in Europe.

In the United States, one of the very first hospitals was founded by the Quakers in the early 1700s, and that was one of only two hospitals until the early 1800s. In the second half of the 1800s, many more hospitals were built, usually by local churches and Christian denominations. The hospitals were often named after the denomination which sponsored them, such as Baptist Hospital, Lutheran Hospital, Methodist Hospital, and Presbyterian Hospital. Others were given names such as St. John's, St. Luke's, St. Mary's, etc.



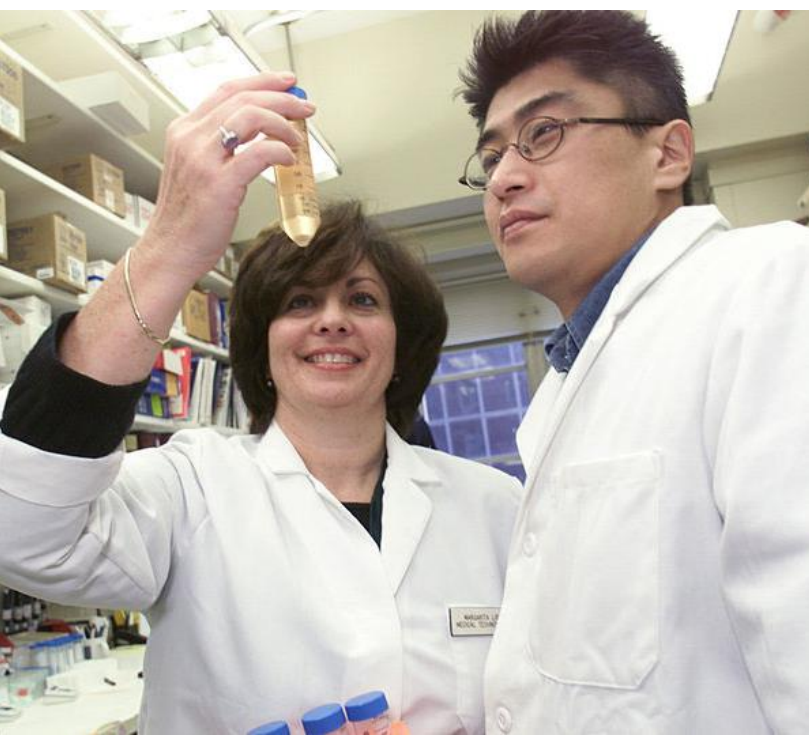
Science

The ancient Greek and Roman polytheistic cultures believed in gods who engaged in jealous, irrational behavior in a world that was nonrational, which made the concept of systematic investigation of the world and how it functions futile.



However, Christianity, along with Judaism, teaches that God is a rational being. Because humans are made in His image, we too are rational beings who are able to use rational processes to study and investigate the world in which we live.

In the 12th century, some Christian philosophers such as Robert Grosseteste (1168–1253), a Franciscan bishop and the first chancellor of Oxford University, proposed the inductive, experimental method as an approach to gaining scientific knowledge. Grosseteste's pupil Roger Bacon (1214–1292), another Franciscan monk, asserted that “all things must be verified by experience.”



Three hundred years later, Francis Bacon (1561–1626), a devout Anglican, propelled the concept of inductive reasoning forward by means of keeping a written account of his experiments and their results. He promoted the concept that science involves careful and methodical observation along with rigorous skepticism about what is observed. As such, he is known as the father of the scientific method.

Education

Another area influenced by Christianity was public education for all children. Today, free public schools are common; however, this wasn't always the case. Prior to the 1500s, most education in Europe, especially at the elementary level, was supported and operated by the church in cathedral schools. Sadly, few people overall were literate, as very few attended the church schools.



Martin Luther (1498–1546) advocated a state school system in which students of both sexes would be taught in the local language in primary schools, followed by Latin secondary schools and universities. His coworker Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560) persuaded the civic authorities in Germany to start the first public school system. Luther also advocated that the civil authorities should compel children to attend school. Over time, Luther's idea of compulsory education took root in other countries. Today the concept that every child should attend school is written into law in most countries.

Universities

It is commonly accepted that the oldest existing university in Europe is the University of Bologna, Italy, founded in 1158. It specialized in canon law (church law). The next university in Europe was the University of Paris, founded in 1200. It originally specialized in theology, and in 1270 it added the study of medicine. Bologna became the mother of several universities in Italy, Spain, Scotland, Sweden, and Poland. The University of Paris became the mother of Oxford and of universities in Portugal, Germany, and Austria. Emmanuel College, a British Christian college within the University of Cambridge, became the mother of Harvard in America.

Harvard University, one of America's most prominent, was established to train ministers of the gospel. Its original motto was (in Latin) *Truth for Christ and the Church*. It was founded by the Congregational Church. Other prominent American universities were also founded by Christian denominations, such as the College of William and Mary (Episcopalian), Yale University (Congregational), Northwestern University (Methodist), Columbia University (Episcopalian), Princeton University (Presbyterian), and Brown University (Baptist).



Education for the Blind

Not much is known about care for the blind in the first few centuries after Jesus' death and resurrection. In the fourth century, Christians operated some facilities for the blind. In 630, a *typholocomium* (*typholos* = blind + *komeo* = take care of) was built in Jerusalem. In the thirteenth century, Louis IX (St. Louis) built a hospice for the blind in Paris.

In the 1830s, Louis Braille, a dedicated Christian Frenchman who lost his sight at an early age, developed a means by which the blind could read. He came upon a system used by the military which incorporated raised dots to enable the reading of messages in the dark. From this idea he developed his own system of pricked raised dots which allowed the blind to read. On his deathbed, he said, *I am convinced that my mission is finished on earth; I tasted yesterday the supreme delight; God condescended to brighten my eyes with the splendor of eternal hope.*

Education for the Deaf

Teaching the deaf an inaudible language largely originated because of three Christian men—Abbé Charles-Michel de L'Épée, Thomas Gallaudet, and Laurent Clerc. L'Épée was a priest who developed a sign language to use in teaching the deaf in Paris in 1775. His goal was that the deaf would be able to hear the message of Jesus.—Thomas Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc brought L'Épée's sign language to the United States.



Laurent Clerc, born in a small village near Lyon, France, lost his hearing when he was one year old. He attended the National Institute for Deaf Children of Paris and eventually became a teacher there. Thomas Gallaudet, a clergyman who wanted to help the deaf, attended the school where Clerc taught in order to learn sign language. These two men decided to travel to the United States in order to open the first school for the deaf there. Before returning to Europe in order to learn more about working with the deaf, Gallaudet said to a deaf girl, *"I hope when I come back to teach you much about the Bible, and about God, and Christ."*—The two men started a school for the deaf in 1817. In 1864, Gallaudet's son founded the first college for the deaf, which later became known as Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.

Each of us, every single day, can positively affect our part of the world through loving others, being kind, fair, understanding, generous, positive, and helpful. We can be inclusive, respectful, forgiving, humble, meek, patient, and kind. As we do our best to live our faith, to emulate Jesus, to love God and others, we too will change our part of the world for the better.

www.freekidstories.org

Image Credits:

Page 1 (clockwise): LUMO Project, via freebibleimages.com; public domain; public domain; designed by pressfoto via Freepik; public domain

Page 2: Hans S. via Flickr; used under Creative Commons license

Page 3: (top) LUMO project via freebibleimages.com; (bottom) public domain

Page 4: LUMO project via freebibleimages.com

Page 5: LUMO project via freebibleimages.com

Page 6: LUMO project via freebibleimages.com

Page 7: Public domain

Page 8: LUMO project via freebibleimages.com

Page 9: (top to bottom) Nora Morgan via Wikimedia Commons; Anphalen via Wikimedia Commons; Abqjoe via Wikimedia Commons

Page 10: (top to bottom) Sith-x via Deviantart.com; used under Creative Commons license; public domain

Page 11: public domain

Page 12: (left to right) Albert Bergonzo via Wikipedia.org; Daderot via Wikipedia.org

Page 13: public domain

Text adapted from "The Effects of Christianity" by Peter Amsterdam