

# **What Good is Christianity?**

## Evaluating its Historical Record

### **Schedule and Notes**

by Robert Velarde with Sarita Holzmann

*"But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good."*

1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NASB)



# What Good is Christianity?

## Introduction

The world of ideas is often filled with misinformation. Sometimes this is purposeful, as is the case with propaganda that seeks to intentionally mislead. At other times misinformation is a consequence of failing to investigate truth claims. In certain instances a particular agenda moves individuals or groups to disseminate information that is meant to present an opposing view in a bad light, while generally championing the cause of those preparing the content. In short, presenting fair and objective information is not as easy as it may sound. Our intention at Sonlight is to present a variety of viewpoints, while at the same time remaining committed to Christianity. In recent years we've noticed an increasing amount of misinformation about Christianity and its influence. The so-called new atheism, for instance, has leveled a number of attacks and criticisms against the faith that call into question the benefits Christianity has provided civilization with, as well as seeking to demonstrate that Christianity has, in fact, done more harm than good.

Are these criticisms true? If they are, then Christianity does indeed have quite a bit of explaining to do. If they are not, then the critics have some apologizing to do. Some claims, however, are more nuanced than a simple "Yes" or "No" answer can provide. For instance, it is true that some Christians supported slavery, but it is also true that some Christians vehemently opposed it (see Week 17 in our schedule). Learning to think through ideas is part of our goal. We'd like to help you raise children who are able to think for themselves, reasonably, as they weigh the claims they will encounter in daily life. Consequently, our goal in this curriculum is not to force-feed information, but to expose you and your children to a variety of ideas they are likely to encounter in their Christian walk, while at the same time providing relevant insights as your children grapple with some challenging ideas.

In order to accomplish our goal, we've selected seven primary resources, described below, combined with our Instructor's Guide Notes and other included resources such as discussion questions, suggested assignments, and some articles intended to supplement the primary content. As always, our Instructor's Guide is intended as a flexible tool that you are welcome to modify and adapt as best fits your educational goals. Also note that we've included a section on **Tips for Classroom Use** intended to help teachers integrate this curriculum into a classroom setting or for use by home school co-ops.

## Resources

***What's So Great About Christianity?*** by Dinesh D'Souza (Tyndale, 2008). Written in a crisp, engaging style, D'Souza guides readers through eight parts: The Future of Christianity, Christianity and the West, Christianity and Science, The Argument from Design, Christianity and Philosophy, Christianity and Suffering, Christianity and Morality, and Christianity and You. Specific topics addressed include Christianity and atheism, democracy, evolution, miracles, natural law, the problem of evil, and much more. Its short chapters provide a nice break from the more academic writing style found in *How Christianity Changed the World* and *The Victory of Reason*.

***What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us?*** by Jonathan Hill (InterVarsity Press, 2005). Filled with color photographs and illustrations, Hill's book is not only fun to flip through, but also fun to read. Unlike most authors of historical works, Hill possesses a dry wit that appears throughout the book including some comical quips in illustration captions. While Hill's background is in philosophy and theology (Oxford University), he capably tackles the history of Christian influences on culture while often considering interdisciplinary issues and topics. Unlike some Christian works that overtly make an apologetic case for Christianity due to its influence on history, Hill takes a more detached approach, claiming that his book "aims to be an objective look at some of the positive contributions that Christianity has made to the world" (p. 7). Nevertheless, Hill has compiled a broad spectrum of information regarding Christianity's positive influence on culture, thought, the arts, education, society, and more, that can be integrated into a cumulative case for Christianity.

***Christianity On Trial*** by Vincent Carroll and David Shiflett (Encounter Books, 2002). This book addresses a number of topics including slavery, science, charity, the environment, and more. The authors begin each chapter by broadly outlining the general criticisms against Christianity, then spend the remaining portion of the chapter responding to general and specific criticisms. Carroll is a newspaper journalist, resulting in a popular-level and readable book, but it also contains intellectual depth. Broadly speaking, the authors point out that historical illiteracy is often responsible for unjust caricatures of Christianity, while also pointing out the many positive influences Christians have made on civilization throughout history.

***How Christianity Changed the World*** by Alvin Schmidt (Zondervan, 2004). Schmidt's tome is at times on the dry



side, but is nevertheless filled with valuable and factual historical information about Christianity's influence on the world. The book covers a diversity of topics ranging from the sanctity of human life to sexual morality to Christian influences on health care, charity, education, science, liberty, slavery, literature, and the arts. A fascinating final chapter offers an overview of Christianity's influence on holidays, words, and symbols. A number of photographs, illustrations, and tables break up the text with interesting information. Schmidt is a sociologist, but his attention to historical detail is precise.

***The Victory of Reason*** by Rodney Stark (Random House, 2006). Well-known sociologist Rodney Stark makes the case that Christianity positively influenced the development of a variety of globally significant movements in relation to democracy, science, reason, and more. Far from being a negative influence or a backwards religion lacking a robust foundation, Stark convincingly argues that Christians and Christianity are responsible "for the most significant intellectual, political, scientific, and economic breakthroughs of the past millennium." At times Stark makes for some challenging reading, which is why we've broken up the reading of *The Victory of Reason* over the course of three weeks (Weeks 2, 3, and 4). See also his book *God's Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (HarperOne, 2009), especially in relation to Weeks 15 and 16 on Special Challenges to Christianity.

***Art and the Bible*** by Francis Schaeffer (InterVarsity Press, 1973; IVP Classics edition, 2006). This classic work consists of two essays: "Art in the Bible" and "Some Perspectives on Art." Scheduled during our discussion of Christianity and the Fine Arts (Weeks 8 and 9), Schaeffer's work provides a solid foundation for understanding the relationship between Christianity and the arts, as well as containing timeless insights on the topic.

***Does God Exist?*** by Focus on the Family (Tyndale Entertainment, 2009). This DVD set features Dr. Stephen Meyer, author of *Signature in the Cell* (Harper, 2009) and other works. Over the course of two weeks your children will journey with Dr. Meyer through 10 engaging video lessons covering topics such as cosmology, design, morality, and various arguments for the existence of God. The lessons feature short introductions by Dave Stotts, known for his work on the *Drive Thru History* DVD series.

***Atheist excerpts*** (various authors). Note that in Week 14 we've included excerpts from popular contemporary atheist writers as part of assignments (Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins). Our intention is to allow your children to engage typical ideas presented by the new atheists in order to better understand their perspectives and to

allow your children the opportunity to critique opposing viewpoints. Some of the rhetoric of the new atheists is somewhat harsh, to say the least. Nevertheless, we believe exposure to the ideas presented is critical in preparing your children to enter the world, particularly if they pursue college studies. After allowing your children to engage the atheist ideas, we provide our insights to model how we might respond to those ideas.

## Overview

### ***Western Culture/Democracy***

We begin with a look at Christianity's influence on Western culture and democracy (Weeks 1–4). Even though in many respects contemporary Western culture is now secularized, understanding the roots of Christian influence and their extent in many areas is important.

### ***Social Justice***

The topic of social justice (Weeks 5–6) covers a broad range of issues. Our studies begin with an emphasis on the transforming power of Christianity which, in turn, leads naturally to positive interaction with culture, society, politics, the economy, the arts, and more. The emphasis continues by viewing Christianity as a way of life, as well as an opportunity for Christians to change the world for the better.

### ***Education/Literature***

Since education and literature are historically linked, the topics are addressed concurrently beginning in Week 7. An article on "Interpretation" underscores the importance hermeneutical (interpretive) principles as relevant not only to biblical interpretation, but the logical interpretation of any kind of literature and the ideas contained therein. This article will also help children develop critical thinking skills when it comes to understanding and evaluating ideas.

### ***The Arts***

Weeks 8 and 9 concentrate on Christianity's extensive impact on the fine arts including music, painting, literature, sculpture, architecture, and more. *Art and the Bible* provides helpful information in relation to art and the Christian worldview, while *What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us?* and *How Christianity Changed the World* delve deeper into specific examples of Christian influence on the arts. Our Notes emphasize, among other things, the importance of the concept of the image of God (*imago Dei*) in relation to creative pursuits.



## **Science/Environment**

Weeks 10 and 11 address a variety of questions regarding Christianity and science. We read a number of historical examples of Christian contributions to the sciences and explore issues relevant to Christianity's foundational contributions to science, the argument from design, and questions about evolution. Atheism is also touched on, preparing children for further discussions on the topic beginning in Week 12. In addition, we've included an article on "Faith and Science" that provides a helpful overview of a variety of misconceptions and issues regarding the relationship between Christianity and science. Since the topic is somewhat related to science, issues regarding Christianity and the environment are also covered (Week 12).

## **Contemporary Atheism**

With the recent rise of the so-called new atheism, Weeks 12–14 address a variety of issues via readings in *What's So Great About Christianity?* and the 10-part DVD series, *Does God Exist?* In Week 14 your children will have two opportunities to interact with excerpts from popular atheist writings by Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. While the goal is to help your children assess common criticisms raised by contemporary atheists, we also provide suggested solutions and responses that will also help develop critical thinking skills.

## **Charity/Special Challenges**

Weeks 15 and 16 cover Christianity and charity, as well as some special challenges to Christianity. Far from being a "poison" or negative influence on culture, as charged by modern atheists, readings demonstrate Christianity's many positive influences, particularly in relation to charitable efforts. Special challenges addressed include the relationship between Christianity and the Nazis, the Crusades, the Inquisition, an assessment of atheism in

relation to ideologies that have resulted in violence, and an article addressing Christianity and warfare.

## **Women/Slavery**

Weeks 16 and 17 address questions about Christianity and women, as well as Christianity and slavery. Far from being oppressive of women, our readings demonstrate Christianity's profound elevation of women and the freedom and dignity it offers. An article on "Christianity and Women" explores some contemporary viewpoints on the topic. The issue of Christianity and slavery is also addressed.

## **Christianity's Influence**

Week 18 concludes the curriculum with a general emphasis on Christianity's positive influence on the world. A unique chapter in discusses a variety of positive Christian influences in relation to holidays, words, symbols, and expressions, while readings offer additional examples of the ongoing influence of Christianity.

## **Discussion Questions and Assignments**

Each week you'll find a list of discussion questions related to the topics and readings. Discuss these questions aloud with your children. Look in the appendix for a list of all the questions and possible responses to help you interact with your children. Many of these questions are intended to help your children recall and articulate broad understanding of the material and critical thinking skills rather than rote memorization of material.

You'll also notice that we've provided a list of suggested assignments every week. We don't expect your children to do all of these assignments, but we do strongly recommend that at least one assignment per week is selected. For more involved assignments, feel free to allow your children more time to complete them. ■



# WHAT GOOD IS CHRISTIANITY? WEEK 1 SCHEDULE

Date:	Day 1 <sup>1</sup>	Day 2 <sup>2</sup>	Day 3 <sup>3</sup>	Day 4 <sup>4</sup>	Day 5 <sup>5</sup>
<b>Western Culture/Democracy</b>					
<i>Christianity On Trial</i> <sup>[N]</sup> <sup>1</sup>	pp. vii–23 <sup>[N]</sup>				
<i>What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us?</i>		pp. 6–28 <sup>[N]</sup>			
<i>What's So Great About Christianity?</i>			pp. 43–56 <sup>[N]</sup>	pp. 57–81 <sup>[N]</sup>	
<b>Assignments/Discussion Questions</b> <sup>[N]</sup> <sup>1</sup>					Assignments/Discussion <sup>2</sup> <sup>[N]</sup>
<b>Other Notes</b>					

## Day 1

### *Christianity On Trial*

#### pp. xii–xiii

Some of the anti-Christian “art” discussed on these pages is disturbing, but will tie in with our discussion of the fine arts in Weeks 8 and 9, particularly Francis Schaeffer's book *Art and the Bible*.

The ideas of Christopher Hitchens, a prominent atheist, are addressed in Week 14.

#### pp. xvi–xvii

The authors write, “We realize that irreconcilable differences separate many Christian denominations and sects; but that is a sign of their health.” How is Christian division “a sign of their health”? While we agree that there are divisions among Christians, such divisions are unfortunate and, more likely, symptomatic of human depravity than anything particularly healthy. We should also point out that despite divisions on certain issues, on the whole Christians agree on some significant and central points such as the nature of God, the human condition, the person and role of Christ, the authority of the Bible, etc.

#### pp. 2–3

The matter of human beings being made in God's image, a Judeo-Christian teaching, is of importance to a variety of topics related to Christianity. As a result, you'll note that we'll bring up the matter consistently in relation to different areas of study.

The authors will address matters of American democracy in chapter 8.

Elaine Pagels, quoted favorably here, is also known for her work in relation to the so-called Gnostic Gospels. Unfortunately, her work in that area is hardly accurate or beneficial. See, for instance, *Fabricating Jesus* by Craig Evans (InterVarsity Press, 2006), and the more popular level work *The Truth About Jesus and the “Lost Gospels”* by David Marshall (Harvest House, 2007). *Hidden Gospels* by Philip Jenkins may also be of interest (Oxford, 2002).

#### pp. 4–5

The topic of Christianity and women is addressed further in Weeks 16 and 17.

1. The <sup>[N]</sup> symbol: Find a note in the Notes section immediately following the schedule pages.  
2. Please see our note in the Introduction about integrating assignments and discussion questions.



## pp. 6–7

The violence of gladiatorial games in contrast to Christian ethics is addressed further in *How Christianity Changed the World*. The Christian practice of rescuing discarded infants is also addressed in *How Christianity Changed the World*, as is the general topic of Christian charity (Week 15).

## pp. 8–9

On page 9 the authors write, “It is not that Christian ethics were entirely original.” On this point they are correct. Christ did not come to share some new, secret morality with the world, although his morals are indeed high. God’s moral standards, in fact, are woven throughout the cultures of the world, whether they are Christian or not. This relates to what is termed natural law—that God’s moral standards are part of everyone’s conscience. Granted, within Christianity the impetus toward charity is an integral part of being a Christian. Those who love God and others are, after all, inclined to help others.

## pp. 10–11

Ambrose of Milan played a key role in the conversion of Augustine, who found Ambrose to be a level-headed Christian, intellectually and spiritually. Ambrose and Theodosius are also addressed in *What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us?*, beginning on page 155 (Week 6, Day 2).

## pp. 22–23

While this chapter provides a somewhat selective and sweeping overview of Christianity’s positive influence on Western culture, the topic is taken up in far more detail in *The Victory of Reason*, and, to a lesser extent, in *What’s So Great About Christianity*.

# Day 2

## *What Has Christianity Ever Done For Us?*

## pp. 6–7

Whether we acknowledge it or not, or whether we are familiar with it or not, Christianity has had a profound influence on Western life and culture, as the author points out. Many of the concepts we take for granted have their origins in Christianity. These facts, of course, do not mean that Christianity must be true, but they do provide evidence of the positive and extensive influence Christianity has had on the world. While Hill’s approach is not that of an apologist, making a case for Christianity on the basis of his findings, the content contained in his book can cer-

tainly form part of a cumulative case argument in support of Christianity.

Issues regarding the Crusades are addressed in Week 15.

Hill mentions the Reconciliation Walk, wherein Christians apologized for the Crusades. What do you think of contemporary representatives of certain groups apologizing for historical episodes that they had nothing to do with personally? Is this helpful? Unhelpful?

Much is made by critics of the “wrongs” of Christianity, with ample instances cited such as the Crusades. Is this a good approach to determining whether or not Christianity is true? Biblically speaking, the test of the truth of Christianity is very much centered on the person of Christ. Did he exist? Did he rise from the dead? Are the New Testament records reliable? These and other questions really get to the heart of whether or not Christianity is true or not. That’s not to say we can simply ignore other issues and criticisms of Christianity, but it’s important to keep in mind that whether or not the resurrection of Christ actually happened will not be settled by discussing matters such as the Crusades.

Page 7 is a good example of what many authors do in an Introduction. Hill is methodically summarizing in sequence each chapter in the book. As a general study tip, skipping book introductions is not always a good idea. Sometimes you’ll find a good summary of the contents of a book in an introduction, as is the case with *What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us?*

Don’t be alarmed by Hill’s use of the word “mythic” in reference to Christianity. As he explains later in the book, by “myth” he doesn’t mean that Christianity is filled with stories that are not true, but is more in line with the definition in relation to the ideas of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Lewis and Tolkien believed that the myths of the world contained elements of the Christian story, only in Christianity these myths became fact and reality in the historical person of Christ.

Is religion “essentially about living a good life”? Hill doesn’t say one way or another, but merely points out that “many people” view religion in this way. Although seeking to live a good life is not contrary to Christianity, if that is the main focus then we are missing the significance of the centrality of Christ and his redeeming efforts on our behalf.

## pp. 8–9

Hill’s opening remarks about the lessening of Christianity’s influence on modern cultures may be interpreted as both discouraging, as it highlights a decline of Christian influence, but also encouraging in that such insights



should challenge individual Christians and the church as a whole to once again make significant and positive impacts on culture.

Whether you agree with the Protestant Reformation or not, Hill's insights into the contributions to culture that it spurred remain historical facts. That is not to say that Roman Catholicism was excluded from such contributions, as further insights in Hill's book will demonstrate.

### pp. 12–13

Is the written word “still central to the modern world”? In many respects this is true, but when it comes to areas such as entertainment a case can be made for the displacement of literature by the rise of multimedia mediums such as film, television, online videos, etc. That is not to say that the value or importance of literature is disappearing, but only to point out the reality that many individuals have grown up with—a reality that increasingly stresses entertainment on demand via multimedia rather than a focus on literature.

The Orthodox Church refers to one of the three main branches of Christianity, the other two being Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.

### pp. 14–15

Although Hill does not make this direct connection, a case can be made that Christianity has contributed significantly to the rise of modern technology, for better or worse. His mention of an early Braille-like system, for instance, is one example, while the clock is another. The clock, in fact, was originally invented by monks in order to better help them schedule their daily times of Christian devotion. Unfortunately, any technology can become corrupt or less than what its creators intended. At any rate, Christianity and technology have a long relationship.

In Islam the Qur'an is said to be an exact copy of a holy, heavenly book. Unlike the Christian New Testament that consists of various inspired and authoritative writings such as narrative accounts of the ministry of Jesus (Gospels), historical accounts (Acts), a series of letters (epistles), and apocalyptic literature (Revelation), the Qur'an is said to be written by God directly, then transcribed by Muhammad. Reading the Qur'an in its original language is of the utmost importance to Muslims, who believe that it cannot be accurately translated into any other language. Muslims even have a practice that involves keeping the Qur'an on the highest shelf in a house, lest it be placed beneath other literary works. Writing in the Qur'an is also generally frowned upon. This is quite a contrast to Christianity, which encourages a multitude of translations, believing

that God's message can indeed cross language barriers successfully.

Originally, the New Testament was thought to have been written in a special heavenly language, as the Greek it contains did not match up with known scholarly forms of Greek. Then it was discovered that the New Testament was actually written in the common Greek language of its day, known as *koine* Greek. This discovery turned the established speculation on its head! The New Testament was not, after all, written in some special heavenly form of Greek, but in everyday language meant for everyday people.

More on Christianity's influence on festivals and holidays is addressed in Week 18 in conjunction with readings from *How Christianity Changed the World*.

### pp. 18–19

Hill writes, “So the Christians may have taken over parts of the pagan past, but we know this, in part, because they told us so themselves.” This underscores an important point in response to some critics of Christianity. Sometimes it is claimed that Christianity as an institution purposely suppressed documents or competing views, suggesting some sort of conspiracy. However, as historical records indicate, it is quite often the case that Christians preserved other ideas and competing writings merely because they quoted them and critiqued them in their own writings. In other words, we have, in many instances, Christianity to thank for actually preserving such competing ideas that otherwise might have been lost forever.

### pp. 20–21

For more insights on the Christian transition from the Jewish Sabbath to Sunday worship, see *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* by D.A. Carson (Wipf & Stock, 2000).

### pp. 22–23

Christians traditionally chose burial over alternatives such as cremation due to the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. Since in Christian eschatology (teachings about last things and our final state) it is believed that all the dead will be raised prior to judgment, burying was the logical choice.

### pp. 24–25

Although not mentioned by name, Hill's reference to Japanese ancestral worship refers to Shintoism, a religion dating to the 8th century that contains an amalgam of beliefs such as ancestor worship, belief in nature spirits, and *kami*—a sacred power. Shinto, in fact, was Japan's national religion until 1945. Essentially, then, there are



significant worldview differences when comparing traditional Christian methods of burial and treating the dead, which are based on respect for the body and the resurrection, and Shinto-inspired care for the dead, which is tied closely to ancestral worship. For an introductory overview of Shintoism see the chapter in *The Compact Guide to World Religions* edited by Dean Halverson (Bethany House, 1996).

Ideas similar to those of Celsus remain today. Specifically, it is often claimed that Christianity merely took its ideas from existing or pre-existing Greek and pagan mythologies or religions. Is this true? Hardly. For an assessment of these sorts of critiques see *The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow from Pagan Thought?* by Ronald Nash (P&R Publishing, 2003).

#### pp. 26–27

The material here about Ricci and Valignano is illustrative of unique missionary methods as well as apologetic tactics. Rather than force belief on other cultures, which goes against biblical imperatives, or be viewed as outsiders simply “selling” another idea, individuals such as Matteo Ricci took an approach that valued and respected an existing culture and its beliefs. On the other hand, such techniques as Ricci dressing like a Buddhist monk have struck some Christians as going too far. How far do we take the Apostle Paul’s words, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some”? (1 Corinthians 9:22, ESV) Whatever your views on Ricci and his missionary techniques, one must give him credit for being careful in his methods, as well as tactful.

Was Ricci’s withholding the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and Christian ideas about the nature of revelation a good idea? He did so, Hill writes, because he did not think the Chinese would find the teachings “palatable.” But at what point and in what areas should missionaries make such judgment calls, if at all? What if Ricci had decided that monotheism would not be “palatable” to the Chinese? Or the deity of Christ? Or the resurrection? Ricci’s example demonstrates the challenges of missionary efforts, both in a relational sense and a theological one.

## Day 3

### *What’s So Great About Christianity?*

#### pp. 46–47

Many of the themes D’Souza introduces here are addressed in more detail in our other readings over the weeks such as the Christian influence on education, lit-

erature, the fine arts, holidays, other cultural matters, and more.

Does Matthew 22:21 really teach separation of church and state? Schmidt seems to think so, too. See our note in reference to Schmidt for a brief alternative explanation to what Christ is saying in the passage. (Week 5, Day 1, pp. 264–265 of Schmidt)

#### pp. 48–49

There are different schools of thought regarding the origins of religions and their types. Some hold to what is usually termed *original monotheism*, arguing that from monotheistic traditions came a decay in belief that resulted in beliefs such as polytheism, animism, henotheism, etc. Original monotheism is in contrast to an evolutionary approach to religions origins, which place monotheism as a much later religious development. For an overview of these perspectives see chapter 1 of *Neighboring Faiths* by Winfried Corduan (InterVarsity Press, 1998).

D’Souza’s use of the phrase “The God of the Old Testament” is somewhat unfortunate in that it implies a distinction between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. For Christians, however, God is the same God, unchanging, in the Old and New Testaments.

#### pp. 50–51

D’Souza writes, “But the Christian God is not like human beings at all,” going on to offer some examples. It is indeed true that there are significant differences between creature and Creator, but we should balance these facts with additional information such as the fact that human beings are made in God’s image. This means, at least, that we do have some traits in common with God, but not such that we, too, are gods. For instance, we possess intellectual, creative, and moral aspects to our being, just as God does. In addition, in God the Son (Jesus), we have the miracle of the Incarnation, meaning that God became a man. Without getting too far off on a theological tangent, God the Father is spirit, but God the Son does indeed have a physical, though glorified, body. Even the Holy Spirit, though a spiritual being by definition, is a personal being. Again, this is not to dispute D’Souza’s point, merely to offer some clarifications. If “God is not like human beings at all,” we’d have no way to meaningfully relate to God.

Although D’Souza points out contemporary theocratic approaches by underscoring Islam, there are elements within Christianity that could also be included, such as those holding to what is variously termed Christian theonomy or reconstructionism. Such Christians do indeed believe in establishing God’s laws, emphasizing the Old Testament, in contemporary society.



The phrase “Christian dichotomy” is a tricky one. While on the one hand, D’Souza’s overall point here is to demonstrate theocracy inherent in a religion such as Islam, on the other hand the use of “Christian dichotomy” may lead some to make an all-too-common error in thinking that the Christian life can be neatly segregated rather than a whole integrating all of the Christian life into every aspect.

## Day 4

### *What’s So Great About Christianity?*

**pp. 58–59**

The phrase “new values entered the world” as a consequence of Christianity needs some clarification. Christianity did not introduce “new values” per se, because those values already existed to some degree or another in every person. Those values were “written on the heart” (Romans 2:14–16) by God and, as such, cannot be completely eradicated. Christ did not come along to introduce a new morality or new values, but he certainly reiterated such God-derived values and their importance, leading Christians to better understand their significance both personally and practically.

**pp. 62–63**

Stating that “Christ invented the notion that the way to lead is by serving the needs of others” is somewhat of an exaggeration. Perhaps it would be better to say that Christ ideally modeled the notion of servant leadership.

**pp. 64–65**

Actually a better translation of the passage cited by D’Souza is “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils” (1 Timothy 6:10, ESV).

The rise of capitalism is addressed further in *The Victory of Reason*.

**pp. 66–67**

The idea of progress as ongoing betterment is certainly debatable on a number of levels. For instance, while there’s no disputing the progress made in certain realms, such as medical technology, in comparison to conditions hundreds of years ago, there are other areas where progress as betterment is not so clear. In some ways one could argue that humanity as a whole has indeed gotten worse or at least maintained similar stances when it comes to warfare, for instance. The 20th century alone saw the advent of two world wars. While some secularists have placed their faith in naturalistic science to “save” humanity, viewing religion as a relic that will one day vanish, such

has not been the case, either with science as savior or religion diminishing. With that said, there are within various Christian theological viewpoints different perspectives on progress. Some view the church influencing the world so positively that the world will indeed get better and better such that it is ultimately “Christianized,” thus preparing the way for the return of Christ. This view is commonly called postmillennialism. Other views tend to lean in the direction of the world becoming more and more corrupt, thus setting up the world for the rise of a period of great tribulation (hardly “progress” in the typical definition). Such a view is commonly held by Christians who hold to a form of premillennialism known as dispensationalism. Our goal here is not to present and sift through various Christian positions on such things, but merely to point out that there are differing Christian views on “progress.” We would add, too, that even Christians who differ on such matters agree that history has a linear, God-directed (providential) purpose that will indeed come to a head.

More on Christian compassion is included in chapter 5 of *How Christianity Changed the World* (Week 15).

**pp. 70–71**

Chapter 10 of *How Christianity Changed the World* also addresses matters of equality (Week 5, Day 1), while chapter 2 addresses matters regarding the sanctity of human life (Week 6, Day 2), and chapter 4 addresses the topic of women in Christianity (Week 17, Day 1).

**pp. 72–73**

Slavery is addressed in more detail in Week 17.

**pp. 76–77**

For more on just war theory see our article on “Christianity and Warfare” (Week 16).

**pp. 80–81**

For more on the negative impact of secularism on society see *Saving Leonardo* by Nancy Pearcey (B&H Books, 2010). For an astute assessment of the ideas D’Souza brings up regarding the ultimate failure of a “secular” morality see *The Abolition of Man* by C.S. Lewis

## Day 5

### *Assignments*

#### **Western Culture**

1. Write a summary of chapters 5, 6, and 7 of *What’s So Great About Christianity* (Part II: Christianity and the West).



## **Democracy**

1. Did Christian ideas and ideals influence the formation of the U.S. Declaration of Independence and its Constitution? Research the topic and write a paper about it.

## ***Discussion Questions***

### **Western Culture**

1. In general terms, what role did Christianity play in the foundation of Western culture?
2. Do you find D’Souza’s presentation of “the spiritual basis of limited government” convincing or not? Why or why not?
3. How has the Christian view of human dignity influenced Western culture?

## **Democracy**

1. How did Christian ethics transform the pagan world?
2. How has Christianity contributed to balancing power between the church and the state? ■



## Appendix 1: Discussion Questions and Answers

Below you'll find a list of discussion questions related to the topics and readings. Discuss these questions aloud with your children. Many of these questions are intended to help your children recall and articulate broad understanding of the material and critical thinking skills rather than rote memorization of material.

### Week 1

#### Western Culture

1. In general terms, what role did Christianity play in the foundation of Western culture? *(Answers will vary, but may include mention of Christianity's influence on government, art, music, literature, architecture, religion, morality, etc.)*
2. Do you find D'Souza's presentation of "the spiritual basis of limited government" convincing or not? Why or why not? *(Answers will vary. See chapter 5 in What's So Great About Christianity?)*
3. How has the Christian view of human dignity influenced Western culture? *(Answers will vary, but in general the Christian emphasis on human dignity has influenced Western culture in a variety of ways including its legal system, ethical assumptions, charity, etc.)*

#### Democracy

1. How did Christian ethics transform the pagan world? *(See Christianity On Trial, page 4 and following.)*
2. How has Christianity contributed to balancing power between the church and the state? *(See Christianity On Trial, page 10 and following.)*

### Week 2

#### Western Culture

1. According to Stark, what are the "blessings of rational theology"? *(See chapter 1 of The Victory of Reason.)*
2. How has Christian thinking influenced the development of the areas of science and technology in the West? *(Answers will vary, but in general Christianity contributed to the rise of scientific and technological progress due to its emphasis on exploring and understanding God's world. See also chapter 2 of The Victory of Reason.)*

### Week 3

#### Democracy

1. Do you think the Christian influence on Western democracy has been exaggerated? Why or why not? *(Answers will vary.)*
2. Is there a danger of placing too much emphasis on the Christian influence on democracy in the formation of the United States? Why or why not? *(Answers will vary.)*

### Week 4

#### Democracy

1. Stark spends a great deal of time addressing questions about capitalism and its Christian affinities. Whether you agree with Stark or not, do you find his arguments convincing? Why or why not? *(See material in Part II of The Victory of Reason.)*
2. How did Christianity contribute to democracy in America? *(Answers will vary, but in general Christianity influenced the foundation of America significantly. Whether or not this makes the origins of America a "Christian nation" or not is debated, but the influence is, nevertheless, very real. Look for broad answers, but for an overview see chapter 8 of Christianity On Trial.)*
3. What do you think democracy would look like in the world if Christianity had never existed? What political ideologies might countries like the United States follow? Would the general trend for the world be better or worse? *(Answers will vary, but obviously without the influence of Christianity many benefits the world has reaped would be lost.)*

### Week 5

#### Social Justice

1. What is social justice? Broadly speaking, social justice relates to bringing justice to society. If things are not right (unjust), then social justice should seek to make them right (just) by active engagement in culture. *(Examples of social justice causes can include civil rights, women's rights, matters relating to the sanctity of human life, outreach to help the poor, bioethics matters, involvement in stopping human trafficking, and even environmental stewardship.)*
2. Can an ethical system like moral relativism rightly help with social justice issues? *(Not really, since moral relativism argues that there really are no standards of right and wrong, but all morality is relative to individu-*