

Human Dignity: Does Every Human Being Matter?

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Introduction: Nietzsche's Critique of Christianity

Friedrich Nietzsche, in his final book *The Will to Power*, accused the Christian faith of sabotaging the development of human civilization. He said:

'If one regards individuals as equal, one calls the species into question, one encourages a way of life that leads to the ruin of the species: Christianity is the counterprinciple to the principle of selection... The species requires that the ill-constituted, weak, degenerate, perish: but it was precisely to them that Christianity turned as a conserving force; it further enhanced that instinct in the weak, already so powerful, to take care of and preserve themselves and to sustain one another. What is 'virtue' and 'charity' in Christianity if not this mutual preservation, this solidarity of weak, this hampering of selection?'¹

Nietzsche went on to say that the concept that every human being has equal value before God

'is extraordinarily harmful; one forbade actions and attitudes that were in themselves among the prerogatives of the strongly constituted – as if they were in themselves unworthy of men. One brought the entire tendency of the strong into disrepute when one erected the protective measures of the weakest... When lesser men begin to doubt whether higher men exist, then the danger is great! And one ends by discovering that there is virtue also among the lowly and subjugated, the poor in spirit, and that before God men are equal – which has so far been the non plus ultra of nonsense on earth!... When Nero and Caracalla sat up there, the paradox arose: 'the lowest man is worth more than the man up there!' And the way was prepared for an image of God that was as remote as possible from the image of the most powerful – the god on the cross!'²

I assume that my reader is put off by Nietzsche, so any defense of his ideal for human civilization must be undertaken elsewhere. However, as far as his analysis of history goes, Nietzsche certainly knew what he was talking about: He was an expert in the classics and became a professor at the age of 24. He understood inside and out what the Greek and Roman world was like before it was invaded by the ideology we now call 'Christianity.' And as far as his understanding of the ethical impact of Christian faith, Nietzsche also knew what he was talking about. Consider the treatment of children in classical times: 'Medical historians have pointed out, for instance, that the care of defective newborns simply was not a medical concern in classical antiquity. The morality of the killing of sickly or deformed newborns appears not to have been questioned until the birth of the Christian church. No pagan writer – whether Greek, Roman, Indian or Chinese – appears to have raised the question whether human beings have inherent value ontologically, irrespective of social value, legal status, age, sex and so forth. The first espousal of an idea of inherent human value in Western civilization depended on a belief that every human being was formed in the image of God.'³

Whereas the 'new atheists' like Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Richard Dawkins tend to accuse Christianity of being inherently violent, pro-slavery, intolerant, and so on, Nietzsche's more thoughtful and accurate atheist critique focuses on what Christianity truly is: a belief system wherein a God of love personally gives his life for each and every human being, then commissions his followers to reflect this same value system. In Christian thought, each human being has intrinsic worth and dignity because of the love of God; we are not a means to some other end; rather, each person is an end in herself or himself. This basic conviction is not disembodied nor is it conjured out of thin air; it was, in fact, enacted in history by the Christian community, especially in the classical

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale trans., p.141 – 42. I am aware that this work was published posthumously and involved other contributors under Nietzsche's name, but the sentiments here are quite representative of Nietzsche himself.

² Ibid, p.466 – 468

³ Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers' Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p.99

Greco-Roman world which Nietzsche knew so well.⁴ This is why Christian faith drew the ire of Nietzsche. The value of Nietzsche as a critic of Christianity is precisely this: He understands his opponent. The ‘new atheists,’ by contrast, do not. They take aberrations like the Crusades – problematic and in need of explanation as they are – as faithful examples of the core belief system itself. Nietzsche’s historical and philosophical understanding of Christian faith far surpasses those of the ‘new atheists.’

Science: A Foundation for Equal Human Dignity?

Nietzsche was quite prescient. On the whole, atheist scientists and social elites of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s did not value each human life. They valued the human species *as a whole*, and used science to try to *improve* the human race. When Enlightenment atheism made major strides in the mid to late 1800’s all the way to World War II, leading thinkers affirmed the value of the human species but not any particular individual. This interest in improving the human species led to the following social movements:

- Social Darwinism, scientific racism, and societal survival of the fittest: Charles Darwin wrote about ‘natural selection at work in the killing of indigenous peoples in Australia by the British, wrote of black people as a category between whites and gorillas, and spoke against social programs for the ‘weak’ because they permitted the least desirable people to survive. In his view, the ‘civilized races’ would eventually replace ‘savage races throughout the world.’⁵ Thomas Huxley, nicknamed ‘Darwin’s Bulldog’ for contributing to the widespread acceptance of evolution, said, ‘No rational man, cognizant of the facts, believes that the average Negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the white man.’⁶
- The Eugenics movement led by Darwin’s cousin Francis Galton.⁷ Galton said, ‘It is easy...to obtain by careful selection a permanent breed of dogs or horses gifted with peculiar powers of running, or of doing anything else, so it would be quite practicable to produce a highly-gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations.’ During the first few decades of the 20th century, eugenics was practiced around the world, and promoted by governments through genetic screening, birth control, promoting differential birth rates, marriage restrictions, segregation (both racial segregation as well as segregation of the mentally ill from the rest of the population), compulsory sterilization, forced contraction of syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases, forced sterilizations, forced abortions, forced pregnancies, and genocide. Nevertheless, eugenics became an academic discipline at many colleges and universities, and received funding from many sources. This movement was hugely popular in the early 20th century and died out quickly after World War II after the realization that Adolf Hitler had been a major proponent of it. Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan had developed ideas of racial hygiene, human experimentation, and the extermination of ‘unwanted’ people groups.
- The priority of the nation over the individual. In the Marxist orbit, there was a tendency for political leaders and elites to believe that social engineering could lead to a ‘new humanity.’ Said Lenin, ‘Religion is the opium of the people: this saying of Marx is the cornerstone of the entire ideology of Marxism about religion. All modern religions and churches, all and of every kind of religious organizations, are always considered by Marxism as the organs of bourgeois reaction, used for the protection of the exploitation and the stupefaction of the working class.’⁸ This led to Stalin’s purges, where an estimated twenty million people perished primarily because they were Russian Orthodox Christians, political dissidents, or otherwise considered less-than-loyal subjects of the Soviet atheist state.⁹ Soviet and Nazi authorities set up notorious

⁴ David Bentley Hart, in *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, chs.10 – 15) provides ample historical information on how Christian faith stressed our common humanity and thus invented the human. For historians’ and sociologists’ appraisals of Christianity’s impact on European civilization, see Appendix A, below.

⁵ Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), p.74

⁶ Thomas Huxley, *Lay Sermons, Addresses, and Reviews*, 1871.

⁷ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, p.1. British Christian journalist G. K. Chesterton was an early critic of the philosophy of eugenics, expressing this opinion in his book, *Eugenics and Other Evils* (1917).

⁸ Lenin, Vladimir, *About the Attitude of the Working Party Toward the Religion*, Collected works, 1909, v.17, p.41

⁹ Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Orion Books, 2007), p. 649: ‘Perhaps 20 million had been killed; 28 million deported, of whom 18 million had slaved in the Gulags.’ Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy for an Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), p.139: ‘Between 1929 and 1953 the state created by Lenin and set in motion by Stalin deprived 21.5 million Soviet citizens of their lives.’ Alexander N. Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p.234: ‘My own many years and experience in

labor camps in Siberia and Germany, reinstating forced labor slavery in Europe: by 1941, some 2.3 million people were in the Soviet Gulags¹⁰ and 1.3 million in conscripted German labor camps.¹¹ Mao initiated the Chinese Cultural Revolution from 1966 – 1976, which led to a massive number of deaths; estimates range from 3 million to 20 million.¹² Cambodia's Khmer Rouge, North Korea's dictatorship, Vietnam's communist regime, and modern China's human rights violations also fall under this category.

Coming largely out of the jarring experiences culminating in World Wars I and II, the humanist community attempted to put forward a scientific foundation for human dignity. Their 1933 Humanist Manifesto I is a remarkable document for many reasons. It is notable, however, that considerable ambiguity exists in Manifesto I when it speaks of human values and needs:

'Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values. Obviously humanism does not deny the possibility of realities as yet undiscovered, but it does insist that the way to determine the existence and value of any and all realities is by means of intelligent inquiry and by the assessment of their relations to human needs. Religion [the term used by the early humanists of humanism itself] must formulate its hopes and plans in the light of the scientific spirit and method.' (Humanist Manifesto I, Article 5)

The same thoughts are reiterated in Humanist Manifesto II, articles 3 and 4. Yet how does one define or determine human needs without any guarantees of human values? For example, human values might include providing extra services for the handicapped or honoring certain parent-child or spousal relationships; yet if those values have no actual foundation, what exactly are human needs? Can science tell us what human needs are, as the humanist movement expected? Since Darwin's time, science has been used to try to *improve the human race*, not to protect the rights of each human being. That continues to be true. In the U.S., 92% of babies with Down's Syndrome are aborted,¹³ which means that we are not using abortion as *birth control* in this instance; we are using it as *child selection*. We use our abilities to perform an amniocentesis and an abortion to express our freedom from (certain) children. We are also aware of the abortion of girls due to the cultural preference for boys.¹⁴ Is abortion for gender selection morally acceptable? In the realm of scientific research, we are using embryonic stem cells from fertilized eggs harvested from in-vitro fertilization. Are these fertilized eggs in fact human beings? That, of course, depends on larger metaphysical and religious considerations. Science by itself does not tell us whether these actions are right or wrong. We have to bring in a moral framework from somewhere else. That is why Harvard professor of biology and mathematics, Martin A. Nowak, also Director of the Program for Evolutionary Dynamics, explains that, by itself, intellectual scientific life is 'inherently unstable,' and is unable to answer the kind of questions religion can — like the meaning of life, or the value of each human life.

This is especially true when we read the political and economic goals of the humanist manifestos. Manifesto I, article 14 asserted that a 'socialized and cooperative economic order' is preferable to a 'profit-motivated society' and that a 'radical change in methods, controls, and motives must be instituted.' While I admire the direction of

the rehabilitation of victims of political terror allow me to assert that the number of people in the USSR who were killed for political motives or who died in prisons and camps during the entire period of Soviet power totaled 20 to 25 million. And unquestionably one must add those who died of famine — more than 5.5 million during the civil war and more than 5 million during the 1930s.' Robert Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe* (New York: Knopf, 2007), p.584: 'More recent estimations of the Soviet-on-Soviet killing have been more 'modest' and range between ten and twenty million.' Stéphane Courtois, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.4: 'U.S.S.R.: 20 million deaths.' Cf. Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.423

¹¹ Ibid, p.429

¹² Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), p.569 make an estimate of 3 million deaths. Daniel Chirot, *Modern Tyrants: The Power and Prevalence of Evil in Our Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p.198 estimates 20 million.

¹³ See <http://www.voicesforlife.net/2010/02/staggering-92-of-down-syndrome-babies.html>. Also http://abcnews.go.com/Health/w_ParentingResource/down-syndrome-births-drop-us-women-abortion/story?id=8960803

¹⁴ Joe Carter, 'The Global War Against Girls', *First Things*, March 16, 2011, <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2011/03/the-global-war-against-baby-girls>

these statements from 1933, I do not think that *science alone* grounds these humanists' intellectual commitment to socialism. Science per se can easily reinforce capitalism, as it did during the days of Darwin through World War II. This logical problem contributed to why the 'socialized and cooperative economic order' put forward by Humanist Manifesto I suffered from lack of support. This socialist language was considerably softened in the 1973 Humanist Manifesto II, articles 10 through 17.

Nevertheless, atheist Sam Harris, in his claim that science can provide us with a morality from the bottom up, has recently renewed this basic contention, though not connected to any specific political platform. Fellow atheist physicist Sean Carroll objected to Harris' claim by saying, 'What if I believe that the highest moral good is to be found in the autonomy of the individual, while you believe that the highest good is to maximize the utility of some societal group? What are the data we can point to in order to adjudicate this disagreement? We might use empirical means to measure whether one preference or the other leads to systems that give people more successful lives on some particular scale—but that's presuming the answer, not deriving it. Who decides what is a successful life? It's ultimately a personal choice, not an objective truth to be found simply by looking closely at the world. How are we to balance individual rights against the collective good? You can do all the experiments you like and never find an answer to that question.'¹⁵ Harris promised a response, but none has come forth, to my knowledge. Perhaps that is because there is none, properly speaking. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in his book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* has given us a very full treatment of this problem.¹⁶

Hence, John Gray, political philosopher and formerly professor of European Thought at the London School of Economics, maintains the vigorous critique of humanism that it is a Christian heresy and, therefore, intellectually unstable. For it is a hollowed out version of Christianity, an attempt to preserve the dignity of each human being while removing the foundation of that dignity: a loving God whose love dignifies the person. As evidence, historically and sociologically, secular humanism only appears in places where Christianity has been before. It does not succeed in drawing many converts from, say, Hinduism, where the equal value of each human life is far from self-evident. Gray traces the development of humanism from Plato to postmodernism and argues that the myth of scientific and technological progress is how we console ourselves when we face the darker side of our nature. For example, he holds that 'modern humanism is the faith that through science humankind can know the truth – and so be free. But if Darwin's theory of natural selection is true this is impossible. The human mind serves evolutionary success, not truth. To think otherwise is to resurrect the pre-Darwinian error that humans are different from all other animals.'¹⁷ Science is simply a tool that human beings use for one purpose or another, and it can just as easily be yoked to warfare and competition as to individual human dignity and human equality. Science itself does not inherently prefer one over the other.

Philosophy: A Foundation for Equal Human Dignity?

Can philosophy provide us with an argument for the value of each human life? The International Bill of Human Rights, part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) speaks of 'the inherent dignity...of the human family.' But what underlies this 'inherent dignity'? Ronald Dworkin, a very noted American philosopher and scholar of law, says that equality between all human beings is so fundamental that it needs no justification. 'We almost all accept...that human life in all its forms is sacred...For some of us, this is a matter of religious faith; for others, of secular but deep philosophical belief.'¹⁸ This principle of human equality, he concedes, is 'too fundamental, I think, to admit of any defence in the usual form. It seems unlikely it can be derived for many more general and basic principle of political morality that is more widely accepted. Nor can it be established through one or another of the methods of argument popular in political theory for these already presuppose some particular conception of equality.'¹⁹ Dworkin thus admits that there is no secular foundation for human dignity. He says, instead, that the assertion must be held to be self-evident.

But this assertion would hardly be self-evident to most people in most times and places. It certainly was not to the ancient Babylonians, whose Code of Hammurabi meted out civic punishments based not on the crime but on the

¹⁵ Sean Carroll, <http://www.scienceandreligiontoday.com/2010/03/29/can-science-answer-moral-questions/>

¹⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1988)

¹⁷ John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*, Granta Books, 2003.

¹⁸ Ronald Dworkin, 'Life is Sacred: That's the Easy Part,' *New York Times Magazine*, May 16, 1993, p.36

¹⁹ Ronald Dworkin, 'In Defence of Equality,' in *Liberalism*, ed. Richard J. Arneson (Hants, U.K.: Edward Elgar, 1992), 3:537

social standing of the victim:

¹⁹⁷ If a man has broken another man's limb, his own shall be broken. ¹⁹⁸ If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of a *poor man*, he shall pay one maneh of silver. ¹⁹⁹ If a man has destroyed an eye or a limb of *the servant* of another man, he shall pay one-half of a mina. ²⁰⁰ If a man has made the tooth of another to fall out, one of his own teeth shall be knocked out. ²⁰¹ If the tooth be that of a *poor man*, he shall pay one-third of a maneh of silver.'

In the Code of Hammurabi, the poor and the servant class are worth less than other people; this is shown by the lesser monetary value needed to compensate for killing or harming them.²⁰ Classical Greek and Roman cultures, as Nietzsche well understood, did not view all human beings as possessed of equal worth and value. The noble Athenians at the time of the great philosophers believed that they were descended from a different human ancestor, a belief that enabled Plato and Aristotle to approve of mass slavery. Aristotle said, 'From the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.' Plato and Aristotle owned five and fourteen slaves, respectively, as enumerated in their wills.²¹ The Roman Empire followed the Greek idea of the polis of citizens. For example, it operated a system where surplus food in one part of the Empire was distributed to other parts that lacked, but only registered citizens of each city could receive the benefit; foreigners could not benefit – 'it had nothing to do with need.'²² Nor would the idea of equal human dignity be self-evident to those raised in strongly Confucian cultures like China, Japan, or pre-Christian Korea, where the value of children and those in younger generations are determined by parents and elders. Nor would it be self-evident to many in modern-day Hindu India, whose karmic views explain differences in social standing and apparent value as reflecting the merit each person acquired in a previous life. Sri Lankan Christian social commentator Vinoth Ramachandra says of the idea of human equality, 'It would have been incomprehensible to someone brought up, say, within Indian or Chinese civilizations.'²³ The idea of equal human dignity was not actually self-evident to even the founders of the American Constitution or the Enlightenment philosophers. Consider their frequent racist and pro-slavery positions.²⁴ Finally, Islamic shari'a law is not rooted in the idea of equal human dignity, still less does it concretize that basic idea into human rights applied consistently to all in Muslim-held lands. Dworkin's statement, 'Human life in all its forms is sacred' is precisely where there is no meaningful consensus. Hotly contested are the rights of women, the rights of people in various stages of life (especially the unborn and the aged), people in various relations (the dependent and subordinate), and people in various moral and cultural situations (the non-citizen, the poor, the lower caste, the criminal, the wartime enemy, the opponent across a geo-political dispute, the oppressor, the 'other').

²⁰ Converting to present dollars is difficult, but as points of comparison, within the Code of Hammurabi, one-third of a maneh of silver was the compensatory worth of a slave fatally gored by an ox, the penalty for causing the death of a pregnant slave girl, the penalty a creditor would have to pay if he wrongfully seized collateral from a debtor, and the payment a poor man would have to pay his wife to divorce her.

²¹ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: Why Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York, NY: Random House, 2005) p.27.

²² Jonathan Hill, *What Has Christianity Ever Done For Us? How It Shaped the Modern World* (Downers' Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), p.158 – 159. Christians, by contrast, cared for all people by setting up food distribution centers, xenodocheion ('houses for strangers'), and ptocheion ('places for the poor').

²³ Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers' Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p.101

²⁴ Immanuel Kant was the leading Enlightenment philosopher of the late 1800's. He was a staunch racist and the architect of modern racism. He said, 'Humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race. The yellow Indians have a smaller amount of talent. The Negroes are lower, and the lowest are a part of the American peoples.' (Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, lectures from 1772 – 1796). Robert Bernasconi argues that Kant, while not the first person to use the word 'race,' was the first to give the term a precise definition. 'By setting out clearly the distinction between race and variety, where races are marked by hereditary characteristics that are unavoidable in the offspring, whereas the distinguishing marks of varieties are not always transmitted, Kant introduced a language for articulating permanent differentiations within the notion of species' ('Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race', in Bernasconi (ed), *Race* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.17). The former president of the American Sociological Association, Joe Feagin, concurs with this assessment of Kant. The leading American Enlightenment philosopher was Thomas Jefferson, Kant's counterpart. Although he wrote on a few occasions that he disliked slavery, Jefferson 'also articulated the first well-honed and extensive arguments by a North American intellectual for black racial inferiority...[viewing] African Americans as inferior to whites in reasoning, imagination, beauty, and other important qualities. Over his long lifetime, Jefferson was a major slaveholder who owned hundreds of African Americans.' (Joe Feagin, *Racist America*, p.69)

As far as I can tell, Nietzsche's thoughts illustrate the difficulty with trying to determine whether the human species (or nation, etc.) or the human individual is the starting point for ethical reflection. The decision to go one way or the other appears to be arbitrary from an intellectual standpoint. One can start with the individual, of course, but there is no necessary requirement that one do this. It is arbitrary. One can just as easily start with the family, nation, this generation, ethnicity, race, species, or planet as the jumping off point for ethical reflection. This would bring into question the worth and significance of every human individual. What is the real objection for doing that? There appears to be none.

For example, Princeton utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer argues that certain people – fetuses, infants, those with certain cognitive disabilities, and certain elderly people – are not 'persons' because they can't express their will to live in a way that we recognize. Singer writes:

'Only a person can want to go on living, or have plans for the future, because only a person can even understand the possibility of a future existence for herself or himself. This means that to end the lives of people, against their will, is different from ending the lives of beings who are not people. Indeed, strictly speaking, in the case of those who are not people, we cannot talk of ending their lives against or in accordance with their will, because they are not capable of having a will on such a matter...killing a person against her or his will is a much more serious wrong than killing a being that is not a person. If we want to put this in the language of rights, then it is reasonable to say that only a person has a right to life.'²⁵

Singer makes assertions about the fundamental definition of a human being, including the ability to communicate to us their desire to live in a way that we can understand. Hence, he argues that newborns lack the essential characteristics of personhood: 'rationality, autonomy, and self-consciousness.'²⁶ Therefore, 'killing a newborn baby is never equivalent to killing a person, that is, a being who wants to go on living.'²⁷ Singer appears to take 'this present generation' as the starting point and the lens through which ethical reflection happens. Most people have found Singer's conclusions appalling. Most of us believe that a woman who throws her newborn baby away is committing murder. Yet what exactly is the rational basis for decisively refuting Singer? If the same woman had had a late-term abortion just two weeks prior to giving birth, is that the same act in principle, or is it different? Singer also places the elderly in the unenviable place of having to justify their own existence. Who can offer assertions about the ontological status of human being that are substantiated by larger evidence, and anchored in a worldview that is provable?

The limitations of science and philosophy here are telling. If we find our history of disregard for human rights distasteful, then what scientific or philosophical basis do we have for saying that each and every human being has worth and value? Are we worth something only if we contribute to someone else or to 'society'? Do we have only *instrumental* value to someone else's happiness? Or does *each* human being have *intrinsic* value?

Self-Regard: A Foundation for Equal Human Dignity?

In this landscape, the last resort to human dignity for some people is existential self-regard. It is expressed by the statement, 'Because I value my own life, I can understand how others value their own lives; therefore I can ground universal human dignity in my own personal existence.' Yet, it seems to me that this type of existentialist individualism, however well-meaning, suffers from several fatal problems. American legal scholar and law professor Michael Perry highlights some of them.²⁸ First, there are clearly people who do not 'properly' value their own lives; therefore their evaluation of others' lives suffers by extension. Whatever their stated reasons for devaluing their own lives, they are not persuaded by science or philosophy that their individual lives do matter, often because they recognize that those disciplines neither articulate nor impart meaning. I am not speaking only of people who engage in criminal behavior or suicide bombing. Consider the man who committed suicide in Harvard Yard in September of 2010, leaving a very sophisticated, one thousand nine hundred and six page suicide note on the web in which he described his act as 'an experiment in nihilism.' He wrote:

²⁵ Peter Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1995) p.197–198

²⁶ Peter Singer, *Taking Life: Humans*, Excerpted from *Practical Ethics*, 2nd edition, 1993

²⁷ Peter Singer, Peter Singer FAQ, Princeton University, accessed March 8, 2009

²⁸ Michael Perry, *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.32 – 35

'If there is no extant God and no extant gods, no good and no evil, no right and no wrong, no meaning and no purpose; if there are no values that are inherently valuable; no justice that is ultimately justifiable; no reasoning that is fundamentally rational, then there is no sane way to choose between science, religion, racism, philosophy, nationalism, art, conservatism, nihilism, liberalism, surrealism, fascism, asceticism, egalitarianism, subjectivism, elitism, ismism.'²⁹

Self-regard is not simply a given; it is at best an emotion that waxes and wanes. And when that emotion is at a low ebb, as I assume that it does for each and every person, it is far from clear how a person can go from believing 'the entire universe has no inherent meaning' to believing 'my life is meaningful,' and then even further to believing 'other peoples' lives are as meaningful as my own.'

Second, self-regard seems particularly and suspiciously well suited to people educated in the capitalist West. It resembles Adam Smith's doctrine of the invisible hand of the market where the pursuit of one's own self-interest naturally and easily leads to the pursuit of other people's interests. And, like Smith's doctrine, it does not adequately deal with the possibility that the two may be in conflict, at least in some very significant ways. To add to the problem, Western secular philosophy, culture, and jurisprudence have been notoriously weak in articulating what positive responsibilities people have towards one another.³⁰ Here are two concrete examples. In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Milliken v. Bradley* ruled that desegregation, 'in the sense of dismantling a dual school system,' did not require 'any particular racial balance in each school, grade or classroom.' This decision legally nullified desegregation efforts which began with *Brown v. Board of Education*, which hung on school districts and state governments having a positive responsibility to combat racial segregation. The result, as educator Jonathan Kozol called it in 2005, is the restoration of apartheid schooling in America.³¹ Similarly, in 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down *City of Richmond, Virginia v. J.A. Croson Company*. Richmond's population was half black, but the city awarded less than 1 percent of city government construction business to black owned construction companies. The high court said that Richmond's city government had no particular positive responsibility to hire black owned companies. These decisions were made because of how Western secular culture conceives of human relationships.

What do I *owe* another person in terms of relational, emotional, financial, and institutional care? How is this manifested by my answers to the questions about what level of taxes should I pay, how much should I care for other people's children, what career choices should I make to benefit myself or others, should I raise my children in a poor school district to possibly inject more cultural capital into declining neighborhoods, should I vote to limit corporate freedom or increase it, what is the appropriate course of reparation (if any) towards Native Americans and black Americans for historical injustice, what to do with competing claims to land between the U.S. and Mexico and between the U.S. and First Nations peoples, etc.? The main issue is that Western rights talk has mostly been defined negatively, that is: what must I *not* do to another person in terms of oppress them *in the context of the existing individualistic, democratic, industrialized, capitalist system*? The overwhelming tendency with those who espouse an existentialist individualism is to first accept the larger system as valid and then define relations negatively and thus, passively. People are said to have protection from government or others telling them what to do, which is precisely what nullifies whatever *positive responsibilities* they might owe to others. Other-regard, especially based on self-regard, mostly amounts to extending to others the right to not be interfered with. In a nutshell, it tends to mean, 'I will leave you alone because I want to be left alone, that is, as much as possible.' Michael Perry therefore acknowledges that self-regard can lead to the mutual 'nonaggression treaty.' But self-regard seems quite stunted in eliciting the commitment needed to ground and honor the dignity of *every* human being, especially people whose aggression we do not fear, or whose cooperation on which we do not depend. At this point, other-regard based on self-regard appears to collapse into mere sentimentality. One can easily *speak* of valuing every person, all the while *living* according to the principle of 'survival of the fittest.'

Third, self-regard elevates instinct and emotion but not reason and reason-based persuasion. The limitation of

²⁹ Mitchell Heisman, *Suicide Note*, 2010, p.21, found at <http://www.suicidenote.info>

³⁰ Michael Perry, *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.33. See also Appendix B, below, for more comment on the U.S. Supreme Court decisions I mention here.

³¹ Jonathan Kozol, *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing, 2005)

existential self-regard is seen when it tries to persuade someone who does not share this view. As Perry asks, would it persuade a Bosnian Serb to treat the life of a Bosnian Muslim as sacred? That is unlikely. What can it say in the face of China's human rights violations? 'Powerful Chinese bureaucrats should recognize individual human rights because *I* value Chinese citizens' rights, and I do that simply because I value my own life'? Individualistic reasoning is not an appeal to knowledge from science, philosophy, or history that can be morally imparted or shared by other people. In fact, this view devalues real knowledge, especially a deeper pursuit of any metaphysical knowledge.

Consequently, and fourth, true followers of this approach must admit that everyone else's ethical positions – even those of white supremacists, misogynists, radical terrorists, and the like – have just as much intellectual validity as their own. Why? Because in their view, ethical systems are only self-generated. Since they assert opinions on the grounds that they are self-generated, they must accept other opinions as valid simply because those opinions were generated by other selves. If another person says, 'Because I value my own life, I do *not* value others' lives as highly, especially those far away from me or unlike me; therefore I do *not* ground universal human dignity in my own personal experience, nor do I regard it as established by *your* opinion,' what logical recourse to moral persuasion exists? As a result, they may tend to either give up trying to influence others, or resort to violent force.

This retreat from rational persuasion is problematic and needs to be considered. Let me propose a question. Consider one of today's leading competitors for an alternative social ethic, a Machiavellian view that I nickname 'controlled inequality': 'survival of the fittest with a social cushion,' where the poor should be cared for only to the extent that they do not revolt. After all, why invest equally in all children? Disproportionately large investments in children from wealthier backgrounds are always more likely to result in technological and social advances, which will eventually trickle down to the masses. For instance, the inner city child who might discover the cure to cancer one day is irrelevant compared to a social system of incentives that is sure to produce someone else who will discover that same cure; that someone else will probably be drawn from a stable, wealthy family, which lives in a stable, wealthy school district. In point of fact, the period 1984 – 2007, despite being a period where the racial wealth gap between white and black families quadrupled from \$20,000 to \$95,000,³² and where racial segregation and inequality in public schools reached new heights, nevertheless saw huge advances in the pharmaceutical, banking, and high-tech sectors, the last of which was famously driven by white, middle-class young adults who started their own businesses with a proverbial computer in the garage. So the question remains: Why do more than what is necessary to maintain peace? Food stamps, child tax credits, and some minor assistance seem to be sufficient for that. Government welfare expenses are today's bread and circuses, once used by the Roman elites to pacify and entertain the masses so that their other privileges remained intact. From the standpoint of outcomes, this is quite justifiable. It is hard to argue against *realpolitik*. Judging by what people actually do, political stability and economic consumption are clearly the values most people hold dear, not working out the ramifications of the idea of equal human worth. The question is: Can an argument from self-regard really counter this amoral, pragmatic approach to life and politics?

Historian Christopher Lasch, an American social critic with socialist sympathies, does not believe so. In the domestic realm of the United States, the disconnection between real shared knowledge and a larger framework for ethics leads to the decline of political discourse into soundbite slogans and shouting matches. Lasch calls this disconnection 'existentialist irrationalism.' It is *existential* because people must choose an alternative to *reason* that is simply tied to *existence* (Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus chose the leap of faith, radical freedom, and heroic revolt, respectively); it is *irrational* because people must despair of ever making sense of an incoherent world; thus, they fall into an individualistic mode of survival. Lasch says that, as a result, he and other intellectuals feel 'alienation' from politics because there is no meaningful political party to which to belong. In the U.S., for example, on the political right lies the alliance of nationalism and corporate capitalism with varying degrees of racism privileging whites; this has clear interests and appeal. But on the left lies a fragmented coalition of special interests, all using 'rights' language without providing much reflection or analysis to ground these claims, which are very hard to bring together. Meanwhile, the left seems unable to deal with the history of racial injustice, continues the legal privileging of the corporation, places no real limitation on inheritance, etc. And for all its idealistic language, the left maintains the prevailing corporate imperialism in American foreign policy, because American businesses make more profit through war than through maintaining the dignity of foreigners elsewhere.

³² Thomas M. Shapiro, Tatjana Meschede, and Laura Sullivan, *The Racial Wealth Gap Increases Fourfold*, Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Brandeis University, May 2010

In Lasch's estimation, this is a direct result of the malleable nature of self-regard and its tenuous link to other-regard.

For Lasch and others who lament the demise of the Socialist Party of Eugene V. Debs from the 1920's, there is simply nowhere to invest one's hopes for coherent ethical action. Lasch notes that Americans on the secular liberal left put forward claims that are 'undogmatic, highly personal and idiosyncratic' and therefore inadequate 'to sustain effective social criticism or to bring about any radical social change.'³³ Remarkably, Lasch warns, 'As a social philosophy, liberalism is dead; and it cannot survive even as a private morality unless it is integrated into a new moral and philosophical synthesis beyond liberalism.'³⁴ While I am uncertain about Lasch's prediction of liberal individualism's demise as a private morality, I do concur with his larger point about the death of liberalism. If one basically agrees with the capitalist system, then it is difficult to maintain that one's other-regard has much real meaning. But even if one takes a more heroic stance, who else can be persuaded, and on what basis? A foundation of self-regard seems utterly unable to persuade anyone to move beyond the amoral, Machiavellian stance of 'controlled inequality' I described above. With what, then, does a foundation of existential self-regard leave us? Rhetoric without substance, bark without bite. Is it possible that those people who say 'self-regard leads to equal other-regard' are too easily contented, repeating rhetoric that can only fail to bring about any real change, or rationally persuade other people on substantial issues? How does one even continue to persuade oneself? When the Machiavellian alternative casts its long shadow as an equally justifiable and realistic paradigm, I find it doubtful that self-regard can sustain a person's long term commitment to a moral direction that is quite difficult and increasingly lonely.

What happens in the realm of international politics if we make self-regard (Lasch's existentialist irrationalism) a foundation for human dignity? For example, how would we address the explosion of modern-day slavery originating in non-Western countries which has now thoroughly infiltrated the West in the form of sex slavery and child pornography? A challenge we face is the lack of cross-cultural consensus on the dignity of each human being. American philosopher Richard Rorty advocates that we abandon our 'human rights foundationalism' altogether, arguing instead that we adopt a pragmatic attitude where we chalk up 'human rights talk' to simply 'a culturally acquired taste' of Western Europeans and Americans, that is, a white, Eurocentric culture.³⁵ In effect, Rorty wants us to say, 'We do this simply because we like it.' In which case, human rights talk on a global level would become yet another exercise in cultural imperialism. This is immediately problematic. Practical problems of going down this path were already anticipated by Adda B. Bozeman, an expert in international relations and history who showed in her 1971 study *The Future of Law in a Multicultural World* that conceptions of words, knowledge, law, the state, individuality, and community vary so greatly across cultures that 'human dignity' or 'human rights' have no stable meaning. Therefore, Bozeman wrote:

'Bills of human or civil rights on the order of those taken for granted in the West and registered explicitly in the Charter of the United Nations...will therefore continue to be as *deceptive* of the real state of affairs as they have been in the last decades. And the same prognosis naturally holds for constitutions: many are on record and many more will no doubt be written, but their normative effectiveness in the realm of public life is *bound to be limited indeed*.'³⁶ (emphasis mine)

No doubt Professor Bozeman, were she alive today, would not be surprised at the vast reach of modern-day slavery. To address this multi-faceted problem (and others) involving the far-reaching internet, large-scale government corruption and the like, we seem to need some normative value system that transcends cultures. That is, because it is doubtful that we can be satisfied with nominal legal changes without real weight on the ground *in people's hearts and minds*, we need a way forward where other people can embrace social change as a response to *truth*, not cultural imperialism. Rorty's proposal that we articulate human rights talk simply as a 'culturally acquired taste' of the West, since it would not attempt to rise above western culture to a transcendent status, would thus be doomed from the start. If these secular existentialists assert that 'we' have 'evolved' a higher level of morality than people in the

³³ Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1969), p.46, quoting T. B. Bottomore, *Critics of Society: Radical Thought in North America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), p.99, 130

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.209-210

³⁵ Richard Rorty, 'Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality,' note 43, at p.116. This is critiqued by Michael Perry 1998, p.38 – 39.

³⁶ Adda Bozeman, *The Future of Law in a Multicultural World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.164

past, then they gain the added distinction of being yet another group of mostly white people who claim to be more 'evolved' than other cultures, this time on the level of morality. Combining existentialism and pseudo-science in this way would appear to generate more problems than it purports to answer.

In the end, it is not even clear that science or secular philosophy can establish the value of the human *species*. The human species may be the most intelligent life form on earth, but it is almost certainly the most destructive as well. Humanity could not survive without the earth, but the earth would flourish without humanity. What if most or all human life perished? What if nature eventually produces another self-conscious species? This would produce a sense that human life is simply absurd, as existentialist Albert Camus wrote, 'In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.'³⁷ How exactly does science or secular philosophy prevent us from falling into this sense of absurdity?

Michael Perry, in evaluating the proposals of Dworkin and others, says, 'There is, finally, no intelligible secular version of the idea of human rights...the conviction that human beings are sacred is inescapably religious.'³⁸ Secular people might have an emotional commitment to such a view, but a rational and intellectual commitment seems impossible outside of a theological and spiritual framework. I am glad for more intellectual inquiry in this direction. But it is significant that after centuries of Enlightenment attempts at searching for a non-theological foundation, we have not discovered one.

Deism, Hinduism, and Islam: Foundations for Equal Human Dignity?

I would ask one further question. Can any deity serve as an adequate foundation for human dignity and sacredness? I ask this because the deist god believed in by the Enlightenment philosophers and the authors of the American Constitution is understood to be entirely passive in the face of human evil. Yet to be fundamentally passive in the face of human evil is to be evil. It is to be uninvolved in the afflictions of human beings. Since the deist god was not and is not personally involved in supporting human dignity, such a god cannot serve as the foundation for this idea. The deist god was always nothing more than an intellectual place holder for a generic 'creator' who endows people with theoretical 'rights' but who otherwise does not intervene in human history.

It seems to me that the Hindu god and the Muslim Allah suffer from similar problems.³⁹ With the Hindu god, there is no true moral difference between actions or motivations that we call 'good' and other actions or motivations we call 'evil.' This is because in Hinduism, good and evil are held to be constructs of our own limited perspective; they are simply aspects of the same ultimate reality, as Shiva the Destroyer is merely an aspect of the one god. The Brahma Sutra 2.1.34 – 36 offers this understanding of reality as the resolution to the apparent problem of injustice, where people do not get what they deserve in this life. Where is justice? The great Hindu commentator Sankara says that the resolution involves saying that people are actually receiving the karmic rewards or consequences from a past life, and that the creation is beginningless, so that there is no true problem of injustice. Many questions can be asked of this, but one suffices: If human dignity is said to be a distinct moral good, then can a deity who makes the duality between good and evil irrelevant serve as its foundation? Such a deity would be just as much at work to neglect it or undermine it.

The Islamic concept of Allah also leans towards the Hindu concept of a god who is both good and evil. The Qur'an 6:39, 4:88 and 143 says, 'Verily, God will cause to err whom he pleaseth, and will direct whom he pleaseth.' The lines refer to God's determination of the fate of individuals, and this becomes the Islamic equivalent of double predestination. Though devout Muslims refuse to say anything about the character of Allah, claiming that Allah is beyond all human language because all words become anthropomorphic and tainted by human experience, it is hard to escape the conclusion that Allah is both good and evil as well. Furthermore, serious questions related to human dignity can be raised about how the Qur'an envisions the political and social status of non-Muslims, ex-Muslims, women, and slaves. I explore those questions a bit more in Appendix A, below.

³⁷ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* 5 (1944; English translation 1955)

³⁸ Michael Perry, *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.35

³⁹ See my paper *Evil and the Christian God* for a theological appraisal of the various deities and their relation to good and evil. [http://nagasawafamily.org/article evil and the christian god.pdf](http://nagasawafamily.org/article%20evil%20and%20the%20christian%20god.pdf)

Trinitarian Theology Revealed by the Historical Jesus: The Original Foundation for Equal Human Dignity

The Christian Trinity, by contrast, quadruply affirms human dignity and sacredness in one continuous movement of love towards humanity. First, he made humanity, male and female, in his own image. He gave equal value to men and women. He also made loving relationships the norm for humanity, starting with marriage (Gen.1:27). The question of what is imaged in humanity leads to a reflection on the source of that image in the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit freely choose to love one another, for that is their divine nature; they cannot choose otherwise. Because God is not coerced from some force outside of him, it follows that people, to be like God or similar to God, must also not be coerced by some outside force; they must be free to reflect their God-given, God-inclined nature. Jesus said, 'Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you' (Jn.15:9), and since the Father did not coerce the Son's response, so the Son did not coerce his followers' response. God created human beings as beings-who-are-becoming, beings designed to grow through love, with a nature inclined towards this God. Our free choices towards God and one another would have helped us know and participate in the Trinity himself, eventually resulting in each person's free choice to allow our human nature to be perfected in union with this God, such that we would freely choose to always choose God eternally. This understanding of humanity and the Trinity means that the Christian God is completely and wholly opposed to human evil, and not complicit in it at all: He is incapable of turning us into robots precisely because of his love for us, and this explains why this God is not a passive partner-in-crime to human evil. It is not a choice that is even available to him. Thus, we cannot posit a definition of omnipotence whereby the Trinity *can* override human free choice but merely chooses to not do so for some unexplained reason. Rather, this God's love upholds and enables human free choice, even when that choice is abused to reject God Himself. Still less can we posit a doctrine of divine omnipotence like the Sunni Muslim doctrine of Allah's omnipotence, such that this God also causes humans to err, to sin, and do evil. I understand that this raises questions for some Christian traditions rooted in Augustinian monergism (the idea that there is but God's will in the universe), but such questions must be answered elsewhere.

Second, this God personally took corrupted human nature – the source of human evil – to himself, in a preliminary way in the community of Israel, and then ultimately and ontologically in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the representative of Israel. In the person of Jesus, he took corrupted human nature to himself, fought its self-centeredness, defeated it in his death, and gave us back a new, God-soaked, God-saturated human nature in the body of the resurrected Jesus.⁴⁰ Jesus is able to share his new humanity with us by his Spirit, once we receive his Spirit by faith. Jesus, therefore, is both the Christian foundation for human worth and the model and source of Christian human love and responsibility to one another to honor the other's dignity: 'Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.' (Mt.20:26 – 28) Jesus fully reveals a God who simultaneously loves humanity and opposes the evil corruption of our nature – a God who can be considered to be wholly good. The resurrected Jesus reveals to us what the God intended for humanity from the beginning of creation: to be elevated and glorified and brought fully into the life of the Trinity. In other words, God designed each and every person to share in the physical, glorified, God-soaked humanity that the resurrected Jesus now has, regardless of whether the fall of humanity had happened or not.

Third, in his present, personal work by his Spirit, this God is simultaneously attacking the root source of human evil in each one of us and personally loving us and providing love in which we can participate. This gives rise to a 'new humanity in Jesus' (Eph.2:15) indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus, mobilized in Christian mission, proclamation, and embodied witness through Christian love and social justice. The Spirit of God does not operate mechanically and causally on people as if they were simply robotic. The Spirit works personally; he issues both an external call concretely spoken by another person, but also an ongoing internal call within each person, through our consciences and in our humanity, because our humanity is patterned after Jesus' and because Jesus exerts a claim on it. Each person is called to respond personally to Jesus through the activity of his Spirit. This reality makes the Triune God a very active opponent of human evil at its very source. While enabling and utterly respecting our human free choice, he calls us to freely join him in healing humanity and the world, while we receive his ongoing healing of ourselves.

Fourth, this God promises to resurrect people in the likeness of Jesus' resurrection, in fresh, purified, and incorruptible human bodies. This is why, for example, the apostle John writes, 'We know that when he appears, we

⁴⁰ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, chapters 2 – 3. This atonement theory is called 'physical redemption.' See note below.

will be like him, because we will see him just as he is.' (1 Jn.2:2) The Triune God will give to each willing person the resurrected humanity that he physically perfected in Jesus. This gives rise to the question of human destiny and hell. Those who receive Jesus and the fundamental transformation he both offers and insists upon experience Jesus' love as love. They receive the final consummation of their personal union with the Triune God for which they had longed; they also receive the new heavens and the new earth as the restored and elevated creation which God had always desired. But those who reject Jesus reject their very own existence and destiny. Through their own choices, they will have conditioned their nature and will to curve in upon themselves with self-love, having taken even that gift from God and turned it inwards. Yet this God does not give up on them. He keeps calling out to them in love. But because they experience God as a hated and jealous competitor who constantly calls out to them to yield up their self-definitions, ambitions, pride, and resistance, they experience God's love as sheer torment. They can only experience His love with utter loathing and bitterness, and with ever increasing feeling. In this case, hell is the wrath of God against their corrupted human *nature*, yes, but this does not change the fact that, on a more profound level, hell is the love of God for them as *persons*.⁴¹ What is important for the purpose of this paper is simply to note that this action does not impugn this God's ability to serve as the foundation of human dignity, because, articulated this way, he loves *each and every human being for all eternity*.

Teasing out the implications of Christian belief, building from this last point, C.S. Lewis aptly remarked, 'Christianity asserts that every individual human being is going to live for ever, and this must be either true or false...And immortality makes this other difference, which, by the by, has a connection with the difference between totalitarianism and democracy. If individuals live only seventy years, then a state, or a nation, or a civilisation, which may last for a thousand years, is more important than an individual. But if Christianity is true, then the individual is not only more important but incomparably more important, for he is everlasting and the life of the state or civilisation, compared with his, is only a moment.'⁴² To be precise, *every individual* has more dignity than the state.

Can a god who arbitrarily condemns some people to damnation prior to time and prior to their choice serve as the basis of each person's human dignity? I do not see how he can, for he would only love some people, and not all. Can a god who holds some people in a hellish prison system against their will as they desire reconciliation serve as the basis of each person's dignity? The same basic problem seems to occur. Those theological schemas call into question how a god understood in these ways can serve as the basis of universal human dignity, for his own actions suggest that he is willing to create 'throwaway people' from the start, and/or inflict eternal suffering upon them even when they want to be reconciled to him. If there are Christian theologians who insist on those theological schemas, I will leave it to them to explain how their articulation of the Christian God can serve as the basis for universal human dignity. I am confident, in the meantime, that a systematic Trinitarian theology (which is Patristic, Orthodox, and Reformational) offers a quadruple affirmation of human being, flowing out of the continuous commitment of an active, interventionist, thoroughly good, and loving Creator God who loves every human person, who joins Himself to humanity, first as one of us, then as one with us, thereby overcoming the corruption and alienation within human nature itself.

Ronald Dworkin can say that the idea of equal human dignity is self-evident (to him) because he is writing in a cultural context that has already been greatly influenced by the Christian tradition, a fact that John Gray, Michael Perry, and Jurgen Habermas recognize. Habermas, one of Europe's most prominent political philosophers, who built his intellectual career on secular and Marxist foundations, nevertheless said in 2004:

'Christianity, and nothing else is the ultimate foundation of liberty, conscience, human rights, and democracy, the benchmarks of western civilization...To this day, we have no other alternative to it...We

⁴¹ This understanding of hell, and the systematic/dogmatic theology from which it derives, is less common among Catholics and Protestants, but is nevertheless biblically and historically grounded and attested by great Christian theologians. It comes from the patristic Trinitarian foundations of writers like Athanasius, and is found explicitly in Gregory of Nyssa and Isaac the Syrian, continues through the entire Eastern Orthodox communion through today, and has been recovered by Protestants like Karl Barth, C.S. Lewis, T.F. Torrance, and Donald Bloesch, along with Catholics like Hans Urs Von Balthazar. Eastern Orthodox American theologian David Bentley Hart is an eloquent exponent of this tradition. Hence, this is a systematic Trinitarian theology that is Patristic, Orthodox, and Reformational.

⁴² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1943, 1945, 1952), p.73

continue to nourish ourselves from this source. Everything else is just idle postmodern chatter.⁴³

Nor is this conclusion unique to Western scholars. One of the leading Chinese scholars at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences said in a lecture to a group of American tourists:

‘One of the things we were asked to look into was what accounted for the success, in fact, the pre-eminence of the West all over the world. We studied everything we could from the historical, political, economic, and cultural perspective. At first, we thought it was because you had more powerful guns than we had. Then we thought it was because you had the best political system. Next we focused on your economic system. But in the past twenty years, we have realized that the heart of your culture is your religion: Christianity. That is why the West has been so powerful. The Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life was what made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic politics. We don’t have any doubt about this.’⁴⁴

Though I submit that viewing capital as morally equivalent to land and labor involves a fundamental departure from Christianity,⁴⁵ this admission is significant. Therefore, we must come back to Friedrich Nietzsche and his targeting of Christian faith in particular. Nietzsche did not take aim at just any religion, least of all every religion. Nietzsche specifically criticized Christian faith. He believed that if you cut the root, you lose the fruit. That is, if you cut the root of belief in Jesus, you lose the fruit of the worth and value of *each human life*. Human dignity is thus anchored in the person of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, and especially the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection, the event in which the Christian God’s loving commitment to humanity is said to have been ultimately demonstrated. And this means that the idea of equal human dignity is not just a philosophical assertion resting on nothing, or a given which cannot be proved. It is not merely a culturally acquired taste of Western culture. Nor is it rooted in my personal existence and my current personal evaluation of other human beings. Rather, it is derived from a quest for the historical Jesus according to the discipline of verifiable historical inquiry.⁴⁶ It is rationally accessible because we can investigate historical facts outside our own feelings, ungrounded ideas, personal experience, or culture. We can engage people’s hearts and minds alike when we try to persuade others. Curiously, the conceptual link between the search for equal human dignity and the search for the historical Jesus does seem not accidental. The link is even poetically appropriate, for in it, we hear an echo of a central invitation of the New Testament writers. They said that in finding Jesus, we will find our true selves.⁴⁷

⁴³ Jurgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions* (English translation Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p.150 – 151

⁴⁴ Reported by Time essayist David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington DC: Regnery, 2003), p.5

⁴⁵ See, for example, Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, IV.31 – 38

⁴⁶ For an excellent example of this historical inquiry, see N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1997), and *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003). See also Dr. Simon Greenleaf, *Testimony of the Evangelists* (public domain); Greenleaf was one of the principle founders of Harvard Law School and evaluated the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection against the rules of evidence of the modern courtroom; he became a Christian in the process.

⁴⁷ For example, Jesus is recorded to have said, ‘For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it’ (Mt.16:25; Mk.8:35; Lk.9:24). Jesus’ story of the prodigal son has the son return to his father when ‘he came to his senses,’ where the Greek literally says, ‘he came to himself’ (Lk.15:17). Conversely, John’s Gospel portrays rejection of Jesus as involving self-denial. In John 18 – 19, sin is expressed in terms of self-negation. Jesus, when he was arrested, boldly stated his identity and said three times, ‘I am’ (John 18:5, 6, 8). But Simon Peter, Pilate, and the Jews negate their own identity. Simon Peter, while trying to follow Jesus into the courtyard of the trial, was confronted by people who suspected him of being a follower of Jesus, and he said three times, ‘I am not’ (John 18:17, 25, and implicitly in v.27). Pilate, when Jesus was standing right in front of him, should have cared about truth in Roman legal proceedings, but said in abdication of his office, ‘What is truth?’ (John 19:38) The Jews, who cried out at every Passover that they had ‘no king but God’, said, ‘We have no king but Caesar’ (John 19:16). If, in John’s Gospel, the result of negating Jesus is self-negation, then the result of embracing Jesus is discovering one’s true self. This, too, is consistently portrayed in the narrative.

Appendix A: Historians' and Sociologists' Appraisals of Christianity's Social Impact

How did Christians practically express and embody the doctrine of the equal dignity of each human being? I will elaborate on some of the major examples. The following examples are important for two reasons. First, they substantiate the fact that the teaching of Jesus really did lead to dramatic changes relationally, socially, economically, and politically. If I claim that the New Testament taught something that was never enacted by any Christian community anywhere, then I would be standing on very weak ground. If, however, the New Testament taught something that was embodied and lived out by Christians, then that ground is all the more firm. Second, the following examples suggest the ethical shape of Christian responses to various types of injustice today. The question of how human dignity translates into specific human rights in various contexts is not a straightforward one. We are assisted in this task by knowing how Christians of previous generations expressed the conviction of equal human dignity. There are vital principles that can be traced and continued.

The Humanization of the Greco-Roman City

The following comes from Lewis Mumford, one of the 20th century's leading sociologists of the city and urban life. Mumford was never a Christian and was not eager to flatter Christianity. Nevertheless, he could not deny that Christianity humanized the European city. To quote extensively from Mumford:

'Public hospitals were one of the definite Christian contributions to the city. Jerome relates that in AD 360 Fabiola gave up his villa for the care of the needy sick, otherwise left to die wretchedly in the streets of Rome. From that time on, very rapidly after the eleventh century, the holy orders founded hospitals in almost every town: there would be at least two in most German towns, one for lepers, and one for other types of disease...And note: there are the rule, rather than the exceptions.'⁴⁸ 'What was involved in a realization of the Christian city? Nothing less, I submit, than a thoroughgoing rejection of the original basis on which the city had been founded: the renunciation of the long-maintained monopoly of power and knowledge; the reorganization of laws and property rights in the interest of justice, free from coercion, the abolition of slavery and of compulsory labor for the benefit of a ruling minority, and the elimination of gross economic inequalities between class and class. On those terms, the citizens might find on earth at least a measure of that charity and justice that were promised to them, on their repentance, in heaven. In the Christian city, one would suppose, citizens would have the opportunity to live together in brotherhood and mutual assistance, without quailing before arbitrary power, or constantly anticipating external violence and sudden death. The rejection of the old order imposed originally by the citadel was the minimal basis of Christian peace and order.'⁴⁹

The First Abolition of Slavery

Then there is the vexing matter of slavery, which continues to be a global concern today. Mumford mentioned 'the abolition of slavery,' which might surprise some readers who are uninformed about the impact of Christianity prior to the discovery of the New World and who read the Bible a bit simplistically. The following comes from Rodney Stark, who began investigating early Christianity as a non-Christian sociologist, and then expanded his field of interest to the history of Christianity in Europe, eventually becoming a self-confessed 'independent Christian' at some later point, as a result of his research. He writes in 2005, which is prior to his self-identification as some sort of Christian, 'Slavery ended in medieval Europe only because the church extended its sacraments to all slaves and then managed to impose a ban on the enslavement of Christians (and of Jews). Within the context of medieval Europe, that prohibition was effectively a rule of universal abolition.'⁵⁰ In my opinion, Stark's handling of the matter is a bit too generalized to be useful, but his attribution of credit to Christian faith is appreciated. The following summary comes from my own research.⁵¹

Many records exist of Christians in the first through fifth centuries regularly emancipating slaves. Clement of Rome (30 – 100 AD) observed, 'We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds, in order that

⁴⁸ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1961), p.295 – 6

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.317

⁵⁰ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: Why Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York, NY: Random House, 2005) p.28

⁵¹ Mako Nagasawa, *Slavery and Christianity: First to Fifteenth Centuries*, 2010. See [http://nagasawafamily.org/article slavery and christianity 1st to 15th centuries.pdf](http://nagasawafamily.org/article%20slavery%20and%20christianity%201st%20to%2015th%20centuries.pdf)

they might ransom others. Many, too, have surrendered themselves to slavery, that with the price which they received for themselves, they might provide food for others.⁵² Polycarp (69 – 155 AD) and Ignatius (~50 – 117 AD), second generation Christian leaders, freed their slaves.⁵³ Sometime during the reign of Trajan (98 – 117 AD), a Roman prefect named Hermas received baptism at an Easter festival with his wife and children and twelve hundred and fifty slaves. On that occasion, he gave all his slaves their freedom and generous gifts besides.⁵⁴ At some point between 95 – 135 AD, Ovidius, appointed bishop of Braga (in modern-day Portugal) under Pope Clement I in 95 AD, emancipated five thousand slaves. I explore many more examples in my research.

In 315 AD, two years after issuing the Edict of Milan legalizing Christianity, Constantine imposed the death penalty on those who kidnapped and enslaved children. Since Constantine purportedly converted to Christian faith in 313 AD, his enactment of fairly radical legislation as a young Christian statesman reflects very favorably upon the Christian community. This act of Constantine testifies to the likelihood of a vigorous critique within the Christian community of kidnapping and forced enslavement, rooted in both the Old and New Testaments (Ex.21:16; Dt.24:7; 1 Tim.1:10). In 321 and 334 AD, respectively, Constantine made it illegal for slaveholders to separate slave families and eased the conditions of manumission so that a slaveholder could simply go to a church service and declare their emancipation before the bishop. This again testifies to the strong concern to defend the humanity of slaves within the Christian community, which Constantine now extended beyond Christians to the entire Roman Empire. Christians then took Easter as an occasion to regularly emancipate slaves. In 529 – 534 AD, Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian, a Christian, issued the *Corpus Juris Civilis* ('Body of Civil Law') also known as the *Institutes of Justinian*. These laws were a complete revision of past Roman law and formed the basis of Latin jurisprudence and Byzantine law. In it, Justinian says, 'Slavery is an institution of the law of nations, against nature, subjecting one man to the dominion of another.' He said it should be illegal but is tolerated because of the generals' practice of taking captives in war, or because they are born to slave parents, or when a man over 20 years of age consents to voluntary enslavement so he can share in the money resulting from his own sale. Justinian ruled that if a pregnant woman was free at any moment between conception and delivery, her child is free by birth. He prohibited 'unrestrained violence toward slaves,' except when the court granted permission for a specific reason, usually a penalty for criminal activity. He made into law the traditional, already widely practiced manumission of concubines and their children at the death of the master, if he did not specify her status in his will. In 595 AD, a council at Rome under Gregory the Great permitted a slave to become a monk without any consent from his master. Previously, the Western church permitted a slave to be raised into the priesthood only with the formal consent of his master. Councils held in Orleans in 511, 538, 549 AD, while imposing penalties upon the bishop who elevated a slave into priestly office without the master's consent, nevertheless declared such an ordination to be valid. The council in Rome in 595 appears to have carried Paul's prerogative in Philemon to an expressed conclusion.

Remarkably, in 649 AD, Clovis II, king of the Franks, freed and married his British slave Bathilda. Bathilda was a British Christian who had been kidnapped and brought across the Channel. The two had met when Clovis was but a teenager. Together, they started to dismantle slavery. In 650 AD, the Council of Châlon-sur-Saône, in Burgundy in modern-day France, forbids the sale of Frankish slaves outside the Frankish kingdom. 'When Clovis died in 657, Bathilda ruled as regent until her eldest son came of age. Bathilda used her position to mount a campaign to halt the slave trade and to redeem those in slavery. Upon her death, the church acknowledged Bathilda as a saint.' Hence, Bathilda abolished slavery among the Franks. Charlemagne (742 – 814), king of the Franks from 768 and Emperor of the Romans from 800, opposed slavery, and many other clergy echoed the past Queen Bathilda. Abbot Smaragde wrote to Charlemagne, 'Most merciful king, forbid that there should be any slave in your kingdom.'⁵⁵ Probably 20% of the population of the Carolingian Empire was enslaved at the time; they became serfs. In 1000 AD, Stephen I of Hungary, the first Hungarian Christian king, who reigned from 1000 – 1038 AD and is generally considered to be the founder of the Kingdom of Hungary, declared in his laws that any slave who lives, stays in, or enters the Kingdom of Hungary would be free immediately. In 1102 AD, the London Church Council forbade slavery and the

⁵² *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, ch.55

⁵³ Edward C. Rogers, *Slavery Illegality in All Ages and Nations* (1855).

⁵⁴ Philip Schaff, 'Christian Life in Contrast with Pagan Corruption: The Church and Slavery,' *History of the Christian Church*, Volume II

⁵⁵ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, p.30

slave trade, which abolished both throughout England. This decree emancipated 10% of England's population.⁵⁶ In 1117 AD, Iceland abolished slavery. In 1335 AD, Sweden (which included Finland at this time) made slavery illegal.

Hence, the early Christians in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East have a very impressive record on emancipation. I could not find data on the Nestorian Christians in Asia or the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia or the Christian Nubian kingdom in Africa. But in the regions where we already know the most about Christianity – Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East – we have an amazing record, especially if we factor in the fact that the Christians were a minority in the Roman Empire for 400 years. They brought about a grassroots, bottoms up reconciliation movement centered on Jesus, which regularly emancipated slaves. When Christians came to power, starting with Constantine, they immediately limited and eventually abolished slavery. The process was not without its hiccups, and some rationalizations also appeared at times. Nevertheless, the fact is that Christian theology and people ended slavery in France, Hungary, England, Iceland, Sweden, and the Netherlands by about 1300 AD. Slavery persisted in all other countries of the world. Freedom from forced labor slavery was, in fact, the 'peculiar institution.' The decisive factor was Christian faith.

The Second Abolition of Slavery

The tragic betrayal of this trajectory by Western Christians is explored further in many other places, but I render my own brief account here. Significantly, New World slavery and theories of race began in Portugal and Spain, where Christians had long-standing military conflict with Islam, were most influenced by Islamic views, and felt the most direct competition with Islam over trade routes to India. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire had effectively encircled European Christians and blocked them from the East. They sacked and conquered Constantinople in 1453 AD, one of many victories against Christian nation after Christian nation. As the strongest military power in the region, they restricted, regulated, and taxed almost all of Europe's interaction – including trade – with the East, and profited from whatever trade did happen, making Europeans fear that they were funding future jihads. This sent Portugal and Spain searching for trade routes to the East around the Ottoman Empire. This is the context in which sanction from Pope Nicholas V (1447 – 1455 AD) gave Portugal the right to reduce conquered Muslims and pagans to slaves, and then sanctioned the purchase of African slaves from 'the infidel' Muslim.

The key crop was sugar. During the early fifteenth century, the Portuguese kidnapped people from the Canary Islands to work sugar plantations of the Azores and Cape Verde Islands.⁵⁷ The Portuguese and the Spanish both looked to Sicily as a model to follow in the Iberian peninsula and in their colonies, and in 1420 Prince Henry of Portugal called upon Sicily for sugar cane plants and experienced sugar growers. 'Between 1513 and 1516 just under 3,000 slaves were transported to Lisbon and over 370 to Spanish ports. The impact of the voyages of Columbus on the slave trade, however, was considerable and tragic. On his third voyage of 1498 to the Caribbean, for example, Columbus spoke of the economic value of introducing African slaves to replace Indian labor, saying it could all be done in the name of Christianity.'⁵⁸ As a young man, Columbus was trained in the Madeira sugar trade. He became romantically involved with Beatriz de Bobadilla y Ossorio, governor of Gomera of the Canary Islands, who gave him sugar cane plantings; these plantings were the first sugar canes in the Caribbean in 1493. Europeans took sugar canes to Santo Domingo, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. In the 1530's, the sugar crop was firmly established in Brazil.

During the ensuing years of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as many as 20% of West African slaves brought to North America were Muslim.⁵⁹ West African Muslims and non-Muslims had a long history of enslaving one another, and selling slaves to Muslim traders on the trans-Saharan slave route. The Islamic West African states on the west coast of Africa at this time, with whom Portugal started to trade – Mali (1235 – 1645 AD), Segou (1712 – 1861), and Songhay (1275 – 1591 AD) – already consisted of large slave populations. Approximately one third of their populations were slaves. The fact that Europeans could step into West Africa and immediately procure a vast

⁵⁶ England's *Domesday Book of 1086*, the oldest public record in England, indicates that 10 percent of the population was enslaved at that time.

⁵⁷ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p.116 – 117

⁵⁸ Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p.2

⁵⁹ http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/timeline/p_1.html

quantity of slaves testifies to the well-developed system already put in place by Muslims, though of course it does not at all excuse the Europeans of the horrific sin of enslaving Africans. The global competition for plantation products like sugar, cloves, and cotton would also swell the Arab Muslim slave trade especially on the East Coast of Africa during the 1800's.⁶⁰

Then we come to the U.S. Why did many white American Christians insist on holding slaves? What went wrong theologically? Historian Mark Noll writes: First and foremost, American Protestants believed that reading and understanding the Bible should be *simple*.⁶¹ Most American Christians, especially in the early 1800's, were influenced by a cultural movement called the Scottish School of Common Sense, which said that understanding things is *simple*. So they thought understanding the world, religious texts, the ancient world, and sociology was *simple*. They thought a person should just be able to read the Bible as an individual in his bedroom and understand it perfectly well. It became common to think, 'I believe in slavery because the Bible does,' and 'Slavery now is the same as slavery then.' They thought that scholars of history, literature, and culture were arrogant elitists, and in their own arrogance going the other direction, they refused to listen to Christian scholars all over the world telling them they were wrong.

British Christians, for instance, published literature telling the American Christians in the U.S. South that they were dreadfully wrong. British evangelical Christians were unified as abolitionists. Quakers and then Christians like John Newton, the author of the hymn Amazing Grace, John and Charles Wesley, the founders of the Methodist movement, the Clapham Sect, and the political activist William Wilberforce led the charge. The pro-slavery force in Britain was led by stuffy old men who attended the Anglican Church but did not put forward any biblical arguments for slavery, which is telling; they only put forward economic and political rationalizations because Christians in Britain knew where the Bible really stood on slavery. Coming to grips with it was the issue for them. But once they all did, they not only abolished slavery throughout the British Empire, they took the British navy and blockaded ports in Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, Zanzibar, Iran, and other places. They intervened in other nations' business and shut down the slave trade. They committed economic suicide in order to abolish slavery. The British abolished the slave trade in 1807 and slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833.

By contrast, the Enlightenment did not impact the issue of slavery because it was articulated as freedom for white people. Immanuel Kant was the leading Enlightenment philosopher of the late 18th century. He was a staunch racist and an architect of modern racism. He said, 'Humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race. The yellow Indians have a smaller amount of talent. The Negroes are lower, and the lowest are a part of the American peoples.'⁶² Robert Bernasconi argues that Kant, while not the first person to use the word 'race,' was the first to give the term a precise definition. 'By setting out clearly the distinction between race and variety, where races are marked by hereditary characteristics that are unavoidable in the offspring, whereas the distinguishing marks of varieties are not always transmitted, Kant introduced a language for articulating permanent differentiations within the notion of species.'⁶³ The former president of the American Sociological Association, Joe Feagin, concurs with this assessment of Kant.⁶⁴ The leading American Enlightenment philosopher was Thomas Jefferson, Kant's counterpart. Although he wrote on a few occasions that he disliked slavery, Jefferson 'also articulated the first well-honed and extensive arguments by a North American intellectual for black racial inferiority...[viewing] African Americans as inferior to whites in reasoning, imagination, beauty, and other important qualities. Over his long lifetime, Jefferson was a major slaveholder who owned hundreds of African Americans.'⁶⁵

Human Rights to Limit the Power of Monarchs and Nation-States

Human rights language was injected into Western political discourse by Christian theologians who had reservations about the growing power of monarchs, slave traders, and eventually, Enlightenment nation-states. This constitutes a

⁶⁰ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World* (New Amsterdam Books: New York, 1989). For a summary of Islamic slavery from Mohammed to the present, see Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World*, or my paper, *Slavery in Islam*.

⁶¹ Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (The University of North Carolina Press: NC, 2006)

⁶² Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 1772 - 1796

⁶³ Robert Bernasconi, 'Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race', in Bernasconi (ed), *Race* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.17

⁶⁴ Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), p.69

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.69

real tension between the Christian tradition and Enlightenment political philosophy. David Bentley Hart summarizes this by saying:

'From the late tenth through the mid-eleventh centuries, various church synods in France had instituted the convention called the "Peace of God," which used the threat of excommunication to prevent private wars and attacks upon women, peasants, merchants, clergy, and other noncombatants, and which required every house, high and low, to pledge itself to preserving the peace. Other synods, over the course of the eleventh century, instituted the "Truce of God," which forbade armed aggression on so many days of the year – penitential periods, feasts, fasts, harvests, from Wednesday evening to Monday morning, and so on – that ultimately more than three-quarters of the calendar consisted in periods of mandatory tranquility; in the twelfth century, the Truce's prohibitions became fixed in civil law. The reason such conventions could actually serve (even partially) to limit aggression is that they proceed from a spiritual authority that no baptized person, however powerful or rapacious, could entirely ignore. And, while we might be disposed to think such things as the late medieval code of chivalry, or the church's teachings on just causes for and just conduct in war, or the church's bans upon the use of certain sorts of military machinery rather quaint and ineffectual, they did actually exercise – in the days when men and women still had souls to consider – a moral authority greater than the ambition of any lord, monarch, or state. With the advent of modernity, however, and the collapse of Christian unity in the West, the last traces of that authority were effectively swept away. To compensate for the loss, devout Christian scholars of law, such as Francisco de Vitoria (c.1483 – 1546), the Dominican champion of the cause of the New World Indians, and the Dutch Reformed jurist Hugo Grotius (1583 – 1645), laid the foundations for conventions of international law regarding "human rights" and justifiable warfare, derived from Christian traditions concerning natural law. But, of course, it was the sovereign state alone that determined to what extent those conventions would be adopted; they were grounded, after all, in theological tradition, and the "irrational" dictates of faith could no longer command assent. The special – indeed, unique – contribution of the newly emancipated secular order to the political constitution of Western society was of another kind altogether; it can be reduced to two thoroughly modern, thoroughly post-Christian, thoroughly "enlightened" principles: the absolute state – and total war.'⁶⁶

The Secular State and Freedom of Religious Conscience

One of the distinct aspects of human dignity comes in freedom of religious conscience, and how Christians treated people of other faiths. Many medieval European Christians do not have a good reputation for political tolerance; much of that is well deserved. Nevertheless, Bernard Lewis, a non-Christian British-American historian and scholar of Islam, gives a fair summary statement: 'Secularism in the modern political meaning – the idea that religion and political authority, church and state are different, and can or should be separated – is, in a profound sense, Christian. Its origins may be traced in the teachings of Christ [e.g. the famous passage 'Render unto Caesar the things of Caesar, and unto God the things that are God's' in Matthew 22:21], confirmed by the experience of the first Christians; its later development was shaped and, in a sense, imposed by the subsequent history of Christendom. The persecutions endured by the early church made it clear that a separation between the two was possible; the persecutions inflicted by later churches persuaded many Christians that such a separation was necessary.'⁶⁷

A bit more elaboration is important. Love for one's enemies is fundamental to Jesus' teaching. Forgiveness is essential to participating in the mission of the body of Christ. In countless texts, lack of forgiveness and apathy towards the work of reconciliation call into question one's being in Christ. To express this conviction, the early church called Roman officers engaging in warfare to resign if they became Christians.⁶⁸ This is a remarkable position which is worthy of discussion on its own. In this context, I point it out to illustrate how seriously the Christians of the first three centuries took Jesus' teaching. From an ethical standpoint, I start with a bottoms-up deduction upholding Jesus' ethics versus a tops-down general deduction about theories of 'the state' or 'the nation' that always tends to diminish the radical ethics Jesus hands down to us. This is because 'patriotism' in its various

⁶⁶ David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, p.97 – 98

⁶⁷ Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.96

⁶⁸ Dale W. Brown, 'Pacifism' in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, p. 645. Contrast Qu'ran Surah 4:74 – 76.

forms elevates 'our people' over 'other people,' and makes killing others acceptable while at the same time making dying for peace and reconciliation appear unreasonable. These two ethical moves alone are crucial steps away from genuine New Testament ethics. Jesus put 'our people' and 'other people' on the same level and called us to love all humanity; he made dying for peace and reconciliation perfectly acceptable, but killing unacceptable.

A fuller expression of Christian political theology derived from the New Testament does not start with 'church and state.' Instead, it starts with 'church, *states*, and *Israel*.' The apostle Paul firmly believed that Israel was the object of both compassion and evangelistic mission:

Romans 11:²⁸ From the standpoint of the gospel they [the Israelites who do not believe in Jesus] are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;²⁹ for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.³⁰ For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience,³¹ so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may *now* be shown mercy. (emphasis mine)

Much later, the Diaspora Jewish community was the victim of Gentile anti-Semitism under a Christian guise, which was precisely the posture that Paul taught against in his *Letter to the Romans*. The shift to political pluralism would have saved Western Europe all the wars of religion.⁶⁹ For caring about ethnic Israel at the political level would have led naturally towards extending political recognition to other religions as well. This would have led to a political pluralism, not a political theocracy where non-Christians were disadvantaged in various ways.

Initially, however, in point of historical fact, Christian faith did lead to religious pluralism on the political level. According to sociologist Rodney Stark, 'although historians long reported bitter outcries by pagans against Constantine's support of Christianity, the best recent scholars now agree that there is no evidence of such protests and propose that even those pagans most directly involved regarded the emperor's favors to the Christian church as a "bearable evil." Well they might have, for Constantine neither outlawed paganism nor condoned persecution of non-Christians. In fact, although Constantine subsidized and gave official standing to the Christian church, he continued some funding of pagan temples. As for charges that he encouraged Christian mobs to destroy pagan temples – a claim that originated with Eusebius, who used it to show how "the whole rotten edifice of paganism" rapidly came crashing down as part of God's plan – "it is very likely that Eusebius report[ed] everything he knew of temple destruction," yet he could offer only four instances, and only one of these seems a legitimate case. The other three involved temples of Aphrodite, which featured ritual prostitution.'

'In both word and deed Constantine supported religious pluralism, even while making his own commitment to Christianity explicit. Thus, during Constantine's reign, "friendships between Christian bishops and pagan grandees" were well-known, and the many examples of the "peaceful intermingling of pagan and Christian thought may...be thought of as proof of the success of [Constantine's]...policy" of consensus and pluralism. This policy was continued by "the refusal of his successors for almost fifty years to take any but token steps against pagan practices." And a public culture emerged that mixed Christian and pagan elements in ways that seem remarkable, given the traditional accounts of unrelenting repression.'

Stark concludes that Constantine inaugurated an era of toleration. This was misrepresented by some Christian writers like Eusebius. The famous Christian historian Eusebius portrayed the Emperor as if he stamped out paganism quickly and could be considered to be God's chosen vessel to establish a triumphant church. The reality behind the polemical rhetoric was much different. But the polemical rhetoric was seized upon by eighteenth and nineteenth century historians 'eager to place the church in the worst possible light.'⁷⁰

Stark also offers a table of data featuring the religious affiliation of men appointed as consuls and prefects throughout the Roman Empire from 317 – 455 AD. The data is very helpful in indicating that the practical policy towards religious affiliation was pluralism and tolerance. The data is as follows:

⁶⁹ Oliver M.T. O'Donovan, *The Desire of Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

⁷⁰ Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2006), p.189 – 194. Stark notes especially Constantine's *Edict to the Palestinians* and *Edict to the Eastern Provincials* as being of critical importance to understanding Constantine's commitment to peaceful pluralism (p.192).

*Religious Affiliation of Men Appointed as Consuls and Prefects, 317 – 455 AD*⁷¹

Reign	Christians	Pagans	Unknown	Number
Constantine (317 – 337)	56%	18%	26%	55
Constantius & Constans (337 – 350)	26%	46%	28%	43
Constantius (351 – 361)	63%	22%	15%	27
Julian (361 – 363)	18%	82%	0%	17
Valentinian (364 – 375)	31%	38%	31%	32
Valens (364 – 378)	39%	25%	36%	36
Gratian (375 – 383)	50%	11%	39%	44
Valentinian II (383 – 392)	32%	32%	36%	19
Theodosius (379 – 395)	27%	19%	54%	83
Arcadius & Honorius (395 – 423)	34%	12%	54%	161
Theodosius II & Valentinian III (408 – 455)	48%	4%	48%	157

Concerning this data, Stark says, ‘More significant even than his tolerance of pagan temples, Constantine continued to appoint pagans to the very highest positions, including those of consul and prefect, especially if we may assume that most whose religious affiliation is unknown were, in fact, pagans.’ The reasons for assuming that those who kept their religious affiliation hidden are twofold: on the one hand, Christians had a strong impulse to bear public testimony; on the other hand, pagans may have felt uncertain about their political prospects in the face of the changing religious climate of the Empire. Christian political pluralism of religion during this time is remarkable and significant. After Valentinian III’s reign ended in 455 AD, a rapid succession of Western Emperors led to the end of the Western Roman Empire in 480 AD.

Subsequently, the cultural tendency for the Germanic peoples (the Franks, English, and Scandinavians) to unite political and religious power in their kings became problematic from a theological perspective. This tendency led to new and regrettable situations where military and forced conversions were viewed as not ideal, but still acceptable. Tension between king and pope culminated in the Investiture Controversy of the 11th and 12th centuries, where a series of popes challenged the authority of Germanic rulers to appoint church bishops and abbots.

Meanwhile, the Eastern side of the Empire also became theocratic both in theory and in practice over time. The Eastern Orthodox Church has historically held to the ‘symphonic’ view of the roles of church and state in mutually governing society, a problem which, as of this writing, for example, results in the Russian Orthodox Church seeking a dominant role with the Russian state at the expense of Muslims in Chechnya. Although Justinian (527 – 565 AD) attempted to consolidate the Byzantine Empire as Orthodox (Nicean) Christian, it was always less unified than its Western counterpart because of age-old ethnic tensions, the persistence of heresies in Syria, Egypt, and other provinces, and the early use of vernacular languages in Christian services. But ongoing warfare with the Persian Empire and later the Muslim Arab Empire made religious sensitivities high. The Macedonian Dynasty, beginning with Basil, a peasant who murdered his way to the throne in 867 AD, tightened Justinian’s Code and embraced the principle of imperial absolutism, tempered only by the moral and spiritual authority of the church. The fourth century example of Ambrose of Milan censuring Emperor Theodosius, forbidding him from taking communion until he repented for his massacre of seven thousand people in Thessalonica, hovered significantly in the background.

Six principal examples of religious pluralism on the political level are worth mentioning. The first, surprisingly, is the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, which lasted for two hundred years (1099 – 1291). Although ‘there were enclaves of Muslims who continued to rob and attack Christians, most Muslims in the kingdom were peasants who reportedly were quite content under Christian rule. For one thing, there were no land-hungry Christians eager to confiscate their fields or animals. For another, taxes were lower in the kingdom than in neighboring Muslim countries. Fully as important, the Christian rulers tolerated the Muslims’ religion and made no effort to convert them...Finally, the Christians administered justice fairly. Thus, a Muslim pilgrim who passed through the kingdom while returning from Mecca to Spain wrote that Muslims ‘live in great comfort under the Franks; may Allah

⁷¹ Ibid, p.191

preserve us from such a temptation...[Muslims] are masters of their dwellings, and govern themselves as they wish. This is the case in all the territory occupied by the Franks.’⁷²

The second example is Catholic Poland from the 1300’s to the 1800’s. Medieval Catholic Poland is worth more exploration than can be offered here. Poland welcomed the Jewish community and gave them safe haven, eventually resulting in a Jewish renaissance and Hasidic Judaism. Historians suggest that the reason for this tolerance was the cultural-political tendency for the Polish nobles to disagree with each other, not consolidate their domains, and centralize their government. Echoes of this lingering tendency can be seen perhaps even after the end of Soviet occupation of Poland in the 1980’s, when the Polish Parliament opened with over 30 political parties. One can legitimately question, therefore, whether there was a Polish ‘nation’ until after Soviet occupation ended, even though there certainly were Polish people. The Poles were simply not politically organized in those terms, and, interestingly enough did not have to face a competing source of organized group identity, especially one involving the ‘national’ ownership of land. This had as its fortunate result a more true Christian witness to Diaspora Jews and to the New Testament ethic of tolerance. Poland was, in my opinion, the shining star of European Christendom in this regard.

The third example is the Anabaptist movement in Europe at the time of the Reformation. Called the Radical Reformation, the Anabaptists criticized the Lutherans, Reformers, and others for not fully diagnosing the problem of the Roman Catholic Church when it came to their political theologies. The problem, they said, was Augustine. Augustine had said in his massive *City of God* that the state should step in to punish heretics and other deviant groups from the church. This opened the door for a much broader collusion between church and state, which Augustine probably did not intend or anticipate. The Roman Catholic Church had used Augustine as a launching point. The Magisterial Reformers (Luther in Germany, Zwingli in Zurich, Calvin in Geneva, Gustavus Vasa in Sweden, and Henry VIII in England) all followed the same lead. They made theological heresy or conversion out of Christian faith civic crimes punishable by the state. The Anabaptists insisted on a strict separation between church and state. Their main method of making that separation clear was by rejecting infant baptism and calling for Christian adult-only baptism. Theologically, they were communicating their belief that the true church was made up only of those who had mature, active faith, not those who were passively baptized into the church when they were infants. Because infant baptism was a gesture done by the Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican clergy to welcome the infant into both church and society, rejecting infant baptism and insisting on adult-only baptism meant the Anabaptists were rejecting the union of church and society. They recognized that the church was not synonymous with society. And the state, the Anabaptists believed, should not wield the sword to enforce matters of spiritual conscience. Converting out of the faith or theological heresy should not be a civic crime punishable by law.

The fourth example is Roger Williams and the American First Amendment establishing freedom of religion. The Puritans of Massachusetts Bay, led by John Winthrop, had a theocratic vision of a ‘perfect’ church-state union. Roger Williams (1603 – 1683) of Providence Plantation, however, recognized on theological grounds that this was impossible and inadvisable. Before the passage of the English Bill of Rights, Williams established Providence Plantation (1636) as a refuge for religious minorities, the first place in modern history where church and state were separated. He welcomed the Antinomian followers of Anne Hutchinson who were exiled from Massachusetts, helped to start the first Baptist Church in America, and, as governor, assisted in the formation of the first Jewish synagogue. He was a staunch advocate of fair dealings with the Native Americans and became the leading European expert in Native American culture because of his initial interest in communicating Jesus to them in a way that was separable from his own European culture. Williams was the father of the American First Amendment, guaranteeing freedom of religion.

The fifth example is England following its 1689 Bill of Rights. Tired of Catholic and Protestant infighting over political power, the Convention Parliament presented to William and Mary, Protestants, an invitation to become joint sovereigns of England, Scotland, and Ireland. The Bill of Rights barred Roman Catholics from the throne because of suspicion of Catholic loyalties to the Pope, but otherwise placed constitutional limits on the monarch and allowed, among many other things, freedom of religion to be expressed throughout the realm. King William III, for example, did not persecute or otherwise seek to oppress the supporters of the deposed and Catholic King James II, even though James attempted to rally Catholic forces within England, Scotland and Ireland against William. The

⁷² Rodney Stark, *God’s Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), p.171 – 2. See also the footnotes.

English Bill of Rights and the American Bill of Rights became the models for the rest of Europe, Canada, and Australia to adopt.

The sixth example is the Roman Catholic Church leading up to and following the Second Vatican Council. Though undeniably late in coming to this position, the Catholic hierarchy in its Second Vatican Council simultaneously modernized itself and moved back to its biblical roots, especially on its teachings of human dignity, human rights, peace, and social justice. ‘Most strikingly, the Church came to endorse religious freedom – the right of people to choose and to practice their own religious faith – as a human right.’⁷³ The Church finally shed its ‘Christendom model’ theology, wherein the Church occupies, or should occupy, a privileged religious place in society. Since then, the Catholic Church has been a leader in democratization and freedom movements all over the world. Catholics stood in opposition to dictators in Lithuania, Ukraine, South Korea, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Peru. In cases where Catholics once enjoyed a privileged symbiotic relationship with dictators, they withdrew from those relationships and opposed the dictators: in Spain after 1970, Portugal, and the Philippines. In Africa, where the Catholic Church was independent from the state at the time of democratic changes, it very actively agitated for democracy: in Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. As a result, political scientist Samuel Huntington said that the period 1974 – 1991 was ‘overwhelmingly a Catholic wave’ of democratic movements.⁷⁴ The position of the Catholic Church on religious freedom has been vital to the stability of these nascent democracies.

Therefore, the idea of a secular *and religiously pluralist* government which does not establish a particular religion is a distinctly Christian notion. Although modernist and postmodernist stereotypes tend to play up the Inquisition as both pinnacle and archetype of Christian political intolerance, and while the experience of religious minorities in European Christendom certainly needs to be well understood, the fact remains that on either side of that European medieval history is a remarkable separation of religious and political powers. Given the universal desire for political legitimacy, especially in the West, which inherited the burning Greek and Latin anxiety over how to defend legitimate political authority, removing straightforward religious legitimation from the state is a remarkable phenomenon.

Bernard Lewis notes that this is very different from Islam, where there is often an ideal of no separation between mosque and state. Muhammed was both a spiritual and political leader. Muslim theologians were also jurists. The major division in Islam, that of Sunni and Shi’a, arose over the question of who was the legitimate political heir to the Caliphate, not over a point of separate ‘theological’ doctrine as such. Lewis goes on to make an intriguing comment about the first *militantly* secular government which sought to disenfranchise all religions in favor of the creation of a ‘rational’ nation-state, France in 1789: ‘The first Muslim encounter with secularism was in the French Revolution, which they saw, not as secular (a word and concept equally meaningless to them at that time), but as de-Christianized, and therefore deserving of some consideration. All previous movements of ideas in Europe had been, to a greater or lesser extent, Christian, at least in their expression, and were accordingly discounted in advance from a Muslim point of view. The French Revolution was the first movement of ideas in Europe that was seen as non-Christian or even anti-Christian, and some Muslims therefore looked to France in the hope of finding, in these ideas, the motors of Western science and progress, freed from Christian encumbrances.’ However, when Turkey became a ‘secular’ Islamic state in 1922 after being the center for centuries of the mighty Ottoman Empire, and removed mention of Islam from its constitution and shari’a from its law books, suspicions reverberated throughout the Muslim world of the influence of ‘Christian Europe.’ ‘Fundamentalist’ reactions in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, and Sudan in particular have been especially intense. The six former Soviet republics, which have large Muslim populations, are struggling with the question of Islam and the state. Lebanon is ‘no longer an encouraging example of religious tolerance or secularization.’⁷⁵ Other world events, of course, have played a major role in troubling the waters of Western and Islamic relations in the 20th century, so by no means am I suggesting that Turkey’s decision to secularize alone triggered such a reaction. But a key element of Muslim self-definition is the question of the

⁷³ Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), p.111

⁷⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), p.76. quoted in Toft, Philpott, Shah 2011, p.111

⁷⁵ Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.108

original vision of Muhammed as it relates to the clear incursion of Western influences. The group who assassinated President Sadat of Egypt was guided by the writings of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammed ‘Abd al-Salam Faraj, who wrote,

‘Fighting the near enemy is more important than fighting the distant enemy. In jihad the blood of the Muslims must flow until victory is achieved. But the question now arises: is this victory for the benefit of an existing Islamic state, or is it for the benefit of the existing infidel regime? And is it a strengthening of the foundations of this regime which deviates from the law of God? The rulers only exploit the opportunity offered to them by the nationalist ideas of some Muslims, in order to accomplish purposes which are not Islamic, despite their outward appearance of Islam. The struggle of a jihad must be under Muslim auspices and under Muslim leadership, and concerning this there is no dispute.

The cause of the existence of imperialism in the lands of Islam lies in these self-same rulers. To begin the struggle against imperialism would be a work that is neither glorious nor useful, but only a waste of time. It is our duty to concentrate on our Islamic cause, which means first and foremost establishing God’s law in our own country, and causing the word of God to prevail. There can be no doubt that the first battlefield of the jihad is the extirpation of these infidel leaderships and their replacement by a perfect Islamic order. From this will come release.’⁷⁶

In Lewis’ assessment, this does not bode well, but more moderate factions in Islam might still be strengthened. Toft, Philpott, and Shah are especially careful to make the point that moderate Islamic political movements often take their moderation seriously, and they believe Sufi Islam in particular is a viable force within Islam that has a long history of religious tolerance and moderation.⁷⁷ And serious engagement with the Islamic world on diplomatic, political, intellectual, and theological/missiological levels is obviously important. But I raise these matters here to make a contrast between Christian and Islamic theory and practice on politics and religion. A very influential and historically grounded bloc within Islam does not believe that religious and politics should be separated. And, by extension, these Muslims identify the religiously pluralistic secular state as fundamentally Christian. On historical, theological, and ideological grounds, I believe they are correct in doing so. Their analysis carries with it an honesty that Western scholars sometimes lack.

Lewis’ remarks deserve comment for another reason. The other point that I find important to make is that the French Revolution was a militantly secular political movement, as opposed to a religiously pluralistic one. It quickly became anti-Semitic and anti-Christian, as it brought both Jews and Catholics to the guillotine. Legislators and judges in atheist states do not have to wrestle with competing religious claims to loyalty and truth, so this path of nation-building has its ideological attraction: a foundation of autonomous ‘reason’ alone. In principle, this intolerance of religion was continued under the auspices of Marxist revolution in the 20th century, as I mentioned above. Historians have long noted the connections between the French Revolution of 1789 – 1799, the Chinese Revolution of 1911 – 1949 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966 – 1976, and the Russian Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 which culminated in the Soviet Union.⁷⁸ In these cases of ‘atheist states,’ the denigration of all religion became a stated reason for mass murder and tremendous marginalization of large numbers of people. This path of ‘rational’ nation-building, too, is one of the children of the Enlightenment – and perhaps the youngest and most aggressive child at that.

My purpose in mentioning this is simply to point out that the early and recent Christian positions have been the most humane course. Pluralistic separation of religion and politics, though taken for granted in the West, was not and is not an easy matter. That anyone achieved it at all is significant, and from a historical and genealogical perspective, Christianity is the cause. It is deplorable that Christians abused power when they had it. But it is quite startling – and very admirable – that at these critical junctures in history, Christians limited their own power, put checks on themselves and the institutions they occupied, and made political, legal, economic, and social space for others. And

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.107 – 108

⁷⁷ Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), p.173

⁷⁸ For example, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983)

for all its foibles, the church never aspired to be a state. Even 'at the height of its power, [the Church] never took over all the functions of the state.'⁷⁹

So an emotional and intellectual reckoning is due. If the Inquisition and the political intolerance demonstrated by Christians weigh against one's evaluation of Christian faith as a whole, how then do the actions of the Enlightenment and other worldviews weigh against those respective traditions? Mistakes made by Christians are mistakes precisely because they can be *measured against true Christian belief and historic practice*. But if one is at least equally disturbed by these other traditions and the actions taken within them, as I hope one is, then the equivalent question must be asked of those traditions as well: Against *what* can one measure the Muslim vision, the nation-state with whatever pretensions it makes (whether atheist or liberal), or the capitalist system for that matter, and find them deficient? Each of those traditions contains its own claims to truth, which sanctify those actions. If, as I have argued above, there is no stable intellectual foundation for equal and individual human dignity, *then there does not appear to be any such measure*. One might complain and express a personal opinion, but in a relativistic world, there is no truth, only power. Without a measure of actual truth to act as a standard and a barrier, one can only grudgingly concede to a Machiavellian posture: The nation-state, Muslim shari'a law and/or the caliphate, and the capitalist system are more enduring and significant phenomena than any given individual. From that conviction, a whole series of unnerving conclusions might legitimately be drawn.

⁷⁹ Joseph Strayer, 'The State and Religion: An Exploratory Comparison in Different Cultures: Greece and Rome, the West, Islam.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1 (1958), p.38 – 41

Appendix B: Rights Without Responsibilities in the Secular West

A problem I highlighted above about the individualistic paradigm of the secularized West is that we seem to only be able to define rights, not responsibilities. That is, we order relationships negatively: what I cannot do to you. But we seem unable politically, and perhaps intellectually, to order relationships positively: what I owe you, what I must do for you or on your behalf. This is especially problematic with regards to two issues: how do we address historical racial injustice and what do we owe our children?

One Supreme Court case illustrates the difficulty the American (and Western) philosophy of individualism has of describing positive responsibilities. ‘In the decades from the 1970’s to the present numerous conservative, mostly white, judges have ruled that group-remedy programs for racial discrimination violate the U.S. Constitution, which they assert only recognizes the rights of individuals, not groups. For instance, in 1989 a conservative Supreme Court handed down a still-cited major decision, *City of Richmond, Virginia v. J.A. Croson Co.*, which knocked down a local Richmond program designed to remedy some past discrimination against black and other minority businesses with modest set-asides. The high court ruled in favor of a white-run construction company, the plaintiff, which argued that the municipal government had unconstitutionally set aside some local contracts for small minority companies. The mostly white court ruled that the Richmond government had not made a compelling case for remedying antiblack discrimination, even though the government defendant’s statistics showed that in a city whose population was one-half black, less than 1 percent of city government business went to black-owned firms. Similar philosophical and legal arguments against significant remedial action for systemic racism have been reiterated by the plaintiffs and justices in other federal court cases since this important case. Several subsequent cases have built on this precedent to weaken even modest affirmative action programs.’⁸⁰

Similarly, in 1974, the Supreme Court in *Milliken v. Bradley* ruled that desegregation, ‘in the sense of dismantling a dual school system,’ did not require ‘any particular racial balance in each ‘school, grade or classroom.’’ The Court also emphasized the importance of local control over the operation of schools. Justice William Douglas dissented: ‘Today’s decision ... means that there is no violation of the Equal Protection Clause though the schools are segregated by race and though the black schools are not only separate but inferior... Michigan by one device or another has over the years created black school districts and white school districts, the task of equity is to provide a unitary system for the affected area where, as here, the State washes its hands of its own creations.’ Liberal legal historian Lawrence Friedman claimed that the impact of *Milliken* was: ‘The world was made safe for white flight. White suburbs were secure in their grassy enclaves Official, legal segregation indeed was dead; but what replaced it was a deeper, more profound segregation ... Tens of thousands of black children attend schools that are all black, schools where they never see a white face; and they live massed in ghettos which are also entirely black.’⁸¹ ‘Largely because of the persistence of residential segregation and so-called ‘white-flight’ from the public school systems in many larger urban areas, minorities often attend comparatively under-funded (and thus lower quality) primary and secondary schools. Thus minority children are often less prepared to compete for slots in competitive universities and jobs. While efforts to dismantle segregation in our nation’s schools have enjoyed some success, segregation remains a problem both in and among our schools, especially given rollbacks in affirmative action programs.’⁸² Separation of white and minority students has increased since 1988. Experienced, better-paid teachers cluster in schools with the most privileged students, a phenomenon that quietly channels public money away from schools in poverty-prone areas.⁸³ The result, as educator Jonathan Kozol has called it, is the restoration of apartheid schooling in America.⁸⁴

These examples illustrate the severe limitations of Western individualism. We seem – philosophically, culturally, and legally – unable to articulate positive responsibilities and duties. Because of this emphasis on negative rights – what we cannot do to each other – and because of our inability to factor in group experiences and histories of

⁸⁰ Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), p.83

⁸¹ Lawrence M. Friedman, *American Law in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p.296

⁸² Initial Report of the United States to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, September 2000, p.18

⁸³ summarized from Paul Hill and Kacey Guin, co-authors of the University of Washington study published in the journal *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, October 2003

⁸⁴ Jonathan Kozol, *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing, 2005)

injustice, we may not ever adequately deal with the historic and present racist structures. Nor will we ever effectively care for our future children. Perhaps every generation of Christians senses the urgency of Jesus' mission to the world, but I certainly feel like the need has never been greater for more evangelism, character development, and theological formation.