



# Christian Citizenship

**“You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world” (Mt. 5:13-16). One way to be salty and let our light shine is by being good citizens on earth. Our vocation as citizens of both the secular kingdom and God’s kingdom gives us the responsibility to proclaim God’s Word and care for our neighbors. We are called to engage the “public square” with our message of Christ’s mercy for all. Please pray for God’s will to be done... in Jesus’ name.**

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## Christmas & Western Civilization

“I would suggest,” writes Carson Holloway, “that the ethical core of Western Civilization—or at least a key principle by which it distinguished itself from what it regarded as savagery and barbarism—is respect for the dignity of humanity and of the individual human person. This is the moral principle underpinning the more obvious institutional characteristics such as the rule of law, constitutionalism, limited government, and division of social authority among various centers of power. All of these expedients share a common aim: limiting the power of some people over others, and especially limiting the power of the strong over the weak. This aim in turn is informed by the sense that all people deserve such protection, that they all possess a certain dignity that ought not be abused.”

Holloway continues. “The celebration of Christmas has been a powerful teacher of the dignity of the human person. For Christians, Christmas is the feast of the incarnation—the celebration of the moment when God became a man in order to live among men. It shows that God thought of human beings as worthy of being saved, and that He sought to save them by taking on humanity in a perfected form, thus opening the way to their own perfection. Christian belief in the incarnation is thus inseparable from belief in the objective, and even transcendent, value of the human race as a whole, and of each human person as an individual.”

Important to Western civilization is a “certain egalitarianism.” Holloway explains. “According to Christian teaching, all are sinners, and none can claim to be fundamentally superior to others in this important respect. Conversely, and more positively, God wanted to save all people, of all ranks, from their sins and to open the way to a lofty destiny for them all. Thus the Christian understanding of the incarnation has been important in fostering the West’s sense that,

whatever social order may require in terms of hierarchy and rank, there is an irreducible moral equality of all human beings: all are owed a certain respect, even the lowliest among us.”

Certainly, human dignity has been appreciated by those people throughout history who never professed faith in Jesus Christ. Philosophers such as Aristotle “have suggested, without appealing to revelation, that human beings deserve respect because of their rational capacity for moral responsibility. Nevertheless, it is surely uncontroversial to say that Christianity—and, accordingly, the celebration of Christmas—has been an important force for the *popularization* of the idea of equal human dignity.”

Even Nietzsche, writes Holloway, who was “among Christianity’s most extreme philosophical enemies, admits (even as he condemns) the moral renovation wrought by Christianity. It effected, he claims, a revaluation of ancient values, standing the moral world on its head: where the pagan world celebrated the strength of the strong, Christianity displaced that understanding by demanding pity for the weak.” Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matthew 5:7). (Excerpted from “Christmas and Western Civilization” by Carson Holloway, published in *Public Discourse*, 12-26-2023. Holloway is a Washington Fellow in the Claremont Institute’s Center for the American Way of Life.)

**What can we do?** As a family or small group, discuss how the Christian celebration of Christmas has contributed to Western Civilization. Consider what Christmas says about men, women, and children—born and unborn.

**Please pray** with humble gratitude for God’s mercy upon all human life... in Jesus’ name.

## The Sanctification of Human Life

In his book, *How Christianity Changed the World*, Alvin J. Schmidt explains that “the low value of human life among the Romans was a shocking affront to the early Christians, who came to Rome with an exalted view of human life. . . . [T]hey saw human beings as the crown of God’s creation, they believed that man was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Although

that image was tarnished by man's fall into sin, they nevertheless believed . . . that God so honored human life that He Himself assumed it by becoming incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son (John 1:14)." The Christians countered the depravity of infanticide, the depravity of abandoning infants, the depravity of abortion, the depravity of gladiatorial shows, the depravity of human sacrifices, the depravity of suicide, and chose not to cremate their dead, but bury them. "So strong was the Christians' belief that the dead were 'asleep,' waiting to be resurrected, that they called every burial place a *koimeterion*, a word borrowed from the Greek that meant a dormitory where people slumbered. *Koimeterion* became 'cemetery' in the English language." (Excerpted from Chapter 2 of *How Christianity Changed the World* by Alvin J. Schmidt.)

**What can we do?** Order Schmidt's book which explains much about Christianity's impact on the world. Understand why powers and principalities are at war, and why Christianity is the brunt of attack by men who want to be gods. Help your children and grandchildren contrast what the world teaches about human life with what God's Word says. Sing: "Satan, hear this proclamation: I am baptized into Christ!" (LSB 594:3)

**Please pray** "I have one worth more than any that brought me salvation free" ... in Jesus' name.

## Rebels for Christ

"An unjust law is no law at all," writes J.B. Shurk, "and the more that injustice becomes the law of the land, the more likely that chaos comes, too. Why? Because injustice begets more injustice." Shurk continues. "Most humans have an antenna that can distinguish right from wrong, but most humans also ignore this antenna to their detriment. It is far easier to accept the world as it is—even when it is drenched in depravity—than to rebel against majority opinion. It is far safer to stay silent in the sight of outrageous sin than to stand alone and say, 'This is wrong.' As everyday wrongs pile up high, though, human antennae—even ones that have gone unused for too long—begin to twitch uncontrollably. . . . The mountains of evil rising in our world torment every soul. . . ."

Shurk acknowledges that the idea of struggling against evil, "is easier said than done. How can the actions of any one person make any meaningful difference?" As Christians who contemplate the birth of Jesus Christ,

however, "it seems more logical to ask: how can any person dedicated to making a difference ultimately not succeed? Christ came to earth to send a message of hope and redemption and died for our sins. His disciples spread that message across the world, suffering torture and death . . . Christians have been persecuted, imprisoned, and slaughtered ever since . . . Next to their sacrifices, our hardships pale."

Shurk believes that one person can make a difference in the fight against evil. His evidence is that of Bible smugglers all over the world. "For decades, two Finnish men named Antti and Esko smuggled Bibles into the Soviet Union and throughout the Eastern Bloc . . . eventually . . . manufacturing prefabricated housing components that allowed them to move tens of thousands of Bibles through Leningrad, Moscow, Tula, Oryol, Kiev, Kishinev, Romania, and Bulgaria. . . . Through all their years of danger . . . they found strength through Scripture: *The Lord will protect your going and your coming, now and forevermore.*"

Andrew van der Bijl (known as Brother Andrew) was a Bible smuggler and "fearless Christian" from the Netherlands who "risked his life on innumerable occasions to bring light into the darkness of totalitarian regimes. [While delivering] God's Word, he developed a prayer: 'Lord, in my luggage I have Scripture I want to take to Your children. When You were on earth, You made blind eyes see. Now, I pray, make seeing eyes blind. Do not let the guards see those things You do not want them to see.'" Brother Andrew survived encounters "with Cold War border guards, Chinese communists, and Islamic security services." (Excerpted from "Rebels for Christ" by J.B. Shurk in *American Thinker*, December 24, 2023.)

**What can we do?** We can refuse to be intimidated by the world; after all, as members of the Body of Christ, we have communed with heaven and all the saints who have gone before us. We can trust, says Shurk, that our "seemingly mundane words or actions might light a flame of courage in someone else. [We] do not know how [our] good example might affect another's future. So speak bravely and live [our lives] as if curious eyes are constantly watching. [We can be people] of both gentleness and authority. . . . [We can] be fearless, while others quiver . . . rebellious against injustice and defiant against evil." And, "remember this: no matter what tyrant rises or what iniquity spreads, God's faithful children have nothing to dread."

**Please pray** for courage of faith in the midst of injustice and evil... in Jesus' name.

