

# The Christian Influence on Western Civilization

March 21, 2014

## Introduction

I (Larry Paarmann) will teach (lead) a class on The Christian Influence on Western Civilization. Thesis: Western Civilization owes its very existence to Christianity.

This study is to serve three communities: (1) a Small Group of Heartland Community Church, (2) a few from other churches, and (3) as a function of the Sunflower Local Group of the Evangelical Christianity Special Interest Group (SIG) of Mensa.

## Core Material

This study will use as a core, to hold things together, the video series *How Should We Then Live?*, and the book by the same title, by Francis Schaeffer.

## Additional Video Lessons

It will also use video lessons from *The Great Courses*. Possible lectures will come from

- (1) *Experiencing Rome: A Visual Exploration of Antiquity's Greatest Empire*, by Steven L. Tuck  
Rome – A Spectacular Civilization; A Brief Survey of the Roman Empire; Power, Conquest, and Romanization; and Sanctuaries, Temples, and Religious Ritual
- (2) *Foundations of Western Civilization*, by Thomas Noble  
The Rise of Rome; The Culture of the Roman Republic; and The Emergence of a Christian Church
- (3) *Late Antiquity: Crisis and Transformation*, by Thomas Noble  
The Barbarians – Ethnicity and Identity; Rome and the Barbarians; The Christianization of the Roman World; and Christianity and the Roman State
- (4) *Early Christianity*, by Luke Johnson  
Greco-Roman Polytheism; and Greco-Roman Religious Experience
- (5) *Fall of the Pagans and the Origins of Medieval Christianity*, by Kenneth Harl  
Religious Conflict in the Roman World; The Mystery Cults; Pagan Response – First Persecutions; The Great Persecutions; Christianizing the Roman World; and Struggle over Faith and Culture
- (6) *The Other Side of History: Daily Life in the Ancient World*, by Robert Garland  
Being a Roman Slave; Being a Roman Soldier; Relaxing Roman Style; Practicing Roman Religion; and Being Christian under Roman Rule
- (7) *The History of Christianity: From Disciples to the Dawn of the Reformation*, by Luke Johnson  
The Unpopular Cult – Persecution; Forms of Witness – Martyrdom and Apologetic; The Extension of Christian Culture; Evangelism of Western Europe

It will also use a few of the lessons from *A Survey of Church History* by W. Robert Godfrey: Introduction, Expansion of the Church, and Defending the Faith.

It will also use a couple of lessons from *The Truth Project: The State, and The American Experiment*.

## Movies

I propose that we also, to break things up a little, watch some movies: *Ben Hur*, *The Mission*, etc.

## Reference Material (books)

In alphabetical order of the author:

Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by Marcus Dods, The Modern Library (Random House), 1950.

Brown, Peter, *The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150–750*, Norton, 1989.

Brown, Peter, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200 – 1000*, 2nd edition, Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

Crouch, Andy, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, IVP Books, 2008.

Davies, J. D., *The Early Christian Church: A History of Its First Five Centuries*, Baker Book House, 1980.

Durant, Will and Ariel, *The Story of Civilization*, eleven volumes, Simon and Schuster, 1963–1975. The following volumes will be of special interest to us: Caesar and Christ, The Age of Faith, and The Reformation.

Fox, Robin Lane, *Pagans and Christians*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

Gibbon, Edward, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, seven volumes, Methuen & Co., 1909–1914.

Grant, Robert, *Augustus to Constantine: The Rise and Triumph of Christianity in the Roman World*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Lecky, William E. H., *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne, Part 1*, 3rd edition, D. Appleton and Co., 1913.

Lecky, William E. H., *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne, Part 2*, 3rd edition, D. Appleton and Co., 1913.

MacMullen, Ramsay, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, Yale University Press, 1981.

MacMullen, Ramsay, *Christianizing the Roman Empire: A.D. 100–400*, Yale University Press, 1984.

MacMullen, Ramsay, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200–400 (Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement)*, Society of Biblical Literature, 2009.

Robbins, John W., *Christ and Civilization*, booklet, The Trinity Foundation, 2003.

Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, eight volumes, Eerdmans, 1991–1994 [1890–1910]. Volumes V and VI were written by David S. Schaff.

Schmidt, Alvin J., *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization*, Zondervan, 2001.

Stark, Rodney, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.

Stark, Rodney, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism led to Reformation, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery*, Princeton University Press, 2003.

Stark, Rodney, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*, Random House, 2005.

Wilken, Robert, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, Yale University Press, 2003.

Wilken, Robert, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*, Yale University Press, 2003.  
Woodberry, Robert D., "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No. 2, May 2012, pp. 244-274.

**The following are concerned primarily with the decline of western civilization:**

Colson, Charles, and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?*, Tyndale House, 1999.  
Dalrymple, Theodore, *Our Culture, What's Left of It*, Ivan R. Dee, 2005.  
Dalrymple, Theodore, *Anything Goes*, New English Review Press, 2011.  
Grudem, Wayne, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*, Zondervan, 2010.  
Pearcey, Nancy, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, Crossway Books, 2004.  
Pearcey, Nancy, *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, & Meaning*, B&H Publishing Group, 2010.  
Schaeffer, Francis, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*, Crossway Books, 2005.  
Sider, Ronald, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, Baker Books, 2005.  
Wittmer, Michael, *Heaven is a Place on Earth: Why Everything You do Matters to God*, Zondervan, 2004.

## **The Basic Plan**

The basic plan is to begin by considering positive things of the Roman Empire, then show the corruption of the Roman Empire and of the Greeks and the Barbarians, and then view the first video of *How Should We Then Live?* I propose that the book *How Should We Then Live?* be required by all participants, as we will discuss it, and it provides the framework for the study. Basically, we will be supplementing *How Should We Then Live?* with additional material. The intention is to show that Western Civilization owes its very existence to the influence of Christianity, that those nations that embraced Christianity the best have thrived the best with the greatest freedom and prosperity, and that Western Civilization will decline as it moves farther and farther away from its Christian foundations.

## **Meeting Times and Place**

We will meet weekly, on Sunday afternoons, from 3 to 5 PM, except that we will not meet on certain Sundays, such as Easter, for example. The first meeting will be on March 30, 2014.

The meeting place will be the library of the Classical School of Wichita, located at 6355 E. Willowbrook St., Wichita. This is located at the northwest corner of the intersection of Woodlawn and Kellogg. The parking lot entrance is at the northwest corner of the property. The main entrance of the school is on the south side of the building. Go straight in the main entrance, and the library is the third door on the right, just past the restrooms.

## **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or comments, please email me at [LDPaarmann@cox.net](mailto:LDPaarmann@cox.net).

## Caveats

The development of this study will be ongoing, and will continue as we go. Therefore a precise schedule of meetings with content is not possible at this time. This study may look to be a bit ambitious, and it is. However, we have lots of resource material, and the difficulty will be sorting it out and organizing it, and then presenting it in a way that is stimulating and enjoyable. Hopefully, we can do this. How long it will run is not known at this time, but certainly it will take several months at a minimum. The goal is to glorify God in our understanding of what He has done. If you attend the study, it does not necessarily mean that you agree with my thesis, or with the content, but merely that you have an interest in the material in general.

## Outline

1. Introduction
  - What do we hope to accomplish and how?
2. First-Century Roman Empire
  - 2.1 Background of Rome, its greatness, and what it accomplished.
  - 2.2 Greco-Roman polytheism
  - 2.3 The morality of the Roman Empire
  - 2.4 Daily life in the Roman Empire
3. Very Early Christianity
  - 3.1 Conflict with Rome
  - 3.2 Persecution
  - 3.3 Evangelizing the Roman World
  - 3.4 “Victory” over Rome
4. Christianity in the Middle Ages
  - 4.1 Christianity and the Roman State
  - 4.2 Struggle over faith and culture
  - 4.3 Corruption of the Church
5. The Protestant Reformation
  - 5.1 What Concerns Led to the Reformation
  - 5.2 Earlier Attempts at Reformation
  - 5.3 What Were the Main Doctrinal Issues
  - 5.4 Why Did Reform Not Work?
6. Christianity in the New World
  - 6.1 The North American Continent
  - 6.2 The South American Continent
7. The Decline of Christian Influence
  - 7.1 In Europe
  - 7.2 In North America
8. A Brief Look at the Christian Influence Elsewhere in the World
  - 8.1 Protestant Missions
  - 8.2 Roman Catholic Missions
9. A Christian Response
  - 9.1 Worldview Concerns
  - 9.2 Personal Responses