

STUDY PACK 26

THE AMERICAN CENTURY

“Americanism means the virtues of courage, honor, justice, truth, sincerity and hardihood – the virtues that made America. The things that will destroy America are _____, _____ instead of duty-first, the _____ and the _____ theory of life.” ~ Theodore Roosevelt~

I. THE AMERICAN CENTURY

“American Century” is a saying coined by *Time* publisher Henry Luce. It is used to claim preeminence for the United States during the 20th century. Luce, the son of a missionary, in a 1941 *Life* magazine editorial urged the United States to forsake isolationism for a missionary’s role, acting _____. He also called upon the U.S. to enter World War II _____:

“Throughout the 17th century and the 18th century and the 19th century, this continent teemed with manifold projects and magnificent purposes. Above them all and weaving them all together into the most exciting flag of all the world and of all history was the triumphal purpose of freedom.

It is in this spirit that all of us are called, each to his own measure of capacity, and each in the widest horizon of his vision, to create the first great American Century.”

Today, the term is usually used to illustrate _____, beginning with the Spanish-American War and the important role played by the United States in World War II, continuing on through the Cold War status of the United States as one of the world’s two superpowers, and ending with the role of the United States as sole superpower on from the 1990’s. It refers not only to the political influence of the United States, but also its economic influence, as many nations around the world would over the course of the 20th century adopt the economic policies of the Washington Consensus, and its cultural influence.

II. “CHRISTIAN AMERICA”

The United States enjoyed such economic fruitfulness, individual liberty and staggering military power, that many Americans recognized this as unique blessing from God.

“I believe that no one can read the history of our country without realizing the good book (the Bible) and the spirit of the Savior which have from the beginning been our guiding genius. Whether we look at the first charter of Virginia, or the charter of New England, or the charter of Massachusetts Bay, or the fundamental orders of Connecticut, the same objective is present, a Christian land governed by Christian principles... I believe the entire Bill of Rights came into being

_____. Freedom of belief, of expression, of assembly, of petition, the dignity of the individual, the sanctity of the home, equal justice under the law, and the reservation of the powers to the people....I would

like to believe that we are living today in the spirit of the Christian religion. I would also like to believe that as long as we do, no great harm can come to our country.”

~ Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, to *Time* magazine in 1954~

III. AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY

As a result of America’s Christian roots and the resulting economic blessings and freedom, American’s felt a responsibility to help the rest of the world. This was without parallel among the history of the nations of the world. American foreign aid, both governmental and private, flowed around the world. The United States assumed the lead in responding to any natural disaster anywhere in the world.

When the U.S. defeated a country militarily, _____. When people in other nations struggled for freedom, the United States felt an obligation to support them. This attitude was summed up by President John F. Kennedy, “Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”

IV. WHAT’S SO GREAT ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

The following article is from Dinesh D’ Souza’s book *What’s So Great About Christianity*. Permission to reprint it (in a college syllabus only) has been granted.

“We seem to be witnessing an aggressive attempt by leading atheists to portray religion in general, and Christianity in particular, as the bane of civilization. Finding the idea of God incompatible with science and reason, these atheists also fault Christianity _____. The proposed solution: a completely secular society, liberated from Christian symbols and beliefs.

This critique, which comes from best-selling atheist books, academic tracts and a sophisticated network of atheist organizations and media, can be disputed on its own terms. What it misses, however, is the larger story of how Christianity has shaped the core institutions and values of the USA and the West. Christianity is responsible even for secular institutions such as _____ and _____. It has fostered in our civilization values such as respect for human dignity, human rights and human equality that even secular people cherish.

Consider science. Although there have been many civilizations in history, _____: Western civilization. And why? Because science is based on an assumption that is, at root, faith-based and theological. That is the assumption that the universe is rational and follows laws that are discoverable through human reason.

The ‘Miracle’ of Our Universe

Science is based on what James Trefil calls the principle of universality. “It says that the laws of nature we discover here and now in our laboratories are true everywhere in the universe and have been in force for all time.” Moreover, the laws that govern the universe seem to be written in the language of mathematics.

Physicist Richard Feynman found this to be “a kind of miracle.”

Why? Because the universe doesn't have to be this way. There's no particular reason the laws of nature that we find on Earth should also govern a star billions of light years away. There's no logical necessity for a universe that obeys rules, let alone mathematical ones. So where did Western man get this idea of _____? From _____.

Christians were the first ones who envisioned the universe as following laws that reflected the rationality of God the creator. These laws were believed to be accessible to man because man is created in the image of God and shares a spark of the divine reason. No wonder, then, that the first universities and observatories were sponsored by the church and run by priests.

No wonder also that the greatest scientists of the West – Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Boyle, Newton, Leibniz, Gassendi, Pascal, Mersenne, Cuvier, Harvey, Dalton, Faraday, Joule, Lyell, Lavoisier, Priestley, Kelvin, Ampere, Steno, Pasteur, Maxwell, Planck, Mendel, and Lemaitre – were Christians. Gassendi, Mersenne and Lemaitre were priests. Several of them viewed their research as demonstrating God's creative genius as manifested in his creation.

If modern science has Christian roots, so do our most basic political institutions and values. Consider Thomas Jefferson's famous assertion in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." He claimed this was "self-evident," but one only has to look to history and to other cultures to see that it is not evident at all. Everywhere we see dramatic evidence of human inequality. Jefferson's point, however, was that human beings are moral equals. Every life has a worth no greater and no less than any other.

The preciousness and equal worth of every human life is a Christian idea. We are equal because we have been created equal in the eyes of God. This is an idea with momentous consequences. In ancient Greece and Rome, human life had very little value. The Spartans, for example, left weak children to die on the hillside. Greek and Roman culture was built on slavery.

Christianity banned infanticide and the killing of the weak and "dispensable," and even today Christian values are responsible for the moral horror we feel when we hear of such practices. Christianity initially tolerated slavery – a universal institution at the time – but gradually mobilized the moral and political resources to end it. From the beginning, Christianity discouraged the enslavement of fellow Christians. Slavery, the foundation of Greek and Roman civilization, withered and largely disappeared throughout medieval Christendom in the Middle Ages.

The first movements to abolish slavery completely occurred only in the West, and were led by Christians. In the modern era, first the Quakers and then the evangelical Christians demanded that since we are all equal in God's eyes, _____.

_____ This religious doctrine not only supplies the moral justification for anti-slavery but also for democracy. Yes, the idea of self-government is also rooted in the Christian assumption of human equality. One reason the atheist philosopher Nietzsche hated democracy is because he understood its religious foundation.

Rights and Christianity

Consider finally modern notions of human rights- the right to freedom of conscience, or to property, or to marry and form a family, or to be treated equally before the law – as enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The universalism of this declaration is based on the particular teachings of Christianity. The premise is that all human lives have equal dignity and worth, but this is not the teaching of all the world's cultures and religions. Even so, it's appropriate

that a doctrine, Christian in origin, should be universal in application. Christianity from the start promulgated its message as one for the whole world.

There are some atheists and even some Christians who admit that theism and Christianity have shaped the core institutions and values of America and the West. But now that we have these values, they say, why do we still need God and Christianity? Oddly enough, the answer is supplied by Nietzsche.

Nietzsche argued that since the Christian God is the foundation of Western values, the death of God must necessarily mean the erosion and ultimate collapse of those values. Remove the base and the whole building will slowly crumble. For a while, Nietzsche conceded, people would out of custom or habit continue to respect human life and treat people with equal dignity, but eventually there would be ferocious assaults on these values, and practices once unthinkable such as the killing of people deemed inferior or undesirable would once again occur. This is precisely what we have seen in our time, and Nietzsche predicted that it will only get worse.

If we cherish the distinctive ideals of Western civilization, and believe as I do that, they have enormously benefited our civilization and our world, then whatever our religious convictions, we will not rashly try to hack at the religious roots from which they spring. On the contrary, we will not hesitate to acknowledge, not only privately but also publicly, the central, role that Christianity has played and still plays in the things that matter most to us.”