

# The Impact of Jesus

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## Introduction: My Neighborhood

What is the impact of Jesus? Let me begin by telling you a story about my neighborhood. My wife Ming and I got married in May, 1999. One of the things that attracted us to each other was that we had both lived in inner city communities, we both wanted to live in intentional Christian community, and we both wanted to be blessings in our neighborhood. So we got married and bought a house in the second highest crime rate area in Boston, the Franklin Park – Franklin Field area. Our good friend Tischa Brown moved in with us, along with a bunch of other Christians we knew who wanted to live this way. Our house is a three story house. Before we made some changes recently, it was an 11 bedroom, 4 bathroom, 3 kitchen house. We peaked at 19 people in the house at one point. We got to know our neighbors, ran kids bible clubs, and helped organize neighborhood cookouts. In 2005, Ming and our housemate Leslie got grant money to turn the vacant lot right next door into a community garden. You can see some pictures of the building process. Those are vegetable beds, and our first crop of vegetables, with the corn towering over my daughter Zoe at the time, and a neighborhood birthday party. It was awesome. Older people loved to plant their beans and greens. We paid teenagers a stipend to work for the garden on the weekends. When it was finished, we did outdoor family movie nights on the grassy area, and 20 – 40 people would come out. After that, people wanted to start a monthly neighborhood meeting. We also had friends come in to teach an African dance and drums class and a Taekwondo class. The two drug dealing houses directly across the street from us eventually changed, one of the men had a miraculous encounter with Jesus when we prayed for him and he changed his life in response. Hallelujah!!! Thank you Jesus!!! Over the years, our housemates and other people moved in or moved nearby. Leslie bought a house up the street, and Laura bought a house around the corner. They run a residential Christian mentoring program for young men and young women (young moms with kids) in those houses. Another housemate got married and moved five minutes away and she and her husband run their medical practice from their house! Leslie just recently bought property in Rhode Island, including a former factory that she's turning into a community center with music studio so she can bring artists in to teach music classes, and give young people something constructive to do. When I look back over the last 14 years of my life, I know I started with an understanding of Jesus. But when I stop to think about what he has done, I have to stop in wonder. I am awestruck. Who is this man?

## Relevance:

Now there are two main reasons why I think it's important to look at the impact of Jesus. First, because we may want to imitate it. When Jesus' followers were actually faithful and thoughtful and inspired by Jesus, they did amazing things. We may want to imitate that. Second, because we just want to appreciate Jesus himself. As we look through Jesus' followers to try to see Jesus himself pouring out his life and his love through them, I think we might just feel awe. We will find that Jesus is awesome. And we might be interested in asking the question, 'Who is this man?'

So I thought about where I grew up: Los Angeles, CA. Why is there a Los Angeles? Because missionaries came to California and named that city 'The City of Angels.' Why angels? Because angels showed up at Jesus' birth. Then I went up to the bay area for college, and lived between San Francisco and San Jose. Why is it called San Francisco? Because there was a guy named St. Francis of Assisi who became poor to love the poor, and he inspired a wave of generosity and love. Why? Because Jesus did. Why is there a San Jose? Because there was a St. Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, who is held up as an example of hospitality because he received Mary when she was pregnant with a baby who wasn't his, and service because he served Mary and Jesus. The capital of California is Sacramento. Why is it called Sacramento? Because Christians named it after the word 'sacrament,' which means sacred actions like eating the bread and wine of communion.

But the best thing to come out of California is this: In N' Out Burger. And why do we have the In N' Out Burger double double animal style? Believe it or not, it's because of Jesus. This chain is a family owned business, started by Harry and Esther Snyder. The family is Christian. They love Jesus. That's why they put these Bible references on their cups. And in the book *Fast Food Nation*, In N' Out Burger is the only fast food restaurant chain that gets good marks, both for food quality and how they treat employees. They were the *only* one!! Thank you Jesus for the double double animal style!!!

## Health Care and Hospitals

I was born in a hospital called 'The Little Company of Mary Hospital' in Torrance, California. Mary who? Mary of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus, who welcomed the vulnerability of God. Why are there hospitals? The earliest Christians converted their homes into places for the sick. Back in ancient times, cities were way denser in population than Manhattan. Plagues spread like wildfire. People sometimes left the sick out on roads, letting them die. There was mass panic. Christians who organized themselves into groups called the parabolani, meaning the gamblers, gambled with their lives, moved into the cities during the plague, and nursed the sick. Many lost their lives in the process. Then the Nicene Council in 325 AD ordered every church community to build a hospital in every city that contained a cathedral. From that time on, Christian 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: these are the rule, rather than the exceptions.'<sup>1</sup> So now we have hospitals named St. Mary's, St. Joseph's, St. Elizabeth's, Good Samaritan, Caritas Carney, New York Presbyterian Hospital. Why? Because Jesus touched lepers, sick people, the blind, the lame, and the dying. Without Jesus, there would have been no Red Cross, no 12 step group for alcoholics for my dad to go to when he got a DUI. Alcoholics Anonymous started as a Christian group, recognizing our dependence on a higher power, not just ourselves. Why? Because even Jesus lived that way, depending on the Father by the Spirit.

Why do we care so much about children today? Why are there *children's* hospitals? Seneca the Roman philosopher said that we drown children at birth when they are weak or abnormal. He said that without any embarrassment. Just as a matter of fact. Boys were favored over girls, like in China today. But Christians adopted babies left on doorsteps. That's how we got the idea of 'godparents.' Then orphanages started when Christians started receiving children into their monastic communities, instead of letting children be abandoned on a trash dump someplace. The idea that children were people was a powerful Christian idea, highlighted by a Norwegian scholar named O.M. Bakke, in his book *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*. Why? Because when his disciples asked him how to be great in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus brought one of the many children he welcomed to himself and blessed and told them to become like a child.

What about the elderly? Widows in the Roman Empire, who were taxed for surviving past their husbands because they were considered a drag on the economy, were received in the church and cared for. Christians remembered that Jesus had said, 'Behold your mother,' about his mother Mary to his disciple John so that he would care for her.

Secular urban sociologist Lewis Mumford studied cities throughout history all over the world and begrudgingly admitted, '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.'<sup>2</sup> Our cities are far from perfect, but they are much more humane because of Jesus. Without Jesus, there would be no Salvation Army, no YMCA and YWCA, no Habitat for Humanity, no Food for the Hungry, no WorldVision, no Compassion International, no ChildVoice International.

## Abolition of Slavery

But wait, you might ask. Didn't Christian faith justify slavery? Well, let me tell you a story. This statue is of a woman named Bathilde. Bathilde was a British slave in the household of the king of France in the 600's. She was an attractive young woman who loved Jesus. She caught the eye of the next king of France, Clovis II. Clovis also was or became a Christian, apparently. When Clovis II inherited the throne from his father, he freed Bathilde from slavery, and proposed to her. She said yes. And together, they abolished first the slave trade in the kingdom of the Franks. When Clovis II died, she continued by freeing children who had been forced into slavery. Eventually, the law was that any slave setting foot on the soil of the kingdom of the Franks would be set free. France in its early

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), p.295 – 6

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), p.317

form became the first kingdom in the world to abolish slavery on its soil.<sup>3</sup> Why? Because of Christian faith. Others followed. Venice in 960. Hungary in 1000. England in 1102. Iceland in 1117. A city in Croatia in 1214. Germany in 1220. Norway, Sweden and Finland by the 1300's. So before the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, northwestern and northern Europe had abolished slavery. They were the only countries in the world to do that. Why? Because of Jesus. Without Jesus, there would be no abolition, no International Justice Mission, no Love146.

I know you might have questions about that. Before Bathilde and Clovis, Christian abolition had already been in high gear. Let me work backwards and show you just a few highlights. (1) The Apostolic Constitutions is a manual of Christian teaching to that point, showing Christians how to run a church service. It comes from 390 – 400 AD. It instructs this: 'As for such sums of money as are collected from them in the aforesaid manner, designate them to be used for the redemption of the saints and the deliverance of slaves and captives.' I think churches today ought to take up offerings for aftercare for victims of sex trafficking and child bonded labor! Churches did it as standard practice back then! (2) Let's trace that back further, to just one example of Christian leadership. Here is Gregory of Nyssa, bishop of Nyssa, a leading theologian in present day Turkey. He lived from 335 – 395 AD. In a sermon during Lent in 379 AD, he said, 'Since God's greatest gift to us is the perfect liberty vouchsafed us by Christ's saving action in time, and since God's gifts are entirely irrevocable, it lies not even in God's power to enslave men and women.' (Sermon during Lent, 379 AD) Let's trace that back further. (3) When Constantine became emperor in 313 AD, supposedly as a Christian, two public policy items he legislated early on were: (1) In 315 AD, he imposed the death penalty on those who kidnap and enslave children. That was a big deal because kidnappings were mostly of children. (2) In 322 AD, he forbade separating slave families, which meant enslaved people got basic human rights of marriage and parenthood. He also made manumission easy – in a church service and before the bishop. It was that simple, and many people took that route, as I'll show. Since Constantine was a new Christian, this suggests that the Christian community had a strong antislavery position. So let's trace that back further. (4) Before Christians were powerful enough to change any laws, Christians regularly freed slaves personally. 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.<sup>4</sup> Sometime during 95 – 135 AD, Ovidius, who was appointed bishop of Braga (in modern day Portugal) under Pope Clement I in 95 AD, helps emancipate five thousand slaves.<sup>5</sup> All this because the Bible does not support forced enslavement but only servitude for debt or theft, and because Jesus came to set us free from enslavement to sin.

Now I know we're very familiar with the mistakes Christians have made throughout history. I fully acknowledge that. But I want to also say this: When you're looking at whether a medicine is effective, you have to look at the times people actually take the medicine. If people stop taking the medicine, you don't blame the medicine. You blame the people. The same is true here. Friedrich Nietzsche would have agreed. He was probably one of the best opponents of Christian faith. He really understood his opponent. Nietzsche was a professor of classics started from the age of 24. He not only taught the subject, he wanted to return to the culture and beliefs of the Greco-Roman pagan world. And in his view, which is indisputably true, the great invader of the Greek and Roman world was Christianity. He wrote, in his book *Will to Power*, '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?'<sup>6</sup> Then he goes on to say, '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

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Hill, *What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us? How it Shaped the Modern World* (Downers' Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), p.176

<sup>4</sup> Philip Schaff, 'Christian Life in Contrast with Pagan Corruption: The Church and Slavery,' *History of the Christian Church*, Volume II

<sup>5</sup> Edward C. Rogers, *Slavery Illegality in All Ages and Nations* (1855), Letter III in p.28 – 29. See my papers *Slavery and the Bible and Slavery Today* (<http://nagasawafamily.org/article-slavery-in-the-bible.pdf>), and *Slavery and Christianity: First to Fifteenth Centuries* (<http://nagasawafamily.org/article-slavery-and-christianity-1st-to-15th-centuries.pdf>).

<sup>6</sup> 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.

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!’<sup>7</sup> Is that who Jesus was? Let’s keep exploring this.

## Education

Why were I and my sister able to go to colleges, despite having fairly humble beginnings? My last name is Nagasawa, which in Japanese means ‘long swamp.’ Apparently we did not own very good land in Japan. At one point in time, formal education was only for male children of wealthy families. So imagine, those of you who are women, not being able to go to school, not being able to read, not being prioritized as a learner. What would your life be like? What would your future be like? But Jesus taught everyone – men and women – and taught his disciples to teach everyone. The dream of universal literacy comes from Jesus’ Great Commission. So Christians built schools for everyone. The first Christian school that we know of was in Alexandria. The ancient library of Alexandria stood for centuries as a center of learning. The Christian scholars Pantaenus and Clement of Alexandria led the Catechetical School of Alexandria, which might have been started by Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark. They did not just teach Theology. They also taught Christian Philosophy and the Bible; science; mathematics; Greek and Roman Literature; Logic and Arts. ‘The question-and-answer method of commentary began there, and, 15 centuries before Braille, blind students at the school were using wood-carving techniques to read and write.’ Christians then built an academic community in Constantinople, still in the University of Istanbul today. And from there it spread. Their curriculum and methods became a foundation for the medieval universities of Europe.<sup>8</sup>

This is my sister Mari, her husband Richard (doesn’t he look like Michael Buble?) and their kids Lucas and Gabby. They live in France with her husband and children, where the first state education system was developed – by Charlemagne who commanded priests to start schools in every community and parents donated only what they could afford. I’m not saying that Charlemagne was a saint! But he did do something remarkable because of Christian faith. Then Christians built universities: The Universities of Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge are still around. Oxford’s motto is, ‘The Lord is my light.’ Why? Who is this man?

And it wasn’t only in the West. It went East. In the 700’s, when the Muslim caliphate moved its capital to Baghdad, they established a great library and academy called the House of Wisdom. They translated Greek and Syriac knowledge into Arabic. Who were those scholars? Syrian Christians. Sometimes they were kidnapped into service. In the 800’s, an Assyrian Christian named Hunayn ibn Ishaq came there. He translated 116 books into Arabic and Syriac, including the entire Old Testament which counted as 1. He wrote 36 of his own books, and 21 of them were about medicine. For example, in *Ten Treatises on Ophthalmology*, he talks about doing surgery on the human eye to remove corneal ulcers and repair cataracts. In fact, the Wikipedia article on him cites a journal article which says that he ‘laid the foundations for Islamic medicine.’<sup>9</sup> Hunayn ibn Ishaq became the personal physician to the Muslim Caliph al-Mutawakkil. But the caliph thought Hunayn might poison him. So he tested him, saying, ‘Hey, make me a poison, so I can use it against my enemies. I’ll pay you a lot of money.’ Hunayn ibn Ishaq repeatedly said no. Disappointed, and still wanting to test his resolve, the caliph imprisoned him for a year. Hunayn said he would rather be killed than make the drug. When someone asked him, Hunayn explained the physician’s oath required him to help, and not harm, his patients. What an amazing man, who loved Jesus, who he saw as the great physician! Jesus healed people’s bodies to reflect how he heals and will heal the entire person. Jesus said, ‘It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick.’ (Lk.5:31) Hunayn ibn Ishaq was appointed head of the school ‘House of Wisdom.’ By the mid-800’s, ‘the House of Wisdom had the largest repository of books in the world.’<sup>10</sup> From this group of Christian scholars, all the learning of the Greek speaking world, especially Aristotle, passed into the Islamic world, and eventually came back into Western Europe.

Let’s go further East: Kerala, the most Christian state in India, going back to the apostle Thomas who may have gotten there in 52 AD. Because of that influence, Kerala has the highest literacy rate among Indian states, the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.466 – 468

<sup>8</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), p.43 – 44

<sup>9</sup> Strohmaier, Gotthard. “Hunain Ibn Ishaq – An Arab Scholar Translating Into Syriac.” *Aram* 3 (1991): 163–170. Web. 29 October 2009; cf. Wikipedia article, ‘Hunayn ibn Ishaq’

<sup>10</sup> Al-Khalili, pp. 67-78; cf. Wikipedia article, ‘House of Wisdom’

highest status of women, the lowest infant mortality, and the lowest homicide rate. Or turn to modern times. In Burma or Myanmar, the Karen people, an oppressed minority had their language put into writing by Christian missionaries, and this built a sense of solidarity that gave them a political voice to resist oppression. In nation after nation, Christians wrote the first dictionaries, wrote the first grammars, developed the first alphabets. The Gospels are now translated into 2200 languages. No other book is translated into one fifth that many. All that effort to tell people about one man, Jesus. Why? Who is this man?

Back to Europe and the West. Martin Luther said, 'I shall really go after the shameful, despicable, damnable parents who are not parents at all but despicable hogs and venomous beasts devouring their own young.' He was referring to parents who didn't teach their children how to read. He didn't have trouble expressing his feelings! The first American law to require public funding for education was called the Old Deluder Satan Act, in Massachusetts. They said education honors God because it enables people to think God's thoughts after Him. And it sets Satan back because he can't delude people as easily if they can read. Ninety-two percent of American universities founded before the Civil War were in his name. Without Jesus, there would be no Harvard, no Princeton, no Yale, no Wellesley, no Boston University, no great football rivalry between Notre Dame and Boston College. Any BC Eagles here? You benefit from the Jesuit's desire to spread the gospel, and Boston College's desire to help out Irish immigrants who didn't get into Harvard because of discrimination against the Irish at the time. Why was there this heart to serve people? Because it was thought to honor Jesus. Who is this man?

### **Science and Technology**

So what happened with all this knowledge? I studied engineering and worked at Intel for six years. In Silicon Valley, we thought we were the world changers, making cutting edge technology. So it surprised me to find out that the biggest explosion of technology came about in Christian monasteries in the Middle Ages. Why do we have computers? Why do we study science the way we do? At one point, everyone around the world treated the natural world as filled with spirits and forces. 'I don't want to pick up that rock! What if there's a spirit under it?!' Until Jesus said cast out the demons and don't be afraid of nature, because he walked on water and because he said that creation was made for humanity. Jesus blessed wine and used it in communion, because for him it was a reminder of the garden that we had lost and that he was restoring. So Christian monks essentially perfected the production of vineyards and wine and beer. Dom Perignon was actually the name of a Benedictine monk who developed champagne. Then the Guinness family was concerned about how people were abusing alcohol, so they made a beer so heavy you would have a harder time getting smashed, and now we have Guinness beer, one of my favorite beers. Clocks were first used because monks wanted to know when to pray. We first hear about eyeglasses in a sermon because monks needed to pour over texts. In the 1450's, Johannes Gutenberg developed the first European printing press, and made the 42 line Gutenberg Bible, what he thought was his greatest accomplishment.

Why is this important? Because science is not just a subject; it's an endeavor that had to be funded and backed. Sociologist Rodney Stark notes that science as a sustained, organized effort did not develop in other places, but only in the place where Christians had the political freedom to do research. The ancient Greeks thought about things, but they didn't actually do experiments. They thought it was beneath them. Alfred North Whitehead, one of the leading thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, said that experimental science flowed out of a conviction that the nature is a book meant to be studied because it was written by a God who was rational. The church funded Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and so on. They all viewed it as an extension of worship. In the 1960's, an American Christian woman named Rachel Carson published a book about environmental pollution; she did so against pressure and threats by corporations. Her book triggered the modern environmental movement, the founding of the EPA. This because of her love for nature and for Jesus. For her, it was an act of worship. Of Jesus.

### **Restorative Justice**

Jesus sparked a revolution in political life. In older times, no one loved their enemies. Genghis Khan was asked the question, 'What is best in life?' His answer was, 'To crush your enemies, see them driven before you, and hear the lamentations of their women.' But Jesus said, 'Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.' Reconcile with others, to the extent that it depends on you. The apostle Paul spread the message of Jesus around the Mediterranean, saying these words in the section we'll hear tonight: 'Put on the new self who is being renewed... according to the image of the One [Jesus] who created him – a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all' (Col.3:11). In Galatians he adds, 'no male and female.' This was the first statement in the world of egalitarianism,

the radical idea that everyone is equal before God, and their cultures matter and must be respected when it doesn't conflict with Jesus' teaching.

Illus: Let me tell you a fairly poignant story of Jesus guiding someone to lead a whole movement. Leymah Gbowee trained as a trauma counselor and worked with the ex-child soldiers of dictator Charles Taylor's army. The more she worked with them the more she came to see that they were too were victims. She brought all the women of the Christian churches together into a group called the Christian Women's Initiative and, after a lot of prayer and discussion, began issuing a series of calls for peace. They extended invitations to Muslim women and women of no faith to also participate. How did they do it? They went on a strike from sex. They said to their men, 'Look, no more sex, until you end this war.' Leymah Gbowee won the Nobel Peace Prize for bringing an end to the Liberian Civil War. Do you think that's an easy thing to not have sex with your own spouse? If you were married, to bring a conflict happening out there into your own bedroom, in a sense? Do you think you could do it? I doubt it. Because nothing in our culture teaches us to have that kind of strength. Watch the documentary about these women called *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* or read her memoir. Who does she thank for ending the Liberian Civil War? Jesus! Who is this man?

But this is not an isolated story of loving your enemy, reconciliation, and restorative justice. Without Jesus, we would have no Leo Tolstoy supporting Russian peasants in their struggle against the corrupt wealthy class in Russia. We would have no Mohandas K. Gandhi in South Africa and India. Even though the older Gandhi, once he led India, persecuted Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims because he wanted India to be a Hindu state, the younger Gandhi realized that he could not lead a non-violent resistance movement from within Hinduism because Hinduism legitimates war. The second highest caste in Hinduism was the warrior caste, just under the Brahmins. So he turned to the teaching of Jesus. Without Jesus, we would not have Ahn Chang-Ho and the Korean Independence Movement, led by Christians against Imperial Japan. Without Jesus, we would not have Martin Luther King, Jr., no black church leading the Civil Rights Movement. Without the struggle for Civil Rights, led by the black church, many of our parents would not have come to the U.S. because of its hopeless racism. Without Jesus, there would be no Ninoy and Corey Aquino and no bloodless People Power Revolution in the Philippines, when a dictator was toppled without firing a shot, without anyone being hurt. Without Jesus, there would have been no Solidarity in Poland, no Lech Walesa – an electrician with a high school diploma – bringing peaceful democracy overnight to Poland in the teeth of Soviet opposition. Without Jesus, there would be no praying students in Czechoslovakia protecting their pastors from being abducted from their homes, and therefore there would have been no Velvet Revolution. Without Jesus, there would be no Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa, Rwanda, and Uganda, helping people recover from apartheid and genocide and civil war. Hannah Arendt, Princeton scholar, wrote, 'The discoverer of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth.' Who is this man who has had such an impact?

And his impact goes far back, too. In 452 AD, Pope Leo I met Attila the Hun and stopped him from attacking Rome. Meanwhile in Africa, Christian faith spread to the African Nubian kingdoms, what is now the Sudan and the upper Nile. In the 500's or 600's, two warring kings of Nobatia and Makuria came to Jesus and within perhaps a generation or two, reconciled their differences, and united their kingdoms as Makuria!<sup>11</sup> They developed great literature because they weren't focused on war. Man, do we need Jesus like that, or what?!? In 1219, Francis of Assisi (1181 – 1226 AD) went from Italy to try to make peace with the Muslim Sultan of Egypt, and see if he would come to Jesus. Just to name the most famous. Without Jesus, we would have none of these inspiring movements.

Robert Woodberry is a sociologist who wrote an article called *The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy*. He published it in the American Political Science Review, the discipline's top journal. He has won four major awards for this article. According to him, were it not for Protestant missionaries, we might not even have democracy. Democracy has its roots in Catholics and Protestants deciding not to kill each other, and then in Catholic and Protestant missions abroad. You thought European missionaries were uniformly racist and always on the wrong

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<sup>11</sup> No later than 710 AD. But Arab histories speak of only one kingdom, Makuria, thus leading historians to wonder if the merger occurred prior to the Muslim invasion of 652 AD. It is not likely that Makuria conquered and annexed Nobatia to the north, but rather that this was a peaceful merger; cf. John H. Taylor, *Egypt and Nubia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.64; my gratitude for Vince Bantu's paper *The Decline of Nubian Christianity Under Islam (641 – 1517 CE)*, May 2011 which argues for a pre-652 AD date. Tensions between the two kingdoms were still reported, however, in 690 AD in a book by John the Deacon, a Christian Egyptian; see P. L. Shinnie (1986), 'Christian Nubia', *The Cambridge History of Africa: From c. 500 BC to AD 1050*, J. D. Fage and Roland Anthony Oliver, editors (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.556 – 588.

side? Well no. In Africa, missionaries regularly tried to protect land from white settlers, and stop female circumcision. In China, missionaries worked to end the opium trade and stop foot binding for girls. In India, they protected women, fought abuse, and established medical care; in 1947, 95% of all nurses in India were Christian.<sup>12</sup> In the West Indies and other colonies, they played key roles in building the abolition movement. Back home, their allies passed legislation that returned land to the native Xhosa people of South Africa and also protected tribes in New Zealand and Australia from being wiped out by other white settlers. Dr. Robert Woodberry says, 'I feel confident saying none of those movements would have happened without nonstate missionaries mobilizing them. Missionaries had a power base among ordinary people. They [were] the ones that transformed these movements into mass movements.'<sup>13</sup> Then in Africa and Latin America, a third wave of democratization broke out. My friend Timothy Shah, who is a Harvard alum and was part of HRCF, says that this third wave of democratization has been a Catholic wave, so much that he and his fellow authors calls the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *God's Century*. Jurgen Habermas, who is a German philosopher, one of the leading philosophers of Europe, and Owen Wilson lookalike, 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 continue to nourish ourselves from this source. Everything else is just idle postmodern chatter.'<sup>14</sup> What makes that amazing is not only that Habermas is one of Europe's most prominent political philosophers. He built his intellectual career on secular and Marxist foundations. Yet he admits *this*. If you like democracy and human rights, you've got to at least thank Jesus, because without him, you would have no human rights, and no democracy. Who is this man?

### **Beauty and the Arts**

In art, there would be no cathedrals, probably no stained glass art, no Dante, no Michelangelo, no Sistine Chapel, no David. In music, there would be no musical notation because that was an invention of the medieval church so that worship of Jesus can spread, no Johannes Bach who signed all of his works 'for the glory of God,' no Handel's Messiah, no Mozart's Requiem, no gospel music, no Justin Bieber Christmas album. Without Jesus, we would have no J.K. Rowling, who said, 'You won't understand my work until you understand my faith,' no Stephen Colbert, who said that Jesus lifted him from depression in college, no Lecrae, no Yolanda Adams. Without Jesus, there would be no happy ending story. Historian Thomas Cahill says, 'All evidence points to there having been, in the earliest religious thought, a vision of the cosmos that was profoundly cyclical... The Jews were the first people to break out of this circle, to find a new way of thinking and experiencing, a new way of understanding and feeling the world, so much that it may be said with some justice that theirs is the only new idea that human beings have ever had.'<sup>15</sup> And Jesus brought that story to its climax. He is the hero who walks the path of the villains, the fallen ones, the Adam and Eve figures who went before him. He stayed faithful to God when no one else did. So in stories and literature, without Jesus, we would have no Harry Potter, who walks the path of Voldemort but makes the different choice, no Luke Skywalker, who walks the path of his father Anakin but makes the different choice, no Shawshank Redemption where Andy Dufrane walks the path of Red but makes the different choice, no Lord of the Rings where Frodo walks the path of Gollum but makes the different choice. Without Jesus, we would have no happy ending story at all, no Walt Disney, no superhero who saves the world, and all of the variations on that theme. Who is this Jesus who touches on the deepest hopes and longings in the human heart?

I was born in 1972. But if I had been born in Japan a few centuries ago, I would be marking time by the Dynasty and the Emperor. People everywhere believed in cycles and cycles, endlessly repeated. There was nothing new under the sun, and no hope for a happy ending, where good would triumph over evil. But followers of Jesus proposed that we mark time not against the founding of Rome but against the birth of Jesus. Because Jesus marked the turn of the tide, the dawning of the happy ending, the beginning of the triumph of good over evil in human nature itself. And now, every ruler who is born and dies and every dynasty that rises and falls is measured against the birth of the one who was said to be lord of lords and king of kings. We name our children after his ragtag followers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Mary, Elizabeth, Joanna, Tabitha, Lois, Eunice, Timothy, James, Paul, and Peter. Spanish speakers even name their boys Jesus! Who is this man, Jesus?

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<sup>12</sup> Siddarth Nath, <http://www.slideshare.net/siddharth4mba/what-motivated-the-early-christian-health-missions-anatomy-of-transformation-in-india>

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Palpant Dilley, 'The Surprising Discovery About Those Colonialist, Proselytizing Missionaries', *Christianity Today*, Jan-Feb 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/january-february/world-missionaries-made.html>

<sup>14</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions* (English translation Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p.150 – 151

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (Thorndike, ME: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p.13 – 14

**Ideas of God**

Finally, even the idea that there is a loving God we owe to Jesus. Outside of the Psalms of Judaism and then the Christianity of the Gospels, was there anyone who said, 'I love Zeus'? I doubt anyone ever said, 'I love Shiva the Destroyer!' No one spoke that way about their gods. But then Jesus spoke of a God who spoke that way about us. This God said, 'I love you!' This God was like a father whose heart ached for the return of his children, and a husband for his wife. That is the God Jesus knew, the God Jesus communicated, the God Jesus himself claimed to be. Who is this Jesus? Was he who Friedrich Nietzsche said? The god on the cross?