



The Enlightenment



The Newsletter of the
Humanist Association of London and Area
An Affiliate of Humanist Canada (HC)

Volume 6

Number 8

Special Issue

Two Contrasting Legacies of the Axial Age

Grecian Philosophical Rationalism & Monotheistic Christianity

From about 900 to 200 BCE (Before the Common Era) in different regions of the world, four great traditions came into being that have continued to influence humanity to this day. They were Confucianism and Taoism in China; Hinduism and Buddhism in India; monotheistic Judaism in Israel (followed by its offshoot Christianity); and philosophical rationalism in Greece. This was the period of Confucius, Buddha, Jeremiah and Socrates. During this era, which came to be known as *The Axial Age*, spiritual and philosophical geniuses pioneered intense creativity and generated new kinds of human experiences unlike anything that had occurred up until that time. This special issue of *The Enlightenment* will explore the outcomes of two of these historical entities, the glory that was Greece and the monotheistic Judaism in Israel that led to the invention of Christianity and the founding of the early Roman Catholic Church.

In the centuries leading up to the beginning of the Common Era (CE) great things were happening in Greece. This was the civilization that spawned philosophy, democracy, and humanism, among other things, in a polytheistic society that honoured many gods and goddesses. At the same time, not far away in Palestine, the Jews were worshiping only one God called Yahweh. In the first century CE, one of these Jews who went by the name of Jesus, organized a band of twelve disciples and began preaching a reformed gospel that irritated the leaders in the Jerusalem Temple, and possibly the Roman civic authorities as well. For this he was executed. And then something happened that influenced the course of history in the Western World for centuries to come. That something was a coincidental series of events that resulted in the invention of the Christian religion based on a supernatural monotheistic God and Jesus, whom Christians believed to be the incarnated son of this God. The early church fathers believed monotheism to be far superior to the polytheism of the Greeks and Romans, and did everything they could to eliminate anything associated with polytheism. In the process, a lot of the positive qualities of the Greek culture were lost until the Renaissance. This *Enlightenment* will briefly portray some of the lost glory of Greece, and then trace the development of Christianity, outlining some of the problems it has caused as well as some of its benefits.

It is realized that it is risky to distill centuries of history into just a few pages, but it is impossible to comprehend the reality of Christianity without an understanding of the historical events that show Christianity is a human invention, rather than the divine creation of a supernatural deity. It is hoped that this condensation of historical facts will help us humanists bring some enlightenment to those who are having doubts about the conventional picture of Christianity, and who may be interested in exploring humanism.

The Glory That Was Ancient Greece

The Start of Something Great

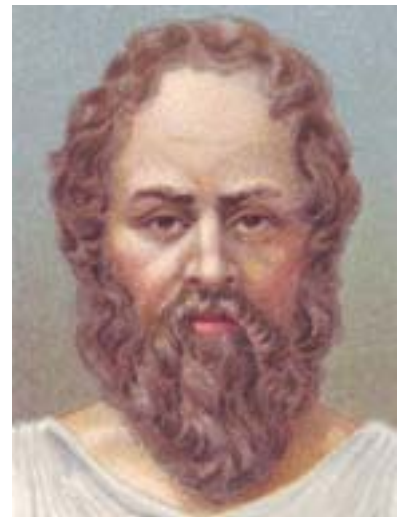
Many of us will remember learning about the wealth of achievements of the early Athenian Greeks in our high school history classes. These included the science of Archimedes, the geometry of Euclid, the theorem of Pythagoras, the cleverness of Pericles, the dramas of Euripides, the philosophies of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus, the impressive architectural achievements, the wars with Persia and Sparta and the development of participatory democracy. And, of course, we all enjoyed Aesop's Fables in our childhood. This discourse on the Athenians will touch briefly on only three points, philosophy, democracy and the humanism of Epicurus, all of which were repressed by the early Christian church; a huge backward step for European civilization.



The Acropolis

Philosophy - The study of Western philosophy began with early Greek scholars known as the pre-Socratics. The first of these was Thales (625-545 BCE). These men, numbering about twenty in total, were among the first to start asking important questions such as – What is the universe really made of? Who am I? How did we get here? Do humans have souls? If so, is the soul immortal? And do the gods really exist? Some of these men surmised that the world was made up of air, fire, earth, and water, but Leucippus, the last of the pre-Socratics, believed the universe to be made up of atoms.

The discipline of Western Philosophy essentially revolves around Socrates (469-399 BCE). All who came after him were called post-Socratics. He did not leave any of his many pearls of wisdom in writing, and he was eventually forced to drink poison hemlock for opposing the authorities of the day. Fortunately, his pupil Plato, and other contemporaries, did record much of what he said. Plato's voluminous writings, including *The Republic* and *The Laws*, are classical treasures, as are the influential writings of Aristotle, who was a tutor to Alexander the Great. And later there were the Stoics, the Skeptics and the Epicureans. The tragedy of the Greek philosophical era is that it came to an end in 529 CE when the Christian Emperor Justinian issued an edict forbidding the teaching of pagan philosophy. It would remain dormant until the Renaissance when it was rediscovered.



Socrates

Democracy - "Our constitution is called a democracy, because power is in the hands not of a few, but of the whole people." With these words Pericles summarized the essence of Greek democracy. He went on to say "everyone is equal before the law" and that "the man who holds himself aloof from public life is useless." All citizens were members of the assembly and could vote directly on legislation proposed by the council. Similarly, all citizens could be placed on a jury to judge their peers, a majority vote leading to conviction. Further, a significant majority

vote could ostracize any citizen for ten years. Most citizens could obtain the higher administrative offices since most of these positions were filled by lot. Power and authority clearly lay with the citizens of Athens.

But to be a citizen, a person had to be male, at least 18 years of age, and born of Athenian parents. This meant that the majority of Athenians, including women and resident aliens, were barred from participating in the democratic process. Of the 310,000 people living in Athens, only 43,000 participated in government, fewer than one-seventh of the total population. Nevertheless, the Athenians laid a foundation that would eventually be resurrected by others. Citizenship, shared power, equality and participation, would in time be hallmarks of democracy around the world. (Our thanks go to HALA member Don Santor for preparing this section on Democracy).

Humanism - The Greek philosopher Epicurus is generally credited with being the father of humanism. He was an atomist who reasoned that all matter in the universe was composed of indestructible atoms and that space was devoid of these atoms. He believed the universe was not created by divine power, as it is full of imperfections. His declared purpose was to free humankind from religious fears by proving the soul is material, not spiritual. He emphasized the necessity of living a moral, ethical, and balanced life. Moderation is the key word. Yes, Epicurus was the consummate humanist, and it is unfortunate that his humanist philosophy was suppressed by the Roman Church in the fourth century CE, as the Church fathers could not condone anything that denied the influence of a deity in the affairs of humans.

The Legacy of Greece – As would be expected by modern standards, Greek society had its shortfalls. Slavery was prevalent and women were second-class citizens. But there, in ancient Greece, was the start of something great that unfortunately lost out to monotheism and the spread of the Christian religion. It took up to one thousand years for democracy, philosophy, humanism, and other attributes of Greek culture to be appreciated by European civilization. It is most unfortunate that monotheism got in the way because eventually the pantheon of pagan gods and goddesses would have disappeared, had the god-free humanism of the Epicureans been allowed to flourish.

Monotheism – As mentioned above, the concept of one God originated with the Jews. It was considered by the Jews to be far superior to belief in many pagan gods. They believed their God was very real and could influence events on earth. It was this “faith in the one true God” that was picked up by the Christians and promoted by the Catholic Church. This questionable faith was successfully used to belittle the pagan beliefs of the Greeks and Romans, and partly accounts for the demise of Greek culture. The monotheistic belief in a superior God was so powerful that it eventually proliferated throughout Europe, as the Church discouraged, and in fact banned, all pagan worship. This ban, combined with the belief that Jesus was the son of God, who shed his blood for the sins of believers, and promised an afterlife in an idyllic heaven, had great mass public appeal. In time, Christianity grew into the largest religion on earth.

But Judaism and Christianity are not the only monotheistic religions. Islam is also monotheistic and is now the second most prevalent religion in the world. Unfortunately, as we all know, Islamic fanatics are now causing great harm. But Islam is too big a subject to be dealt with in this discourse, and it is mentioned only to point out that an argument can be made that humanity would be better off today if both Christianity and Islam, based on a fictitious God, had never existed. That did not happen, however, so we are faced with the challenge of trying to minimize the negative effects of these religions.

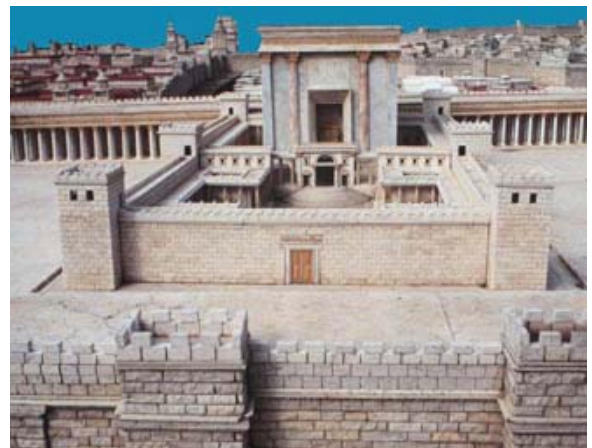
The Invention of Christianity

A Coincidental Combination of Events

It is almost certain that Jesus was not the founder of Christianity. He was a first-century, fully human Jew whose mission was to reform the Judaism of his day. What eventually became Christianity was invented after his death as a result of the coincidental, combined efforts of the apostle Paul, the Gospel writers, the Emperor Constantine and the early Roman Catholic Church. In order to get as close as possible to what really occurred in the first four centuries of the Common Era (CE), it is necessary to examine the historic conditions that prevailed before and during the time Jesus was alive, as well as Jesus the man and his teachings, the writings and exploits of the apostle Paul, the compilation of the four Gospels, the influence of Constantine, the assembly of the New Testament by the early Roman Church fathers and the expansion of the Roman Catholic Church. Each of these matters will be examined separately.

Leading up to the First Century CE – The Israelites were among the most literate of nations in the ancient world and they managed to compose a holy scripture that became known as the Old Testament, a truly amazing piece of literature. The earlier books were codified during the Babylonian captivity, and the final books of the Old Testament were written about four hundred years before the birth of Jesus. Subsequent to that time, a number of other books were written including the seven in the Apocrypha, (the Apocrypha is included in the Catholic Bible), the Pseudepigrapha, and other writings that became available after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These documents reveal that a number of concepts, seldom mentioned in the Old Testament, began creeping into the beliefs of some of the Jewish sects. These ideas include belief in a Messiah, a devil, an underworld, angels, a judgment, and an afterlife. Monotheism, the worship of the single God Yahweh, was also firmed up during that period. These concepts, that were carried over into the New Testament, did not originate with Jesus. They would have been present in some, but not all parts of first-century Judaism, even without him.

The First Century CE - At the time Jesus lived, there were four main Jewish sects: the Sadducees, who controlled commerce and oversaw the Temple; the Pharisees, who were the educators; the Essenes, who were the monkish Dead Sea Scroll people, and the Zealots, who resisted the Roman occupiers and were the holdouts at Massada. There were also a number of smaller, somewhat radical groups such as those led by John the Baptizer and the one led by Jesus himself. Common to all of these groups was Herod the Great's magnificent Temple, the pillar of Jewish worship. It supposedly contained the "Ark of the Covenant." These were the conditions existing in Roman-controlled Palestine when Jesus and the apostles were spreading his message. But a drastic change occurred in 70 CE when the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem temple during the Jewish Rebellion of 66-73 CE. Only one of the Jewish groups survived the rebellion in the long term. These were the Pharisees who replaced temple worship with the Rabbinic Judaism that still exists today. The other group that survived was the Christians in the Diaspora, the areas outside of Palestine.



Herod the Great's Temple

Jesus, the Fully Human Man - Devout Christians believe that Jesus was the supernatural son of God, born of a virgin and bodily resurrected. These supernatural qualities, prevalent in a number of ancient myths, were obviously picked up and employed by the Gospel writers to characterize Jesus as the supernatural Christ. But even if we eliminate the supernatural, it is not easy to establish a profile of the human Jesus with any certainty, because we know so little about his life until he was about 30 years of age. Some say he was an Essene who left the cloistered environment to reform Judaism. Others say he might have been trained as a Rabbi. We know he spoke Aramaic, the language of Galilee, but could he speak and read Greek and/or Hebrew? Some say he probably had a working knowledge of one or both languages. In any case, he appears to have had a firm understanding of the Old Testament, available in Greek (The Septuagint), Aramaic, and Hebrew. Could he write? We do not know, but like Socrates, he left nothing in writing. We do not know who his father was (some speculate it was a Roman soldier) but we believe his mother was Mary. According to the Gospels he had four half-brothers, James, Joses, Simon and Judas, and an unknown number of half-sisters. We do not know whether he was married (it has been speculated that he could have been married to Mary Magdalene). He had no intention of preaching to the Gentiles. (Matthew 10: 5-6)

Historical references to Jesus exist, but they are very scant, so we must rely on the Gospels to try to determine just what he believed his purpose to be. Reading through the three synoptic, or similar Gospels, and the Book of John, makes one realize that this is an almost impossible task because of all the ambiguity, contradictions, and supernatural events. Nevertheless, over the last 250 years there have been numerous attempts to determine the characteristics of the real historical human Jesus of Nazareth.



Jesus of Nazareth

In 1761 Baron d'Holbach published a convincing treatise entitled *Christianity Unveiled*, exposing some of the illogical aspects of Christianity. In 1835 David Freidrich Strauss published *The Life of Jesus, Christianity Examined* expressing serious doubts about traditional Christian beliefs. Although it was not published until 1895, at some earlier date Thomas Jefferson compiled *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, later known as the *Jefferson Bible*.

By rearranging the gospels in chronological order and removing all references to the supernatural, Jefferson retained the beauty and wisdom of the philosophical Jesus.

One of the most recent attempts at defining the historical Jesus is that of the Jesus Seminar. This is a group of Biblical scholars based in California that has attempted to determine which of the recorded words of Jesus in the gospels were most likely spoken by him, using a technique employing red, pink, gray and black beads. Some erudite scholars call the Jesus Seminar methodology embarrassing, but others find the results that have been published to be quite acceptable.

But there is now another source that may lead us closer to the real Jesus than do the four Gospels in the Bible. The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, discovered in a cave at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945, makes no mention of a virgin birth, a bodily resurrection, original sin, repentance, or an afterlife. Instead Jesus is portrayed as an enlightened prophet and spiritual leader as well as being fully human and engaged in the world. God's Kingdom is here on earth, existing as a transformed consciousness or enlightenment. Salvation is through the accumulation of knowledge and by way of good works, not through belief in blood atonement.

I think the gospel of Thomas gets us closer to the real historical Jesus than anything in the traditional Gospels, and I do not think it is too much of a stretch to suggest that Jesus was a fully human, intelligent, verbally spry Jewish sage, in the same sense that Socrates was a sage. Both left nothing in writing and both were put to death for defying the authorities of their day.

The Apostle Paul - The earliest recorded writings about the teachings of Jesus are the 14 Epistles contained in the New Testament, at least 7 of which, were by the apostle Paul: I Thessalonians, I and II Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, Galatians, and Romans. Paul was a Jewish Pharisee, a Roman citizen living in the Diaspora, who supposedly had a vision (some speculate it was an epileptic seizure) in which he claims to have received a message from Jesus telling him to preach the gospel to those living in the Diaspora, both Jew and Gentile.

After the death of Jesus, his half-brother, James, became the leader of a group that included Jesus' other half-brothers and some of the disciples, including Peter and John. They considered Jesus to be fully human. Their mission was to continue promoting the messages of Jesus to the Jews in Palestine. Paul met with this group and let it be known that he intended to convey the teachings of Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles in the Diaspora. Despite some opposition from the Jerusalem group, who, unlike Paul, still believed it was necessary to observe many of the Mosaic laws, including circumcision. Paul set out to preach a reformed gospel of "faith" (Romans 1: 16-17) to citizens in the Eastern Mediterranean area. *This was the first phase in the invention of Christianity.* James was martyred in 62 CE, and his faction that became known as the Ebionites, eventually died out, but Paul's Christianity was destined to have a gripping influence on Western civilization for many centuries to come and continues to this day.



The Apostle Paul

It is not clear how and where it originated, but Paul's message was somewhat different from the message of James and his small group. He espoused the following:

1. Gentiles need not adhere to the Mosaic laws. Salvation could be obtained by a profession of "faith," believing that Jesus died to atone for the sins of believers. In particular, circumcision was no longer necessary in order to be a follower of Jesus. Paul also softened Jesus' divorce laws.
2. Believers would be guaranteed some form of life after death.
3. Jesus was the son of God, the Messiah who would return in the near future to judge all of humanity and establish God's kingdom on earth.
4. Paul promoted the celebration of the Eucharist. (See the wording in I Corinthians 5: 7-8).

Despite many beatings and time in jail, Paul and his associates were amazingly successful at establishing a number of Gentile Christian churches in parts of the Roman Empire. Apparently the promises of redemption and some sort of afterlife without going through the painful circumcision procedure was attractive to many. Also, some of Paul's Epistles contain elegant prose; his beautiful passage on love in I Corinthians 13 is legendary. But in the end, he irritated authorities in Jerusalem, and he was put on trial. Since he was a Roman citizen, he insisted he be tried in Rome where he was convicted and executed in 68 CE. By then the die was cast. Christianity was destined to exert a momentous influence on the western world, as it eventually became the world's most populous religion.

The Influence of the Gospels - In each of the Gospels, Jesus predicts the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple that occurred in 70 CE during the time of the Jewish Revolt. The Gospel of Mark is believed to have been the first one, written soon after 70 CE. It was followed by Matthew, Luke and John in that order. Obviously the words supposedly spoken by Jesus concerning the destruction of the Temple were “put into his mouth” by the Gospel writers after the Temple was destroyed. Similarly, all the words supposedly spoken by Jesus after the resurrection were also put into his mouth, since a physical resurrection is impossible. These post-crucifixion words, that were never really spoken by Jesus, include his instructions to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. The accounts fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies were also likely fabrications. The first three Gospels have many similarities and are known as the synoptics. The Gospel of John is quite different, and introduces the born-again concept that is now the central belief of some Christians, especially the fundamentalists.

A significant problem with the Gospels is that they were written long after Jesus died. With this time lag, how accurate can they be? And since they were transcribed so often by hand, how many errors or deliberate interpretations crept in? How did the authors get their information? Was it word of mouth or was there a lost written gospel that is known as “Q” or the “Source”? We may never know for certain, but more importantly, what prompted the authors to embellish the teaching of Jesus and advocate concepts similar to Paul’s, adding the supernatural virgin birth and a physical resurrection? When these writings were assimilated by the early churches, the *invention of the supernatural Jesus Christ the Savior was almost complete*. But still to come were the formation and development of the Trinity and the Creeds by the Roman Church fathers.

The Influence of Emperor Constantine - After the establishment and expansion of the Roman empire, Latin became a prevalent language, replacing Greek in some areas. Roman culture also evolved in areas of literature, philosophy and architecture. (The Romans made extensive use of the arch). A renowned philosophical work of the period was the *Meditations* written by the stoic Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE). As in Greece, ethics and morality in the Roman Empire resided in the domain of philosophers, not the priests. At the time of Marcus Aurelius, Christian Churches were present, but they were scattered, and Christians were generally looked down upon by the elite as being ignorant. Their adherents often suffered persecutions and the Christian religion might have died out were it not for the Emperor Constantine (274-337 CE). According to legend, Constantine had a vision or a dream indicating that if he fought the next day under the banner of the Christian cross, he would win the battle of Milvian Bridge. He won the battle and subsequently declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. In this effort, he was aided to no small extent by his mother Helena, who carried out archeological work in Palestine, where she is reputed to have unearthed some early Christian relics.



Emperor Constantine

Constantine soon realized that there was dissension concerning beliefs in the various Christian factions. Some believed Jesus to be the son of God; others considered him to be fully human. Reasoning he must have unity in order to rule without religious conflict, he convened the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE in order to sort out the differences and obtain common agreement. It was those who believed in a supernatural Jesus who won the day. Other groups such as the Arians

and the Gnostics that believed Jesus was fully human, faded away. It was at this time that the enigmatic Trinity and the Nicene Creed were born. The Creed defined the basic tenets of the Church. Then, after several synods, the books of the New Testament were selected from the writings available at the time. There were a number of texts available, but only those that dovetailed with the tenets of the Roman Church were selected. They were then adjoined to the Old Testament, and the Christian canon was complete. With the backing of Constantine and future Emperors and Kings, the Roman Catholic Church prospered and grew. *The invention of Christianity was now complete* and with political endorsement and support, the Catholic Church had a monopolistic patent on an *exclusive* Christianity. This monopoly enabled the Church to exert undue influence and power, both religious and political, on Western civilization until the Protestant Reformation. Sadly, this dictatorial, top-down, autocratic organization suppressed the democratic, philosophical, and humanistic qualities of the Greeks for many centuries.

The Roman Catholic Church - Catholics believe their Church was founded by the apostle Peter. They cite Jesus' telling Peter that he is the rock on which he will build his church. (Matthew 16: 18-20). Peter, like Paul, preached to Jews and Gentiles in the Diaspora. He was put to death in Rome in 67 CE. He is regarded as the first pope and is reputed to be buried under St. Peter's Basilica.

The Catholic Church is organized along military lines, with a hierarchy headed by the pope, whose army consists of cardinals, bishops, monsignors and priests. Their message is simple: salvation and a guaranteed entry into heaven is achieved only by becoming a Catholic and observing the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, partaking of communion at mass, confession to a priest, marriage, and the last rights. The theology, doctrines, dogmas, tenets, liturgy, and rituals have been influenced over time by various scholars including St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas.



St. Peter's Basilica

The Catholic religion was no doubt, of some comfort for the illiterate masses who lived with drudgery and hardship during the dark ages that resulted from the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and the invasions of the barbaric Visigoths and Huns. In this dark period, lasting five to six hundred years, the church was the only unifying force. The peasants were told that life, though miserable now, would be immeasurably better in the next life.

Throughout the centuries, the Catholic Church has, on occasion, been the cause of much harm. An early black mark was the destruction of the 700-year-old Alexandria Library, "the storehouse of all the worlds knowledge," preserved on thousands of papyrus scrolls. In 391 CE, on papal orders, the library was destroyed by Archbishop Theophilus because it contained so-called pagan documents. This unforgivable act of destruction was a huge disservice to humanity. The Crusades, the Inquisitions, and the burning of witches are legendary as is the vindictive persecution of the Jews for supposedly being "Christ killers." Another scourge is the religious wars of the past and those that are still with us to this day. And regrettably, the Church discouraged the development of science (think of Galileo) and democracy. The Church's close association with the rulers of the day gave it undeserved power and influence in these matters. The Catholic Church is still causing harm today with its refusal to allow abortion and artificial birth control, both restrictions that further the spread of AIDs. The Church also opposes gay and lesbian marriage and has serious sexual-abuse issues with certain wayward priests. Their stubborn refusal to allow married priests or women priests is senseless, as is the concept of an infallible pope. The Catholic hierarchy will do almost anything to maintain its power.

At this point it is only fair to point out that the above criticism is directed at the Vatican and not at the Catholics in the pews. I know Catholics who get great solace from attending mass and confession. And today there are liberal Catholics who favour married priests as well as women priests, but unfortunately, as mentioned above, the Vatican turns a deaf ear. This reluctance to reform is causing attendance to drop in western Catholic churches, and indeed some Catholic churches are closing.

Protestantism – Up until about 1500 CE, Christianity occupied a significant place in the lives of most European citizens, but thanks to the Protestant Reformation, aided by the invention of the printing press and the Enlightenment philosophers, more and more secularization began to emerge. Most importantly, science and democracy began to advance and gradually through mechanization, much of the drudgery of the past was reduced or eliminated. This progress was aided by the development and utilization of water-, wind-, and steam-power, which significantly increased productivity. These advancements gave people the opportunity to be more secular, and less religious and to enjoy life in the here and now, rather than in a supposed next life.

Most Protestant churches today operate in a democratic manner whereby the congregants have some say in the beliefs and running of their church, as opposed to the autocratic ways of the Catholic Church. This freedom has many advantages, and it has allowed Protestants to make many positive contributions to society (think of the Protestant work ethic), but there is one undesirable outcome: it is possible for anyone who wishes, to leave a traditional mainline Protestant denomination and set up his or her own church. More often than not, these people are radical fundamentalist/evangelicals who may threaten to infiltrate governments to aid in fulfilling their theocratic missions and jeopardize the separation of church and state. This most undesirable situation has caused problems in the United States and threatens to do the same in Canada.

The Legacy of Monotheistic Christianity – While much of the foregoing dwells on the shortcomings of Christianity, there have certainly been benefits. Throughout the centuries church teachings have been a source of ethics and morality for citizens. During the dark ages they were the main source of scholastic knowledge and later were instrumental in establishing the first universities. The construction of cathedrals helped advance both Gothic and Romanesque architecture. Most churches have been, and still are, involved with outreach to the underprivileged. And for many, their church is the centre of their social life.

At the present time, the condition and popularity of Christianity varies a lot from one area of the world to another. In many Western Europe countries it has dwindled to almost insignificance as people lost interest and secularization gradually took over. But in many areas of Central and South America and parts of Africa, Roman Catholicism is still influential. In the United States, the most religious country in the West, Protestant fundamentalist/evangelical big-box churches are growing, while Catholic and mainline Protestant churches are not. In China of all places, Christianity is creeping in, to the displeasure of Communist leaders. In Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, interest in Progressive Christianity is increasing. And also in Canada, Catholic and mainline Protestant churches are closing while fundamentalist/evangelicals are growing and threatening the separation of church and state. Humanists and other like-minded people had hoped that the progress of secularization that has occurred in Europe would be duplicated in Canada, but regrettably the rise of fundamentalism and evangelicalism is slowing the pace of secularization. The remainder of this discourse will bring us up to date on where we are now in the areas of philosophy, democracy, and humanism, three of the legacies of Ancient Greece.

Where We Are Now

Philosophy – After the Renaissance, philosophical thinking began to flourish again and it continues to this day, although predominately in the academic world. This revival from Grecian days has been successful.

Democracy - The first rebirth of democracy was in England with the gradual development of the parliamentary system and the diminishing influence of the monarchy. And, of course, democracy made a big leap forward in the United States after the Revolution, with the establishment of a Constitution based on the separation of the powers of the Administrative, Legislative, and Judicial branches of Government. Since that time many countries have adopted various forms of democratic systems, but there is still a long way to go. There are dictatorships in Africa and problematic theocracies, particularly in parts of the Islamic world. It is most disturbing that after two thousand years, the seeds of democracy planted in Greece, have not germinated evenly throughout the globe, and that in some areas, religions are holding back democratic rule.

And who would have thought only a few years ago, that American democracy would be threatened by religious zealots. After the Founding Fathers went to such great pains to separate church and state, it is really a national disgrace that Christian fundamentalists have been able to influence certain U.S. politicians into bending to their demands in order to get votes. Unfortunately we in Canada are not immune; our separation of church and state is also under attack as outlined so thoroughly in Marci McDonald's book *The Armageddon Factor* (see the September *Enlightenment*). She does not offer a solution, but leaves it up to the electorate to decide the extent of influence that religion will have on governmental policies. It is up to every humanist to decide just how much he or she wishes to become involved in the political process and in the end vote for the candidates that respect humanist principles and values, while fervently advocating the separation of church and state to the greatest extent possible.

Humanism - As we all know only too well, the non-theistic moral and ethical society of the Epicureans, where democratic freedom, science, and moderation in all things were allowed to flourish, has never come about in any large measure except in fictional Shangri-La. The influence of the Christian religion, based on supernatural beliefs has just overpowered most attempts to propagate humanism in any major way, although significant secularization has occurred in various Western European countries on its own, as interest in religion has plummeted. So in addition to the political activity mentioned above, what should humanist be doing in Canada to help further the secularization and prosperity of our nation?

I submit that what we must stress are the positive qualities of humanism as outlined in the twelve humanist principles. And yes, we can be critical of religions, but we can also tactfully point out the fallacies of supernaturalism and explain, as shown in this *Enlightenment*, that religions are human inventions, and not created by a divine deity. It should also be explained that humanists live this life to the fullest, with integrity, compassion and concern for fellow beings and for our fragile environment. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that humanists experience profound feelings of awe and wonder at the miracle of life itself, through the beauty and wonders of nature, through great music and art, as well as love of family. For humanists, life is a celebration of the here and now, rather than living in anticipation of a life in the hereafter. All of these things can occasionally provide transcendent feelings at least equivalent to the spiritual comfort many say they receive from religion. Yes, indeed, humanism can be a desirable substitute for religion, and secular societies based on humanist principles, can be of great benefit to the future of humankind.