

No False Gods Before Me: A Review of Rodney Stark's Work

by [Terry Scambray](#) (December 2018)



Worship of the Golden Calf, Keith Vaughan, 1965

But superstition, like belief, must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone?
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky.

“Church Going”—Phillip Larkin

“History is the only laboratory we have in which to
test the consequences of thought.”—Etienne Gilson

“It is not now the men of faith; it is the skeptics who
have reason to fear the course of discovery.”—Paul
Johnson

“All men constantly and consistently act as though
Christianity were true.”—Francis Schaeffer

“If you wish to destroy a people, you must first sever
them from their roots.”—Alexander Solzhenitsyn

The trouble with many sociologists is that they don't listen with much discernment and don't read widely enough. So says Rodney Stark, the Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences at Baylor, who thinks that other social scientists—like anthropologists, historians, and economists—are similarly distracted by their devotion to materialism and antagonism toward Christianity.

Professor Stark calls this cultish reliance on exclusively materialist explanations and its concomitant demeaning of religion especially Christianity, “the slogans of one of the longest running and most effective polemical campaigns in Western history.”

Stark’s specialty is the sociology of religion so he understands that, “Religion is like the womb from which come all the leading germs of human civilization,” as Emile Durkheim, the discipline’s 19th century founder, wrote. And the function of religion, i.e. “germs,” according to Durkheim, is to provide rituals which repress people’s religious doubts, burying them beneath feelings of tribal solidarity. (Is this a modernist version of Plato’s “noble lie” conceit?)

However, most people report that religion for them is about God or Gods. So Durkheim and his followers paid less attention to what their respondents said just as Marxists patronize the “false consciousness” of their beloved though, apparently, infantile proletariat.

Preferring to stick with common sense and the empirically verifiable, Stark asserts: “Gods are the fundamental feature of religions. And this holds even for Godless religions, their lack of Gods explaining the inability of such faiths to attack substantial followings.”

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Informed by Jewish wisdom and Greek reason, the Christian God was “not only eternal and immutable but also conscious, concerned, and *rational*.” Jesus Christ is the embodiment of this rational principle as “the Word (logos) made flesh,” reason incarnate.

Thus, early on in the third century, Clement of Alexandria warned that Christianity was not fideism, *faith-ism*, because one’s faith is unstable without a foundation in reason, since “truth cannot be without reason” or it collapses.

Augustine also wisely acknowledged that faith must precede reason in matters too difficult to understand; yet it is “the very small portion of reason that persuades us of this that must precede faith.” Augustine sounds modern in his understanding that even a theory about the world, what we would call a scientific theory, must begin somewhere with an assumption, a narrative and *that* understanding, in itself, is reasonable.

“The early Christians fully accepted this image of God,” Stark writes and then reasonably deduced “the proposition that our knowledge of God and his creation is *progressive*.” For example, even though the Bible does not condemn astrology, Augustine reasoned that if human destiny was determined by the stars, humans would lack one of Christianity’s indispensable features, free will; therefore, practicing astrology was sinful. So also slavery was normative in all ancient societies and rationalized even by many Christians; yet slavery clearly violated Jesus’ revolutionary concept that individuals are created in God’s image and thereby possess inherent value of

immeasurable worth. As Paul wrote, "All are one in Christ Jesus."

From this theocentric faith in reason and progress, Christendom ventured forward to establish freedom and capitalism, organize universities, invent science, abolish slavery while at the same time bestowing virtue on physical labor all of which drove the incomparable advances in Western technology. And finally, Christendom spread these gifts around the world.

Stark distances this version of progress from the meme of "Enlightenment progress," sometimes called "Whig history." With his usual deftness, he calls this claim, as well as other Enlightenment disinformation, "nonsense." And that's because progress was inherent in Jewish and Christian millenarianism, the idea that "history has a goal and humanity a destiny," as the peerless historian, Paul Johnson puts it.

Certainly other formidable thinkers have argued that Christianity is inseparable from Western superiority. One such thinker that Stark resembles is the brilliant though neglected historian, Christopher Dawson, who also demonstrated that a culture is based on its vision of God and man, theology and anthropology.

Yet Stark's work—41 books and over a 160 articles—stands virtually alone because of the huge battlefield of disciplines he has chosen to take the fight to. And commensurate with this huge battlefield is the surprising arsenal of evidence he uncovers and deploys, oftentimes presented as "scoops,"—Stark

was a journalist—evidence which he gathers from specialists as well as from his own studies and molds it into a most ambitious and singularly remarkable manifesto for Christianity.

An irony pervades Stark's work as he dismantles materialistic explanations by relying on the quantitative methods of social science to demonstrate Christianity's profound influence on Western success. After all, Auguste Comte who invented sociology, calling it "social physics", was a materialist whose evolutionary scheme anticipated that religion by the process of natural selection would soon be weeded out. That is, God is dead, to be replaced by "science," the materialist version of the end of history.

The mainstay of this paradigm is that Christianity is a recycled, primitive belief system, a superstition, "from the ignorant times of the childhood of humanity," as Freud famously pronounced.

That Christianity is an atavism was most persuasively presented by James Frazer, the British, armchair anthropologist. In his exhaustive study, *The Golden Bough*, he offered examples of polytheistic cults, replete with dying and rising gods and ritual cannibalism which he presented as Christian communion in tribal dress. Frazer wanted to decode Christianity, showing it to be "merely one among many," the reductionist goal of comparative religion studies.

However, Frazer's work was discredited early on because he misconstrued the ethnographies which he tirelessly read. More

recently the University of Chicago's Jonathan Smith concluded: "The category of dying and rising gods must now be understood to have been largely a misnomer based on imaginative reconstructions and exceedingly late or highly ambiguous texts."

"Likewise, when the Christians spoke of the resurrection of Jesus they did not suppose it was something that happened every year, with the sowing of seed and the harvesting of crops," as N.T. Wright puts it. Indeed, as Wright goes on to say, "When Paul preached in Athens, nobody said, 'Ah, yes, a new version of Osiris and such like.' . . . Whatever the gods—or the crops—might do, humans did not rise again from the dead."

As Chesterton wrote, comparing cults or myths to religion leads to comparing "things that are really quite incomparable." So like other 19th century wizards, Frazer "misread" into his work the prevailing bias of the three stages of societal evolution.

Likewise, anthropologists have long thought that polytheism evolved into monotheism. Then the Scottish classicist turned anthropologist, Andrew Lang, showed that many tribes first believed in a High God with polytheism representing a degeneration. Thus, his 1898 book, *The Making of Religion*, "should have been a light from the blue," as Stark writes. Predictably though, Lang's conclusion sunk his book into obscurity.

But by the 1920s, as Timothy Larson notes in his *The Slain*

God, "The First World War helped dislodge the assumption that the human story was one of progress on all fronts." As Lang's findings marinated within scholarly confines, however, anthropologists didn't like the smell of theology flowing from them.

Jesuit scholars at the University of Vienna led by the esteemed Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954) became interested in this unusual view. Schmidt, a priest though not a Jesuit, was in the process of writing his iconic 12 volume, *The Origin of the Idea of God*, published between 1912 and 1955.

In opposition to the postulate that similarities among religions show them to be one among many, Schmidt argued that such similarities derive from a "universal revelation" dating from the earliest time when everyone knew God. Variations among religions are caused by errors in understanding and transmission. As Stark writes: "Schmidt showed how snugly the huge ethnographic literature of primitive religions fits with the account in Genesis of the Creation and Fall."

Stark rightly concludes that, while Schmidt's conclusion is based on a theistic assumption, it is no more faith-driven than others who base their work on a materialist assumption.

As it was, Schmidt's thesis was so well argued and documented that many anthropologists, seeing once again its theological implications, abandoned their own positions that primitive peoples believed in a High God.

Karen Armstrong, the ex-nun, now mother superior on religious matters at PBS, apparently feeling similarly threatened, covers her retreat by insisting that "the monotheism first" thesis is "impossible to prove one way or the other." Others join the deniers by saying much the same thing. (Oh, that PBS would embrace such humility about their trinity of global warming, Darwinian evolution and Christian malevolence!)

Such "know nothing-ism" is a familiar distraction in other disciplines when the evidence turns against the prescribed materialist conclusion.

It should be understood though that Lang, Schmidt and others thought that most primitive tribes had a quasi-monotheistic religion, not the refined monotheism of the Jews. But while these tribes were not noble savages neither were they quasi-human flotsam, for they possessed a deep yearning to understand life's purpose. Stark quotes a Greenland Eskimo with no previous contact with missionaries who said, "Thou must not imagine that no Greenlander does not think about these things. Certainly there must be some Being who made all these things."

Of course, the Jews were unique in having a vision of a moral and personal High God, Yahweh. Though fully developed monotheism is rare in unsophisticated cultures, the ancient Israelites were not the most materially advanced in their day. Consequently Stark asks, "Why them?" He concedes, as have others, that this remains one of "the greatest of all historical questions and one unlikely ever to be fully answered."

In contrast, during the last 50 years, issues surrounding the dating and veracity of the New Testament have been clarified if not answered. Once again though, Stark reveals findings that even informed people seem unaware of.

Why this scholarship remains unknown is best demonstrated by the career of the Anglican Bishop and Biblical scholar, John A. T. Robinson. Bishop Robinson gained fame for his 1963 book, *Honest to God*, which fit the 60's zeitgeist of celebrating the advent of the secular city and the liberation created by the death of God. That these phenomena had actually taken place in the West a hundred years earlier is but another example of the cyclic predictions of the demise of Christianity that Stark routinely points out.

Thus, Bishop Robinson's skepticism was more believable than his extraordinary thesis that the *Gospel of John*, routinely dated around 90 A.D., is the earliest of the four Gospels, probably having been written contemporaneously with Jesus! Robinson concluded this after it struck him that John ignored the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., an unimaginable omission if John's Gospel were written after 70.

To cite one example of how implausible this omission would be, take John 5:2: "Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep's gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes."

Considering the specific detail in this passage and the use of the present tense verbs, is it conceivable that John would be writing this *after* the razing of Jerusalem? And as an

acknowledged source of detailed information about one of the most important of ancient cities, is it likely that John would not mention, *could conceivably suppress* the mention of, the calamitous fact that this city, including its sacred temple, were destroyed and its people murdered and scattered by the imperial Romans?

And, of course, Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple in the three synoptic Gospels so if they were composed after 70, could each writer have resisted the urge to gloat or, more becomingly, to rejoice over the fulfillment of this prophecy?! It would have taken, "A shy and discreet forger!" to resist such a temptation, as the remarkable New Testament scholar, Claude Tresmontant of the Sorbonne, mockingly put it.

Beyond this evidence for the early composition of John, Stark presents compelling linguist evidence for the early composition of Mark offered by the Franciscan, Jean Carmignac, the renowned translator of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1963, Carmignac, had his epiphany when he realized that the Greek of Mark's Gospel was so clumsy because its syntax and figures of speech made more sense in Hebrew. In other words, Mark's Gospel was a translation.

Other reasons abound for thinking that the Gospels were originally written in Hebrew. As Stark concludes, "To someone having no carrier interests in this matter, it strikes me that the case for the Gospels having been written in Hebrew is overwhelming."

It is intriguing to note that the celebrated literary critic,

Eric Auerbach, wrote that the *New Testament* is unique in the literature of the time for its "immediacy" and "its ruthless mixture of everyday reality and the highest and the most sublime tragedy."

The felt life and accurate detail in the New Testament is in obvious contrast to "the gnostic gospels" and one reason that Stark sees them as obvious fabrications. They are vague, cryptic and cultish; that is why they were rejected by the Church Fathers who were not a cabal of chauvinists who coveted power as the *Da Vinci Code* and the Jesus Seminar impute.

The basis for much of the antipathy toward Christianity is the image of the medieval Catholic Church fostered by "distinguished bigots," as Stark calls Edward Gibbon and Voltaire among other Enlightenment notables. Stark, relying on primary source historians like the renowned Marc Bloch, shows, on the contrary, that medieval Catholicism was the breeding ground for modernity.

Most, if not all, ancient societies believed in fate. However, Yahweh gave humans the wondrous and terrifying attribute of free will, freedom. Individual freedom in the West then merged with the legacy of Athenian democracy and the Roman republican tradition to form "the new democratic experiments in the medieval Italian city-states," as Stark reminds us.

These rival polities organized the first universities in a unique tradition of institutional learning and discourse which began at Bologna then spread to Oxford, Paris and elsewhere in Europe. From the medieval university science was born.

The distinguished philosopher and mathematician, Alfred North Whitehead, astonished a Harvard audience in 1925 when he said that science is a “derivative of medieval theology [since it arose] from the medieval insistence on the rationality of God, conceived as with the personal energy of Jehovah and with the rationality of a Greek philosopher.”

Whitehead’s thesis was but another bolt from out of the blue because the notion that medieval philosophy, scholasticism, led to the development of science was astonishing!

Though it should not have been, since scholasticism was complex, diverse, penetrating and devoted to reasoning from the two books that undergird Christianity: the book of God, Scripture, and the book of nature, Creation. As Stark writes, “Not only were science and religion compatible, they were inseparable—the rise of science was achieved by deeply religious, Christian scholars.”

And so it was, including the 13th century Franciscan, Roger Bacon, called “the father of science,” and Albert the Great who was a bishop. Both wrote extensively and made significant contributions in physics, astronomy, optics, chemistry and in other disciplines.

Other early scientists were also bishops like Robert Grosseteste who influenced Bacon’s ideas on the necessity of controlling the variables in experiments. As it happens, Grosseteste’s work was recently studied by researchers at Durham University which they found to be “dense with

mathematical thinking” as it describes the birth of the universe “four centuries before Newton proposed gravity and seven centuries before the Big Bang theory,” a theory advanced in 1927 by the Belgian priest, Georges Lemaitre. These researchers were surprised at Grosseteste’s “belief in the unity of nature” and how it “resonates” with the modern scientific view.

Though no one is surprised by the medieval Church’s support of the arts and of charity, yet the received wisdom is that the Church made an exception from this support when it came to science. James J. Walsh in his “overlooked” 1908 book, *The Popes and Science* suggested that this inconsistency, in itself, is implausible and then proceeded to drive his proposition home with overwhelming evidence that the Church supported science, proving what a preposterous lie it is to say otherwise.

Dr. Walsh was an M.D., with doctorates in letters, law and science and the lengthy title of his book, *The Popes and Science: The History of the Papal Relations to Science During the Middle Ages and Down to Our Own Time*, almost matches the wealth of evidence he presents to support his view.

In the *Divine Comedy*, to take a most conspicuous example, Dante’s understanding of the science of his day is blended in with mythology, politics, theology, the Bible and, of course, his personal grudges! As one critic wrote: “In the *Divina Commedia*, science, learning and poetry go hand in hand.”

This integration of knowledge was best exemplified by the

great universities in Europe from which science developed. One can visit "the theater" at the University of Padua where the first human dissections were performed as merely one example to counter the myth that the Church forbade human dissection.

"Science", from the Latin "to know," has come to mean as one of its definitions "knowledge" or "a body of knowledge." As Stark writes, "The most fundamental key to the rise of Western Civilization has been the dedication of so many of its most brilliant minds to the pursuit of knowledge," which is in marked contrast with Eastern religions which seek illumination or with Islam in which knowledge and reason are seen as threats to Allah's omnipotence.

This pursuit of knowledge in medieval Europe led to "one of the great innovative eras of mankind," as the respected French historian, Jean Gimpel wrote. And according to Stark, "perhaps the single most important technological breakthrough of medieval times was the blast furnace which made it possible to cheaply produce large amounts of superior iron." This mass production of premium iron made for more and better plows and tools which farmers could use to produce more and better food which, in turn, made Europeans bigger, stronger and healthier.

Also the streamlining of iron production put Europe in the vanguard of cannon and weapons production. Medieval Europe also developed cloth making, chimneys and spectacles, the latter two enhancing and extending the productive life of workers.

China was the first to make several technological advances and

also probably invented blast furnaces. But court Mandarins destroyed China's iron industry in the 11th century because Confucianism feared any movement away from what was seen as a greatly superior, frozen past. Not so with the decentralized, competitive, embattled kingdoms and principalities of Western Europe where Sweden probably developed the blast furnace around 1150.

To segue to 1860 and the humble Augustinian monk, Gregor Mendel, working in obscurity with his iconic sweet peas and stumbling on to the laws of inheritance. But this sepia tinged picture is a myth, for science historians report that Mendel and his monastery were plugged into the most advanced conversations on the nature of cells and consequently Mendel was not intellectually isolated in his monastery in Brno.

So Christianity, then and now, never was antithetical to science. And this is because European Christians believed in a rational God whose imprint could be discovered in nature; thus, they confidently looked for and found natural laws. As Johannes Kepler, the venerable 17th century cosmologist, wrote, "The chief aim of all investigations of the external world" is to discover this harmony imposed by God in the language of mathematics.

Stark concludes, "That the universe had an Intelligent Designer is the most fundamental of all scientific theories and that it has been successfully put to empirical tests again and again. For, as Albert Einstein remarked, the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible" which Einstein called a "miracle." And this "miracle" confirms the fact that creation is guided by purpose and reason.

However, Stark shows that, ironically, it was this faith in reason which led to the witch hunting craze which wounded Europe between 1450 and 1750 with the most dreadful episodes clustered between 1550 and 1650, well after the medieval period and well into the Enlightenment, so called.

He explains it this way: In order to smooth the process of conversion to Christianity, the Church from the earliest times permitted people to continue many of their folk practices like relying on local seers, "Wise Ones," for magical cures for physical, financial or other problems. Others depended on prayer for help.

The difference between the two practices was often hazy; since each type of invocations necessarily worked at least some of the time, what practice should receive credit?

As Stark explains: "This posed a serious theological issue, and the attempt to find a logical explanation resulted in tragedy." That is, if God responded to prayer to help petitioners, then who was responsible for the success of "non-Church magic?" Witches whose job description included conjuring up Satan.

The fear of witches swept through Europe and even touched America in the infamous Salem witch trials. Of course, this phenomenon was dreadful, bearing in mind as is always the case with like situations: According to what standard was the phenomenon evil?

Leaving that question aside, the fabrications surrounding the witch craze and its allied institution, the Inquisition, remain the biggest club with which to batter Christianity into intellectual and cultural submission.

Some commentators apparently even go into intellectual convulsions when the witch craze and the Inquisition are discussed. Among the most notable is Andrea Dworkin who claimed that nine million women were burned as witches. Mary Daly said that millions died while even Norman Davies, the respected European historian, wrote that "millions of innocents" died during the witch craze.

Reliable estimates for the number executed during this 300 year period range from 100,000 to 60,000, the latter estimate from scholars who have scrutinized the records. Surprisingly, for the entire period of witch hunting, about a third of the victims were men. Considering the population at that time, this amounts to about 2 victims per 10,000 which is dreadful enough but a monumental distance for those engaged in trashing Christianity at the cost of truth.

Thomas Madden, the distinguished contemporary medievalist, says that those who threatened the social order or were otherwise rebellious received better treatment at the hands of the Inquisition in Spain and Italy than elsewhere. Madden estimated that the Inquisition relied on torture in two percent of the cases to come before it. Moreover, historians of the period agree that the Inquisition's prisons were humane for the time with some criminals in Spain purposely blaspheming in order to be transferred to prisons run by the

Inquisition.

The second biggest hammer used to batter the West is the Crusades, presented as another murderous rampage and a foreshadowing of Western colonialism much as the witch hunts have been presented as a foreshadowing of the pedophile scandal currently besieging the Catholic Church.

Neither is true.

The Crusades were a response to the Muslim attacks on pilgrims to the Holy Land as well as a defense against the relentless attacks to Europe's underbelly by a triumphalist and imperialist Islam which, from its beginnings in the 7th century and under various caliphates, had rapidly conquered and colonized the Levant, North Africa, parts of both India and Portugal, all of Spain and briefly a part of southern France and also southern Italy and Sicily. In 846, Saracens, as Muslims were called then, had even sailed up the Tiber and sacked parts of Rome.

In 1095 under the banner of the Crusades, Europe united and due to its technological superiority, its navies sailed 900 miles across the Mediterranean to the Holy Land while crushing any threat from Islam. Once there the Crusaders established kingdoms – kingdoms which, not incidentally, contained more Muslims than Christians; the reason for this was probably that Muslims in these “territories were generally allowed to retain their property and livelihood, and always their religion,” writes the acclaimed historian, Benjamin Kedar, whom Stark cites.

Lasting for 200 years, these independent kingdoms were not colonies in the sense that they were exploited by a homeland; quite the opposite, for Europeans tired of the drain on their resources from "foreign wars," as Stark puts it, and these kingdoms were abandoned.

Of course adventurers, thrill seekers and opportunists were attracted to the Crusades. The surprise is that there weren't more of them. Despite the Marxist attempt to explain the Crusades as a method of ridding families of their "surplus sons" or as an example of "third world exploitation," the truth is that the overwhelming number of people, including the nobility, risked their lives and fortunes in one of the most selfless enterprises in history. As the historian, Meic Pearse, writes: "Marxism explains everything about religion except the religious part."

The excesses, the outbursts like the Crusader's attack on Jews in the Rhineland were exceptions, episodes in which the Crusaders violated Christian virtues. Such treachery was not inherent in the Crusader movement but rather a violation of its spirit.

From the 7th century to the 18th century, the various caliphates which controlled Islam tortured and killed millions of Asians, Africans and Europeans; millions more were taken as slaves, the largest portion of whom died in transit or when castrated in order to prepare them for their valuable role as eunuchs to be put in charge of harems also composed of enslaved women.

Slavery has probably existed in all societies. What Stark shows is that just as the Christian vision of God was necessary for science to develop, so also the Christian vision of God who held people accountable was necessary for the abolition of slavery while at about the same time work began to be seen as intrinsically virtuous.

The idea that work had dignity was incomprehensible in pre-capitalist societies; workers labored while aristocrats and plutocrats consumed. The Mandarins in ancient China, for example, grew their fingernails outrageously long in order to show their distance from physical labor.

A different attitude arose with the rise of capitalism and the creation of a middle class all of which another revered social scientist, Max Weber, mistakenly dubbed the "Protestant ethic." But Stark points out, as early as the 9th century in Europe, Catholic monasteries were great engines of production, relying on their advanced farming and manufacturing methods. From there, innovations like deeper penetrating iron plows and the rotation of crops became widespread. As commerce grew, barter was replaced by cash and then credit became a vehicle for larger and more distant transactions.

As wealth accumulated, monasteries became bankers to the nobility and the Church which led to the affluence and even opulence of the famous northern Italian city states. This was the beginning of capitalism. Stark channels the respected historian, Hugh Trevor-Roper, who writes: "The idea that large-scale industrial capitalism was ideologically impossible before the Reformation is exploded by the simple fact that it

existed.” So historians have known about the “Protestant ethic” canard, but somehow have been slow to repudiate it.

Why this delay when the wealth of Florence, Venice and other medieval Italian city states was so obvious in their unparalleled cultural achievements as well as the rise of a prosperous and literate middle class in these societies?

Though no one knows exactly when slavery ended in Europe, records show that as Rome declined in the 5th and 6th centuries slaves could receive the sacraments and by the 7th century marriages between slaves and free persons took place. Of these the most prominent was the union of the King of the Franks, Clovis II, to his British slave, Bathilda in 649. When Clovis died, she took over and campaigned for the abolition of both the slave trade and slavery. Thus, by the end of the eighth century, Charlemagne opposed slavery as did the papacy and many powerful clerics. As Marc Bloch wrote, by then no one “doubted that slavery was against divine law.” As Stark summarizes: “While no one would argue that medieval peasants were free in the modern sense, they were not slaves, and that brutal institution had essentially disappeared from Europe. This was not the case in societies to the east or south.”

About this time, feudalism was born and slavery was then finished in Europe. As for those Marxist historians who insist that feudalism ushered in a mere semantic shift, “slave” being replaced by “serf,” Bloch emphasized that serfdom had little in common with slavery.

Slavery was taken up once again by the European colonial

powers as they kidnapped and bought slaves from eager African slave traders. Of course, the native peoples of Africa and the Americas had been practicing slavery, not to mention human sacrifice and cannibalism, back into the dim past. However, by the beginning of the 19th century, the dreadfully cruel and evil episode of the Atlantic slave trade was abolished by Europe and the United States.

Meanwhile several African countries that profited from the slave trade sent delegations to England and France to strongly object to their abolition of slavery.

Another, perhaps less spectacular consequence of having a morally concerned God or Gods is their influence on the everyday morality of individuals. To test this thesis, Stark conducted a study in 34 nations including the United States. In the 27 nations within Christendom, if God was important to individuals, they were more honest in taking responsibility for damaging someone else's car in a parking lot while being less likely to buy stolen goods and to smoke marijuana. The results were similar in Muslim nations as well as in India where accountability to Allah and to the Indian gods, respectively, matters to individuals. As Stark writes: *"Images of Gods as conscious, powerful, morally concerned beings function to sustain the moral order."*

Certainly another of the destructive lies that has taken firm root in Western culture is that the Christian West imposed itself on the peoples in the third world and exploited them.

Yes, of course, Westerners have cruelly subjugated peoples as

did the Belgians in the Congo and other European countries at various times – which is to say that the Christian West failed again to live up to its own standards. At the same time, Western countries eradicated many barbaric practices in client states such as human sacrifice, slavery, female genital mutilation, the burning of widows, the stoning of rape victims because of *their* adultery while improving greatly the literacy, health and longevity of native peoples.

In fact, the so called “cultural imperialists,” Western anthropologists and linguists many of whom were clergy, gave written languages to native peoples, recorded their histories, and rebuilt their monuments and places of worship which they themselves were uninterested in, understandably, probably because they were subsistence cultures.

The ambition of Western scholars is no surprise because Westerners are curious about the so called, “other.” As the remarkable Ibn Warraq puts it, Westerners possess, “an insatiable thirst for knowledge, scientific curiosity, and energy.” For example, Islam ruled Egypt for over a thousand years yet never translated hieroglyphics or even appeared interested in doing so. By contrast, Napoleon conquered Egypt in 1798; and though the French were run out by 1801, their influence remained so that in 1922 Jean-Francois Champollion had decoded hieroglyphics which launched the discipline of Egyptology.

In other words, Western colonialism resembles the bee that takes nectar from a flowering plant but also necessarily cross pollinates the plant, helping it to both generate new life and be fruitful at the same time.

Likewise demonstrating this with reliable social science, Stark cites a remarkable study by his Baylor colleague, Robert Woodberry, which indicates that the more Protestant missionaries in a non-Western country the higher the probability that the nation will become a stable democracy and enjoy an assortment of salubrious advantages including increases in literacy, per capita income, and longevity while decreasing infant mortality.

Since Professor Woodbury's study is so contrary to the Leninist "post-colonialism" dominate in the academy, it was subjected to perhaps the most vetting of any social science study ever.

Though the West studiously maintains an insidious ignorance of its roots in Christianity, influential individuals in The People's Republic of China appear to be quite aware of how essential Christianity has been for Western success and how it can provide the necessary seeds for China's growth into modernity.

For example, a scholar at the Chinese Academy of the Social Sciences recounts how the Chinese hoped to find the key to Western superiority in its military and then in its political ideas and next the Chinese examined the West's economic system. Finally, this scholar concludes, ". . . in the last 20 years we have realized that the heart of your culture is your religion: Christianity. That is why the West has been so powerful. The Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life was what made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic

politics. We don't have any doubt about this."

Another Chinese academic, Zhuo Xinping, writes, "Only by accepting the [Christian] understanding of transcendence as our criterion can we understand the real meaning of such concepts as freedom, human rights, tolerance, equality, justice, democracy, the rule of law, universality, and environmental protection."

It is remarkable that such sentiments come from individuals within the largest experiment in doctrinaire materialism in history! For that matter, even Chinese Communist Party leaders have also intimated similar sentiments so such acknowledgements are not wholly exceptional.

Ideas matter. Moreover, ideas that people have about God matter profoundly. Thus, Stark makes a most convincing case that the *imago dei*, the idea that man is made in the image of God, is the indispensable part of the transcendent and sublime vision that is Western Civilization.

So Professor Stark, relying on the argot of social science and allied disciplines, returns us to an old idea, an earlier realization that has since been expunged from the stew of received wisdom consumed by the Western intelligentsia.

The late Andrew Greeley, himself a brilliant sociologist and best-selling novelist, has called Stark, a "giant comparable to Weber and Durkheim," though as we have seen, Stark refutes both of them.

A discerning friend of mine puts a finer point to it when he says, “Stark has all the right enemies and if he happens to use a broad brush occasionally, it takes one to undo a half-century of awful historiography—sort of like painting over graffiti.”

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