

All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, a fresh water system, and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?

In an Easter opinion piece reminiscent of Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, Greg Sheridan, author of the book 'The Urgent Case for Jesus in our world', writes that 'In a time of darkness, the teachings of Jesus still offer a vision of hope amid the despair.'

Prefacing his piece with the words of the Apostle Paul, 'This may be a wicked age, but your lives should redeem it', Sheridan writes, 'If you want to see what Christian hope looks like, google Ukrainians singing hymns. See the solace and courage and inspiration there. Christianity is also evident in Poland's generosity to Ukrainians fleeing the terror of the Russian military. And this despite their traditional enmity. Christianity is dishonoured in Ukraine too.'

Sheridan points out that the just way theory developed within the Christian west informs the international community's response today. Providing a moral compass, that judges the Russian invasion of Ukraine to be objectively unjust, and that informs the work of the International Criminal Court, as it continues to gather evidence, to bring to justice Russia, its President, its military members, for war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity, and crimes of aggression.

‘But the tragedy of war in Ukraine,’ Sheridan continues, ‘engages Christian belief, at a more personal, existential level. Every human being faces, ultimately, the last things: death, justice, eternal life. Modern Christians in sceptical Western societies – terrified of the transcendent, scared of death, and trained to mock belief at every turn – tend to emphasise Christianity’s good works, its hospitals, its schools and shelters for the homeless...But in truth, Christianity stripped of its transcendent claims, is not an attractive ethical system or a picturesque and benign myth. It is, literally, nothing at all. Without its transcendent claims it is at best delusional, and really a system of lies. Nothing of lasting good can come from a system of lies. As St Paul says in Ephesians, “For if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.’

Sheridan continues, ‘Easter is a good time to remind ourselves just how absolutely weird and radical Christianity is, how unlike any prevailing social orthodoxy or ethos, how radically challenging it is to the zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, even though the good things in Western society, such as universal human rights and equality of the sexes, to name just two, derive directly from Christianity. It’s unclear, at best, that these good things can be sustained in the absence of

transcendent belief, at least among a sizeable portion of the society. But the good things in Christianity in any event are entirely dependent on the transcendent claims it makes.’

‘Many religious traditions involve the interaction of God with humanity, including the idea of a divine Spirit, the author of all things. The similarity of other religious traditions to elements of the Christian tradition does not suggest that religions are just man made. Rather, it suggests that profound spiritual hunger, and equally an instinctive spiritual knowledge, is part of the universal human condition, written into our spiritual DNA.

A spiritual DNA, destined, for fellowship with God, in the future of his kingdom. For a future fulfilment. A completion. A perfection, beyond this world of basic imperfection.

This future defines the human race. Defines the human being. Every human being. Gifting the human race, the human being, every human being, with eternal value. With unfathomable dignity. With an inalienable dignity. That became, in the modern era, the basic principle of political life in society in the Christian west. In the form of individual religious and political liberty. So that the Christian principle of liberty, became the principle of the Christian west. The deepest and the fullest fulfilment of the Christian vision for society ever seen.

As an anticipation of the future freedom of the individual in the kingdom of God, and of the whole world of individual human beings, in the kingdom of God, there is a direct and immediate correlation between the religious and political freedom of the individual within modern western society, and the future kingdom of God. The future of humanity redeemed, in the kingdom of God.

Of the relationship, between this life, and eternal life, Jacques Maritain, one of the great Christian philosophers of the 20th century, and a key figure in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, wrote ‘Just as the Word incarnate had on earth a life divine and human at one and the same time, so also the blessed in heaven have entered into the divine life...where they lead there..a glorious and transfigured human life.’

In the words of the congregational minister, John Ames, in Marilyn Robinson’s Gilead,

‘I can’t believe that, when we’ve all been changed and put on incorruptibility, we will forget our fantastic condition of mortality and impermanence, the great bright dream of procreating and perishing that means the whole world to us...I don’t imagine any reality putting this one in the shade entirely, and I think piety forbids me to try.’

Sheridan concludes, 'Christianity is a power for good, because its true. If it's not true, it's not a power for anything. But happily, it is true.'

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