

# What Christianity Has Done for the World

## Acts of Compassion

*Jesus said, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me ... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."*

—Matthew 25: 35-36, 40

Following the example of these powerful words of Jesus, Christians throughout the centuries have reached out with love to those in need especially the poor, weak, and needy.

- During the Roman Empire, families were encouraged to abandon unwanted children and allow infants to die. Christians spoke against these acts; they rescued infants, cared for orphans, widows, and the outcasts of society.
- Despite their own need, early Christians voluntarily pooled their resources<sup>1</sup> and the church's property<sup>2</sup> in order to support orphans, widows, the sick, prisoners, the disabled, and others in need of help.
- **Basil of Caesarea** and **St. Chrysostom of Constantinople** (4<sup>th</sup> century): Both "urged the construction of *orphanotrophia*"<sup>2</sup> to care for orphans. This was part of a trend within Christianity, from its earliest days, to care for orphans and others who were helpless.
- In the 1800's, during the Industrial Revolution in Europe, people moved into the cities to find work. Many found starvation instead. **The Salvation Army** was founded by William Booth (1829-1912), a minister, to help the poorest people in with food, shelter, and support for their families. "Thieves, prostitutes, gamblers, and drunkards were among Booth's first converts to Christianity. To congregations who were desperately poor, he preached hope and salvation. His aim was to lead people to Christ and link them to a church for further spiritual guidance."<sup>3</sup>



World Vision

*"... the Church of Jesus Christ has done more—and often still does more—than any other institution in history to alleviate poverty. Furthermore, it has set the pattern for relief that is copied worldwide."*<sup>1</sup>

Many of the educational and scientific advancements, artistic achievements, music, acts of compassion, and freedom we take for granted have come from the influence of Christians over the centuries. Christians who have followed Jesus Christ's commands to love God and love their neighbors as themselves have made powerful contributions to our world.

- **YMCA:** The Young Men's Christian Association that today serves more than 20 million people worldwide was founded by British Christian George Williams in the 1840s. The YMCA was formed with the purpose of "the winning of young men to Jesus Christ, and the building in them of Christian character." Young men who went to the cities to find work often turned to crime and alcoholism. The YMCA was a religious organization that combined physical activities with educational and religious activities.
- **Child labor laws:** In England, some children as young as four or five worked in the coal mines and fabric mills more than 16 hours a day. Through the combined efforts of several committed Christians, especially Anthony Ashley Cooper, also known as Lord Shaftesbury (1801-85), England's Parliament passed a number of bills providing much-needed legislation protecting children abused by employers.
- There are dozens of **Christian relief organizations**, employing more than 30,000 humanitarian workers around the world, shipping more than 225,000 metric tons of food, and handling disaster relief for millions of people annually. They serve the needy people around the world with food, clothing, medical supplies, medical care, small loans, drinkable water, and shelter. In 2007, seven of the top twenty-seven international relief and development organizations (as ranked by the American Institute of Philanthropy), were Christian, the rest had no religious affiliation.\*



\* American Institute of Philanthropy (AIP), a nonprofit charity watchdog and information service. Website on 6/30/2007 <http://www.charitywatch.org/> See INTERNATIONAL RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT

*If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today.*

— Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Indian leader





# The Value of Each Human Being

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. —Genesis 1:27*

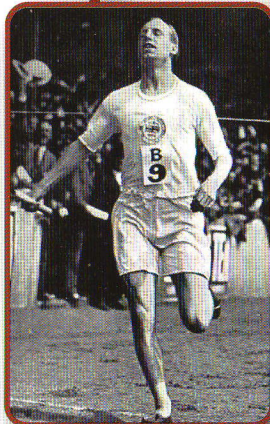
The Bible contains laws dating 1500 years before Christ protecting the weak and innocent. The Bible, for instance, sets down rules about protecting employees, orphans, widows, and foreigners (Malachi 3:5, James 1:27).

Here is a list of just a handful of key Christians and events throughout history who have made a difference in the area of the value of human life:

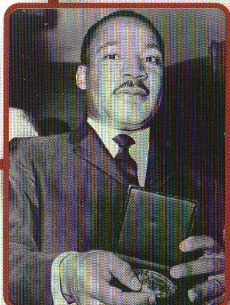
- **Callistus of Rome** (3<sup>rd</sup> century): A former slave who later became Bishop of Rome, Callistus strongly opposed Roman infanticide, as did **Clement of Alexandria**, a Greek theologian influential in Egypt. **Tertullian** (ca. 160 – ca. 240) was an African church father who also openly opposed infanticide.
- **Constantine** and **Licinius** issue the **Edict of Milan** (313 AD), which provided Christians with the opportunity to legally voice their concerns over infanticide, ultimately leading to its formal abolishment in 374 by Christian Emperor **Valentinian**.
- **Lactantius** (c. 240–c. 320): Church father and tutor to one of the sons of Constantine the Great, Lactantius commented in *Divine Institutes* (1.6) on the practice of abandoning children outside to die: "It is as wicked to expose as it is to kill."
- **Afra of Augsburg** (later 3<sup>rd</sup> century): A former prostitute who converted to Christianity, Afra ministered to abandoned children.
- **Honorius** and **Theodosius II** (5<sup>th</sup> century emperors): Both proclaimed that abandoned children must be announced before a church. If the child was not claimed, the finder was allowed to keep and care for the child.
- **Justinian** (483-565): Byzantine emperor who had his jurists prepare the Justinian Code, which clearly condemned abortion and infanticide as illegal.



Justinian



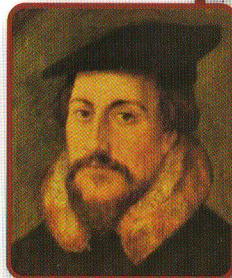
Eric Liddell



Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Because human beings are made in God's image, they have eternal worth; and so Christians have worked to defend human life.

- **King Magnus of Norway** (13<sup>th</sup> century) ruled that parents who exposed their child, resulting in death, were to be charged with murder.
- **John Calvin** (1509-64): Leader in the Protestant Reformation, French-born Calvin, who later fled to Switzerland, wrote, "The unborn child ... though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being ... and should not be robbed of the life which it has not yet begun to enjoy."
- **George Mueller** (1805-98): Born in Prussia, Mueller was an evangelist who established orphanages in Bristol, England, after a cholera epidemic. For the next 60 years, he cared for more than 10,000 orphaned or abandoned children.
- **Amy Carmichael** (1867-1951): A young, single woman in India with the Dohnavur Fellowship, Irish-born Carmichael helped rescue young girls who otherwise would likely become temple prostitutes.
- **Eric Liddell** (1902-1945): Scottish athlete and Christian popularized by the film "Chariots of Fire." Born in China to missionary parents, Liddell later returned to China after winning an Olympic gold medal in 1924. He taught in an Anglo-Chinese school. He died in a Japanese internment camp during World War II.
- **Irene Webster-Smith**: Young, single Irish woman who went to Japan in 1916 and spent her life rescuing girls from lives of prostitution, setting up homes for them.
- **Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.** (1929-68): Baptist minister who spoke in support of fair and equal treatment for African-Americans in the United States during the 1960s. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.
- **Mother Teresa** (1910-97): Born in Macedonia to Albanian parents, Mother Teresa, established the Order of Missionaries of Charity, reaching out to the unloved, uncared for, and forgotten people in Calcutta, India. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.



John Calvin



Amy Carmichael



Mother Teresa



... and he [Jesus] began to teach them. —Matthew 5:2

## Freedom, Social Reform and Education

Because human beings are made in God's image, they are of significant value. As a result, wherever humans are treated without dignity, many times Christians have spearheaded reforms.

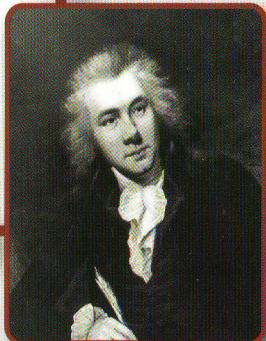
- **Basil the Great** (c. 330-379): Bishop of Caesarea and brother of St. Gregory of Nyssa, Basil preached against "wealthy landowners who refused to share with the starving,"<sup>4</sup> thus emphasizing social justice. Basil established centers to distribute food to the needy and set up the Basileus, "a sort of hostel and hospital in one for the poor, hungry and foreigners."<sup>5</sup>
- **Bartolome de Las Casas** (1484-1566): After traveling to the New World twice, once with Columbus, Bartolome made his home in Hispaniola (today Haiti and the Dominican Republic). He became concerned with the oppression of the native people in Hispaniola and spent more than 50 years fighting for the rights of indigenous peoples of the Americas.
- **Roger Williams** and **William Penn**: Williams, a Baptist and founder of Rhode Island, and Penn, a Quaker and founder of Pennsylvania, both helped pave the way for religious freedom in America with their efforts in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Williams believed "that the state must not coerce the conscience of the individual"; and Penn "treated the Indians with Christian charity and justice."<sup>6</sup> Penn called Pennsylvania, "the Holy Experiment," living at peace with the Native Americans in the area.



William Penn

- **William Wilberforce** (1759-1833): Christian abolitionist who also served as a member of England's House of Commons, Wilberforce campaigned tirelessly for the abolition of slavery beginning in 1789. Forty-four years later, just before his death, Wilberforce heard that Parliament had passed the Abolition Act. As a result, some 700,000 slaves were set free. By 1840, the British empire had abolished slavery completely. Wilberforce's efforts were chronicled in the film "Amazing Grace."

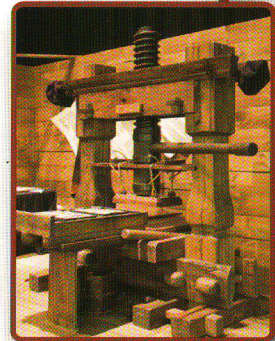
Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." —Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 61:1



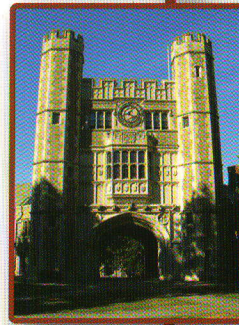
William Wilberforce

Christians have traditionally placed great emphasis on reading the Bible and education in particular. The practical outcome of such a perspective has resulted in numerous contributions to education throughout history.

- **Books**: Although books made of folded animal skins were used long before the first Bible was printed, Christians played a crucial role in getting literature into the hands of the common people. With the advent of the printing press, largely as a result of the efforts of **Johannes Gutenberg** (c. 1400-1468), books, and especially the Bible, spread rapidly, eventually becoming accessible and affordable to common people.
- **Monasteries** during the Middle Ages: These religious communities also served educational purposes. Monks studied, translated, and recorded works. It was from these monastic roots that formal schools and education institutions arose, later giving rise to **universities**. In the United States, modern universities were founded as Christian institutions (for instance, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton).
- **Venerable Bede** (c. 673-735): English monk and author of the first book on English history (*The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 731), Bede has been called "the most learned man of his age."<sup>7</sup>
- **Boethius** (480-c. 525): As a Roman nobleman, Boethius was one of the best educated men of his time. His mathematics were used in early universities and his life goal was to translate all of the ancient Greek philosophy and classical literature into Latin. He wrote thousands of documents, including his *Consolations of Philosophy*, which "would become the most read book of the Middle Ages."<sup>8</sup>
- Education was also important to **Protestant Reformers** who believed laypeople should be able to read and understand the Bible for themselves. **Martin Luther** decided to translate the Bible into German, and wanted laypeople to learn to read. **John Calvin** established an Academy in Geneva, which later became a university.
- **Friedrich Froebel** (1782-1852): German Lutheran Froebel established education for children by originating kindergarten.
- **Robert Raikes** (1736-1811): Remembered as the founder of the Sunday school movement, Raikes of Gloucester, England, sought to provide Christian education for poor children and children who otherwise would not receive a biblical education.



Gutenberg Press



Princeton University



Friedrich Froebel



## RESOURCES

*The 100 Most Important Events in Christian History* by A. Kenneth Curtis, J. Stephen Lang, and Randy Petersen (Revell, 1991; formerly titled *Dates with Destiny*)

*Christianity on Trial: Arguments Against Anti-Religious Bigotry* by Vincent Carroll and David Schiflett (Encounter Books, 2002)

*Christianity Through the Centuries* by Earle E. Cairns (Zondervan, 1996, third edition)

*Church History in Plain Language* by Bruce Shelley (Thomas Nelson, 1995, second edition)

*How Christianity Changed the World* by Alvin J. Schmidt (Zondervan, 2004; formerly titled *Under the Influence*)

*Love Your God with All Your Mind* by J.P. Moreland (NavPress, 1997)

*On Jesus* by Douglas Groothuis (Wadsworth, 2003)

*The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* by Rodney Stark (Random House, 2005)

*What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us? How it Shaped the Modern World* by Jonathan Hill (InterVarsity Press, 2005)

*What if the Bible Had Never Been Written?* by D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe (Thomas Nelson, 1998).

*What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?* by D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe (Thomas Nelson, revised edition 2001)

*Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity*  
by Jonathan Hill (Zondervan, 2006)



## NOTES

- 1 Kennedy and Newcombe, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?*, p. 28.
- 2 Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*, p. 132.
- 3 See [http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/about us, history](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/about_us/history)
- 4 Hill, *What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us? How it Shaped the Modern World*, p. 159.
- 5 Hill, p. 159.
- 6 Kennedy and Newcombe, p. 84.
- 7 Hill, p. 88.
- 8 Hill, p. 91.
- 9 Schmidt, p. 219.
- 10 Hill, p. 41. See also Donald J. Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music* (New York: Norton, 1988, 4<sup>th</sup> edition), pp. 75-80.
- 11 Hill, p. 36.

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# Science & Medicine

Many significant discoveries in the field of science were made by men and women who were Christians. Such figures include ...

- **Robert Grosseteste** (c. 1175-1253): Franciscan bishop, as well as the first chancellor of Oxford. He "first proposed the inductive, experimental method."
- **William of Ockham** (1280-1349): Franciscan monk, Ockham contributed to the development of science with "Ockham's Razor," a principle often stated as the simplest explanation is usually correct. In science this generally means that explanations should be derived without excessive assumptions.
- **Nicolaus Copernicus** (1473-1543): Polish astronomer who proposed the heliocentric model (planets revolving around the sun).
- **Galileo Galilei** (1564-1642): An Italian astronomer and physicist who first used a telescope in his research. This approach led to numerous discoveries including moon craters, moons orbiting Jupiter, the phases of Venus, and sunspots.
- **Blaise Pascal** (1623-62): Frenchman who pioneered the science of probability. He was an accomplished mathematician and invented an early calculating machines, the syringe, and the hydraulic press.



Galileo Galilei



Blaise Pascal



Isaac Newton

- **Johannes Kepler** (1571-1630): German astronomer and accomplished scientist who coined the phrase, "Thinking God's thoughts after him." Kepler studied nature in order to uncover the laws of God, noting that astronomers are "priests of the highest God in regard to the book of nature," not for human glory, but for the glory of God. Kepler's *Astronomia Nova* (The New Astronomy, 1609) presents two key laws of astronomy—the elliptical orbit of planets and the law that planets do not move at a uniform speed.

*The heavens declare the glory of God;*

*the skies proclaim the work of his hands. —Psalm 19:1*

- **Isaac Newton** (1642-1727): English physicist and mathematician whose many accomplishments including the discovery of the law of gravity the invention of calculus.
- **Gregor Johann Mendel** (1822-84): A monk from Moravia (modern-day Czech Republic), Mendel is known as the "father of genetics," because of his experimentation with cross-pollination of peas.

Seed		Flower	Pod		Stem	
Form	Cotyledons	Color	Form	Color	Place	Size
Grey & Round	Yellow	White	Full	Yellow	Axial pods, flowers along	Long (6-7 ft)
White & Wrinkled	Green	Violet	Constricted	Green	Terminal pods, flowers top	Short (< 1 ft)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Diagram showing the seven "characters" observed by Mendel

- **George Washington Carver** (c. 1864-1943): An African-American chemist (his parents were slaves), Carver's research on peanuts resulted in more than 300 by-products, while research on sweet potatoes resulted in more than 100 by-products. In 1939 Carver was awarded the Roosevelt Medal, which read in part, "To a scientist humbly seeking the guidance of God ...."

Many Christians have also influenced medicine.

- In addition to giving rise to the advent of hospitals, Christians also contributed to health care. **Florence Nightingale** (1820-1910) is viewed as the founder of nursing, while the **International Red Cross** was founded by a Christian named **Henry Dunant** (1828-1910). **Louis Pasteur** (1822-95), a dedicated Christian, provided valuable research on bacteria, which in turn led to the process of pasteurization, sterilization, and the development of numerous vaccines.

(Many more could be listed. See, for instance, the books *Men of Science, Men of God* by Henry Morris and *Scientists Who Believe*, edited by Eric Barrett and David Fisher.)



George Washington Carver

**More than 60 Nobel laureats who claim a Christian worldview have been recognized in the areas of chemistry, literature, physics, physiology or medicine, and peace.**



# The Arts

- **Guido of Arezzo**, an 11<sup>th</sup> century monk, offered key contributions to the development of music notation, suggesting the use of horizontal lines and spaces to indicate the pitch of notes. Based on a Latin hymn from around AD 800, Guido also came up with a method of memorization for singers that is now popularly known as the "Do-Re-Mi" system. A portion of the original teaching hymn reads, "So that your servants may sing at the tops of their voices the wonders of your deeds, absolve the sins from their stained lips."<sup>10</sup>
- **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750), a dedicated Christian, also contributed much to the world of music. A prolific composer, Bach regularly wrote sacred music, dedicating his efforts to the glory of God. In the realm of music theory and technique, Bach still serves as a prime example of how to write traditional Western music. His mastery of musical counterpoint remains admired and imitated.
- **Michelangelo** (1475-1564): Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo Buonarroti is remembered for his many biblically inspired works of art including the sculpture of *David*, his painting of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, and *The Last Judgment*. Michelangelo "believed that spiritual value could be found in all natural beauty."<sup>11</sup>



Johann Sebastian Bach



Christ in the Storm of the Sea of Galilee by Rembrandt



David by Michelangelo

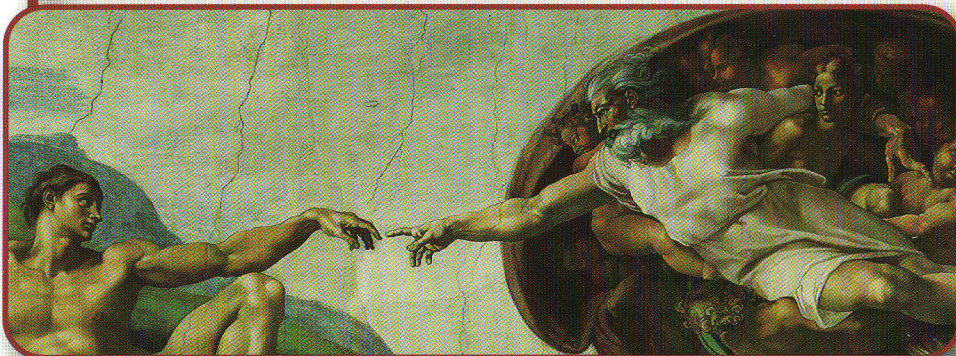


St. Peter's Basilica, Rome



Return of the Prodigal Son by Rembrandt

- **Raphael** (1483-1520): Italian artist Raffaello Sanzio is considered one of the greatest artists of the Renaissance. In addition to his paintings, Raphael also served as an architect in charge of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome (1514), the world's largest church.
- **Rembrandt** (1606-69): Dutch painter Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn was one of the world's greatest painters and is known for many biblical works including *Return of the Prodigal Son* (1662).



The Creation of Adam by Michelangelo

**Send me, therefore, a man skilled to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, and in purple, crimson and blue yarn, and experienced in the art of engraving, to work in Judah and Jerusalem with my skilled craftsmen .... —2 Chronicles 2:7**



# Literature & Philosophy

## Christianity's influence on the literature in the West is striking.

- **Augustine** penned what is considered one of the earliest works of autobiography in *Confessions*, as well as the classic work *The City of God*.
- **Dante Alighieri** (1265-1321): *The Divine Comedy*, consisting of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, is a classic work of literature.
- **Geoffrey Chaucer** (ca. 1342-1400): English poet and author of the classic work *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer, a Christian, is credited with introducing the "pentameter couplet."



Harriet Beecher Stowe

• **John Calvin** (1509-64): Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* significantly influenced the course of Protestantism, particularly in the United States.

• Puritan **John Milton's** *Paradise Lost* (1667), which recounts the Fall of Man, is considered a masterpiece of epic English literature.

• **John Bunyan** (1628-88): *Pilgrim's Progress*, written while Bunyan was imprisoned, offers allegorical insights into the Christian life by following the spiritual journey of the main character, Christian. An enduring work of literature, *Pilgrim's Progress* remains a classic work of Christian literature.

• **Harriet Beecher Stowe** (1811-96): Stowe's vivid portrayal of slavery in her classic book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), later caused Abraham Lincoln to remark, "So this is the little lady that caused this great war."

- Russian author **Fyodor Dostoevsky** (1821-81), influenced by Orthodox Christianity, provides timeless insights into human nature in works such as *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

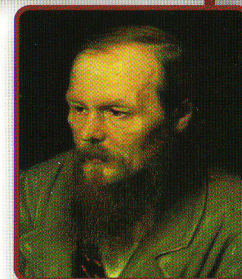
- In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, **J.R.R. Tolkien** and **C.S. Lewis** penned some of the most popular works of fantasy in print: *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

Chaucer as a pilgrim from the Ellesmere manuscript DB



... God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. —Daniel 1:17

- **Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn** (b. 1918): Russian author and historian, as well as recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, who wrote about Soviet labor camps (the Gulag) and was later exiled from Russia.



Fyodor Dostoevsky

**Jesus communicated important ideas that touch upon the central areas of philosophy: epistemology (how we know), metaphysics (what is ultimate reality), and ethics (right and wrong, moral virtue). When asked about the "greatest commandment," Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). From its beginnings, Christianity stressed the importance of the mind.**

- **Augustine** (354-430): St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (in northern Africa), is perhaps the greatest early philosopher of the Christian church. Author of popular works such as *Confessions*, *On the Trinity*, and *City of God*, Augustine's ideas, which included the integration of Platonic thought with Christian theism, have influenced Western philosophy for centuries.
- **Anselm** (1033-1109): St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, is credited with inventing in his book *Proslogion* what is known as the ontological argument for the existence of God, which argues for the existence of God on the basis of God being the greatest conceivable being.
- **Aquinas** (1225-74): St. Thomas Aquinas is credited with integrating Aristotelian thought with Christianity. The medieval philosopher and theologian provides the foundation for much of theology and philosophy. His "five ways" demonstrate the existence of God and are found in his monumental work, *Summa Theologica*.



Augustine as depicted by Sandro Botticelli

"Come now, let us reason together,"  
says the LORD. —Isaiah 1:18