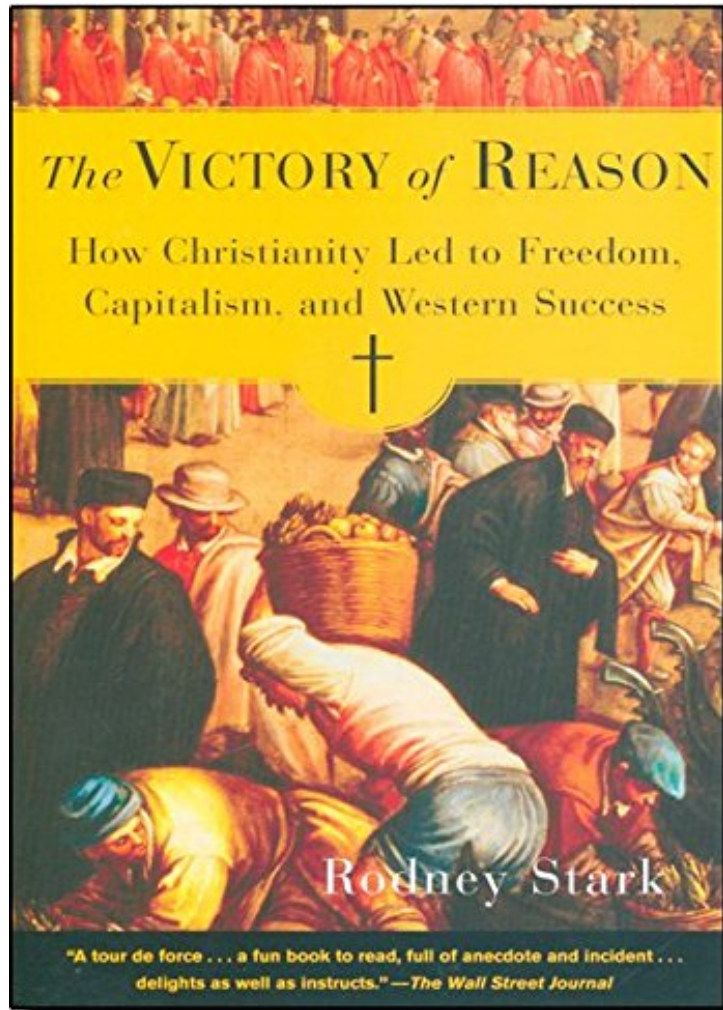


# The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success

Rodney Stark

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#82362 in Books Rodney Stark 2006-09-26 2006-09-26 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.99 x .68 x 5.171, .49 #File Name: 0812972333281 pages The Victory of Reason How Christianity Led to Freedom Capitalism And Western Success | File size: 29.Mb

**Rodney Stark : The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Shine the light of TRUTH! By Ammo Guy Did you ever know something but didn't know why? You know something to be true but don't have the facts right at hand. Did you ever know something was not right but you couldn't put your finger on what it was? This book fill in those blanks!

With information. Without going into details: The Dark Ages, fall of the Roman Empire, Catholicism/Christianity, Capitalism are filled with the light of knowledge. Maybe for the first time. Facts you can argue with. Powerful ammunition. Aim small, miss small. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. interesting By Harlan Stark makes a good case for the value of a good religious tradition in the promotion of rule of law, educational attainment, and a well-functioning market-based economy. His analysis of the effects of the fall of the Roman Empire was particularly interesting. He claims that the Empire had become a giant rent-seeking operation that hindered growth and its demise unleashed a wave of creativity in Europe. He also claims, with good logical support, that the seeds of the Renaissance were in the Catholic tradition. The contribution of Greek texts to the Renaissance was, according to Stark, due to the work of Greek scholars from the former Byzantine Empire who had preserved these texts and fled to Europe to escape Muslim persecution. 5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A Religion That Changes By Gilbert Reeser Every now and then a book can change you in a very fundamental way. This book has changed the way I look at Christianity. The Victory of Reason is a history book, not a book on religion. It posits that Christian theology has led to four big accomplishments of mankind: 1 - a belief that human progress was possible, 2 - that personal freedom was essential to happiness, 3 - technical and organizational innovation and 4 - the development of capitalism. Mr. Stark succeeds in showing how reason made all four possible - reason derived from Christian theology. As someone educated in science, I have for many years looked on Christianity as something that had to be overcome or ignored. The dogma could so easily be disproved by modern science. It stood in the way of accepting evolution and cosmology. The very idea that Christianity could be behind the victory of reason was counter intuitive. Since I was raised as a Methodist, my early education led me to believe that the Protestant Ethic was responsible for much of life's success and that Rome and the Pope were trying to block scientific progress. The success of Western Civilization was obvious, but what could that be attributed to? Surely not just the superiority of Europeans. This idea was falling out of favor as I was leaving high school and entering the university in 1954. No, it must be related to the scientific progress that came from overcoming religious dogma. Perhaps. But then why did this occur in Europe and North America and not in China, India or the Middle East? Couldn't they have overcome religious dogma too? It just couldn't be related to religion. After all, didn't Rome fall because of Christianity as Gibbon suggested? How can you run a civilization based on turning the other cheek and glorification of the meek, the poor and the humble? Not to mention the nonsense of virgin birth and a heaven in the clouds with a large white male in charge. So there was no good explanation of how success came to us and not to others. The idea that a religion can change in fundamental ways over time is not something that is obvious. Religions depend on faith and it is very dangerous to even allow questioning or debate. So it is a surprise for me to find out that Christianity has undergone such changes. This is unique among all religions, I guess. It alone allows reason and logic to be used whereas others embrace "mystery and intuition." In early Christianity revelation was in vogue, the past was emphasized and predestination embraced. Today reason, the future and free will are. Rodney Stark shows how Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and others transformed Christianity. How capitalism is good in spite of the "eye of the needle" quote. And how personal freedom and technical progress derived from or at least were allowed by Christianity. The book is not without flaws. When he denigrates the dark ages at the beginning of chapter two, he errs. If you read the small book "The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization" by Bryan Ward-Perkins you find out that archeology shows that not only government, but pottery, utensils, tools, clothing, houses and food also went into a 500 year dark age. Stark's examples of progress and reason are almost entirely from 1100 AD on. His claim that science and technology was enhanced by Christianity is also over the top. But his point is valid - only in Christian Europe did the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution and the Scientific Method occur. To me, any history book can be judged by what you learn that is new. This book is full of examples. Did you know that the Italian city-states brought banks and multi-national firms to northern Europe and England for the first time in the 13th century? Why did Spain fall from prominence so quickly? It too was very Christian. This answer and many more await the reader of "The Victory of Reason."

Many books have been written about the success of the West, analyzing why Europe was able to pull ahead of the rest of the world by the end of the Middle Ages. The most common explanations cite the West's superior geography, commerce, and technology. Completely overlooked is the fact that faith in reason, rooted in Christianity's commitment to rational theology, made all these developments possible. Simply put, the conventional wisdom that Western success depended upon overcoming religious barriers to progress is utter nonsense. In *The Victory of Reason*, Rodney Stark advances a revolutionary, controversial, and long overdue idea: that Christianity and its related institutions are, in fact, directly responsible for the most significant intellectual, political, scientific, and economic breakthroughs of the past millennium. In Stark's view, what has propelled the West is not the tension between secular and nonsecular society, nor the pitting of science and the humanities against religious belief. Christian theology, Stark asserts, is the very font of reason: While the world's other great belief systems emphasized mystery, obedience, or introspection, Christianity alone embraced logic and reason as the path toward enlightenment, freedom, and progress. That is what made all the difference. In explaining the West's dominance, Stark convincingly debunks long-accepted truths. For instance, by contending that capitalism thrived centuries before there was a Protestant work ethic or even Protestantism she counters the

notion that the Protestant work ethic was responsible for kicking capitalism into overdrive. In the fifth century, Stark notes, Saint Augustine celebrated theological and material progress and the institution of exuberant invention. By contrast, long before Augustine, Aristotle had condemned commercial trade as inconsistent with human virtue which helps further underscore that Augustines times were not the Dark Ages but the incubator for the West's future glories. This is a sweeping, multifaceted survey that takes readers from the Old World to the New, from the past to the present, overturning along the way not only centuries of prejudiced scholarship but the antireligious bias of our own time. The Victory of Reason proves that what we most admire about our world's scientific progress, democratic rule, free commerce is largely due to Christianity, through which we are all inheritors of this grand tradition. From the Hardcover edition.

From Publishers Weekly It is a commonplace to think of Christianity and rationalism as opposite historical and philosophical forces. In this stimulating and provocative study, Stark (*The Rise of Christianity*) demonstrates that elements within Christianity actually gave rise not only to visions of reason and progress but also to the evolution of capitalism. Stark contends that Christianity is a forward-looking religion, evincing faith in progress and in its followers' abilities to understand God over time. Such a future-based rational theology has encouraged the development of technical and organizational advances, such as the monastic estates and universities of the Middle Ages. Stark contends that these developments transformed medieval political philosophy so that democracy developed and thrived in those states, such as northern Italy, that lacked despots and encouraged moral equality. Stark concludes by maintaining that Christianity continues to spread in places like Africa, China and Latin America because of its faith in progress, its rational theology and its emphasis on moral equality. While some historians are likely to question Stark's conclusions, his deftly researched study will force them to imagine a new explanation for the rise of capitalism in Western society. (Dec.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist \*Starred\* At first glance, this book appears to be a retort to geographic theories of societal evolution, of the sort advanced by Jared Diamond's popular *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. Rather than patterns of weather and agriculture, Stark argues, Europe's primacy in economic, political, and social progress was due to its embrace of Christianity, which opened a space for reason and hence science-driven technology. Emphasizing the connection between medieval scholasticism, with its notion of theological progress--the logical science of thinking one's way closer to God--and Renaissance capitalism, Stark maintains that Christianity alone embraced reason and logic, and this gave Christian regions a tactical advantage in developing commerce. An argument made with unavoidably broad strokes, its actual targets are Max Weber's notion of the Protestant work ethic and the conventional story that religion was a barrier to be overcome en route to progress. At times approaching the invective, its defiant tone will invigorate readers who feel religion's place in the trajectory of world history is under attack. But the theological side of Stark's argument--that Christianity is fraternally bound to reason--will challenge the very same readers to reexamine their own relationship with reason. Brendan Driscoll Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved. About the Author Rodney Stark is University Professor of the Social Sciences, Baylor University. Before earning his Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley, he was a staff writer for several major publications. Among his many books are the influential studies *The Rise of Christianity* and *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism*. From the Hardcover edition.