

TCA:ICT?

**Thinking Critically About:
"Is Christianity True?"**

Thinking Critically About: “Is Christianity True?”

Podcast #5:

**How should we evaluate the truth of
the Christian worldview?**

Introduction to Your Host

My Name:

Bradley Bowen

My Role:

Your host and guide for this series of podcasts on

Thinking Critically About: “Is Christianity True?”

My Educational Background:

- BA in Philosophy from Sonoma State University (in Northern California).
- MA in Philosophy from the University of Windsor (in Windsor, Ontario, just across the border from Detroit, Michigan).
- Completed all requirements for a PhD in Philosophy from UC Santa Barbara (on the central coast of California) except for completion of my doctoral dissertation.
- Main interests in philosophy: critical thinking, philosophy of religion, and ethics.

The Main Question at Issue

QUESTION 1: Is Christianity true?

This is the main *question at issue* that I will investigate in this series of podcasts.

QUESTION 2: How can we answer Question 1?

In this series of podcasts, I will try to answer Question 1 by *thinking critically* about Question 1.

QUESTION 3: What is *critical thinking*?

“critical thinking” is (roughly speaking) thinking that is careful, judicious, objective, and fair.

QUESTION 4: Why should anyone care whether Christianity is true?

In Podcast #1, I gave ten reasons why we should care about whether Christianity is true or false. In Podcast #2 I replied to ten objections against my view that we should invest some time into thinking critically about Question 1.

QUESTION 5: What is Christianity?

Before we can rationally evaluate Christianity, we need to clarify what we mean by the word “Christianity” in this context. In Podcast #3, I examined five key claims about Christianity in order to clarify what the word “Christianity” means in this context.

QUESTION 6: Is there just ONE Christian worldview or many?

Although there are many versions of Christianity, I argued in podcast #4 that there is just ONE Christian worldview.

Question 7: How should we evaluate the truth of the Christian worldview?

After a brief review of the key conclusions from Podcast #3 and Podcast #4, I will discuss what is involved in evaluating the truth of the Christian worldview.

Claim 4: “A Religion is basically a worldview.”

The “Doctrinal and Philosophical” dimension of a religion is only one of the six dimensions mentioned by Ninian Smart, but in my view it is *the most basic* dimension of a religion. It is this dimension of a religion that makes a religion something that could be true (or false).

The heart of this dimension is *a worldview*, a philosophy of life. Thus, the most basic and most important aspect of a religion is the *worldview* associated with that religion. If the worldview is false, then the religion is false. If the worldview is true, then the religion is (basically) true. So, when a Christian apologist claims that “Christianity is true.”, what this means is that “The Christian worldview is true.”

Christianity is something that could be true or that could be false, because the *most basic and important aspect* of Christianity is *the Christian worldview*, which is something that could be true or that could be false. Christianity is NOT a relationship. Christianity is *a religion*, and a religion is fundamentally a system of religious beliefs, and the core of such a system of beliefs is *a worldview*.

Claim 5: “There are MANY Christianities.”

There are clearly *many versions* of Christianity. The major categories are: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant denominations. There are significant differences in religious beliefs and religious practices between Catholics and Protestants and Eastern Orthodox Christians. There are many denominations of Protestant Christianity, and those Protestant denominations also disagree with each other about various religious beliefs and practices. So, it is true that there are *many versions* of Christianity available today.

HOWEVER, there is also *widespread agreement* on a number of *basic Christian beliefs* between Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and several major Protestant denominations:

Orthodox Christianity has similarities and differences with the two other large branches of the Christian faith, which are Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The three share beliefs on certain core doctrines such as the sinfulness of man, the Trinity, and the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(<http://www.religionfacts.com/eastern-orthodoxy>)

Argument for just ONE Christian Worldview

1. The Four Basic Beliefs of Christianity constitute a Christian worldview.

THUS:

2. IF the Four Basic Beliefs of Christianity are accepted by the Catholic Church, by Eastern Orthodox Churches, and by many major Protestant denominations, THEN there is just ONE Christian worldview.

3. The Four Basic Beliefs of Christianity are accepted by the Catholic Church, by Eastern Orthodox Churches, and by many major Protestant denominations.

THEREFORE:

4. There is just ONE Christian worldview.

Critical Thinking and ANALYSIS

- A basic skill and practice of critical thinkers is ANALYSIS or analytic thinking. Analysis involves breaking something down into its basic parts, examining and understanding the parts, and thinking about how the parts relate to each other and work together.
- The comparative religions scholar Ninian Smart broke religions down into six basic dimensions. I examined those dimensions and showed that the *philosophical or doctrinal dimension* was more basic than the other dimensions.
- The core beliefs of a religion constitute *the worldview* associated with that religion. It is primarily the truth or falsehood of *the worldview* of a religion that makes the religion true or false.
- *The Four Noble Truths* of Buddhism represent a logical analysis of the Buddhist worldview. I have used that problem-solving logical structure as a model for the analysis of *all worldviews*, including the Christian worldview.

A Worldview is a Problem-Solving Scheme

A worldview is a very general *problem-solving scheme*; it provides answers to basic problem-solving questions:

- What are *the most important problems* of human life?
- What is *the root cause(s)* of the most important problems of human life?
- What is *the best solution(s)* to the root-cause problem(s)?
- How can we *best implement the solution(s)* to the root-cause problem(s)?

The Christian Worldview: Summary

1. What are the most important problems of human life? (Symptoms of Disease)

Alienation or separation from God, conflict and disharmony between people, mental and physical suffering, disease, death, and in the next life: divine eternal punishment.

2. What is the root-cause problem of what are (allegedly) the most important problems of human life? (Diagnosis of the Disease)

Sin (wrongdoing and disobedience to God and the human propensity towards wrongdoing) is the root-cause problem of separation from God, conflict and disharmony between people, mental and physical suffering, disease, death, and ultimately results in eternal divine punishment.

The Christian Worldview: Summary

3. What is the best solution to what is (allegedly) the root-cause problem of what are (allegedly) the most important problems of human life? (Cure for the Disease)

Out of love and mercy for human beings, God sent his son Jesus to die on the cross and to rise from the dead in order provide salvation from sin, to atone for our sins, to reconcile us with God, and to provide eternal life to human beings.

4. How should we implement what is (allegedly) the best solution to what is (allegedly) the root-cause problem of what are (allegedly) the most important problems of human life? (Treatment Plan for the Patients)

If one repents of one's sins, and believes in Jesus as the divine savior of humankind who died for our sins and rose from the dead, then one's sins will be forgiven by God, and the process of salvation from sin will begin, ultimately completing when Jesus raises the dead and gives eternal life in heaven to those who believed in him.

**Wishful Thinking & Emotional Bias
vs.
Critical Thinking & Healthy Skepticism**

A critical thinker is aware of the problems of *wishful thinking* and *emotional bias* and consistently strives to exercise *healthy skepticism* and to avoid evaluating claims and beliefs on the basis of *desires* and *wishes* (or *fears* and *revulsions*) as opposed to *facts* and *reasons*.

Wishful Thinking - Definitions

Definition of wishful thinking

the attribution of reality to what one wishes to be true or
the tenuous justification of what one wants to believe

Definition of wishful thinking for English Language Learners

an attitude or belief that something you want to happen will
happen even though it is not likely or possible

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wishful%20thinking>

Wishful Thinking- Description

Wishful thinking

Wishful thinking is the formation of beliefs and making decisions according to what might be pleasing to imagine instead of by appealing to evidence, rationality, or reality. It is a product of resolving conflicts between belief and desire. Studies have consistently shown that holding all else equal, subjects will predict positive outcomes to be more likely than negative outcomes (see unrealistic optimism). However, research suggests that under certain circumstances, such as when threat increases, a reverse phenomenon occurs.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wishful_thinking

Emotional Bias

Emotional bias

An emotional bias is a distortion in cognition and decision making due to emotional factors.

That is, a person will be usually inclined

- **to believe something that has a positive emotional effect, that gives a pleasant feeling, even if there is evidence to the contrary.**
- **to be reluctant to accept hard facts that are unpleasant and give mental suffering.**

Those factors can be either individual and self-centered, or linked to interpersonal relationship or to group influence.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional_bias

Important Historical Examples of Wishful Thinking & Emotional Bias

ALCHEMY provides us with three important historical examples of wishful thinking and emotional bias:

- **Philosopher's Stone/Chrysopoeia**
- **Elixir of Life**
- **Panacea**

Examples of Wishful Thinking & Emotional Bias: ALCHEMY

Alchemy

Alchemy is a philosophical and protoscientific tradition **practiced throughout Europe, Africa and Asia**. It aimed to purify, mature, and perfect certain objects. Common aims were **chrysopoeia, the transmutation of "base metals" (e.g., lead) into "noble metals" (particularly gold)**; the creation of an **elixir of immortality**; the creation of **panaceas able to cure any disease**; and the development of an alkahest, a universal solvent. The perfection of the human body and soul was thought to permit or result from the alchemical *magnum opus* and, in the Hellenistic and western tradition, the achievement of *gnosis*. In Europe, the creation of a **philosopher's stone** was variously connected with all of these projects.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alchemy>

Examples of Wishful Thinking & Emotional Bias: Philosopher's Stone/Chrysopoeia

Philosopher's stone

The philosopher's stone, or stone of the philosophers (Latin: lapis philosophorum) is a legendary alchemical substance capable of turning base metals such as mercury into gold (chrysopoeia, from the Greek χρυσός khrusos, "gold", and ποιεῖν poiēin, "to make") or silver. It is also called the elixir of life, useful for rejuvenation and for achieving immortality; **for many centuries, it was the most sought-after goal in alchemy.** The philosopher's stone was the central symbol of the mystical terminology of alchemy, symbolizing perfection at its finest, enlightenment, and heavenly bliss. Efforts to discover the philosopher's stone were known as the Magnum Opus ("Great Work").

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosopher%27s_stone

Examples of Wishful Thinking & Emotional Bias: Elixir of Life

Elixir of life

The **elixir of life**, also known as **elixir of immortality** and sometimes equated with the philosopher's stone, is a mythical potion that supposedly grants the drinker eternal life and/or eternal youth. This elixir was also said to cure all diseases.

Alchemists in various ages and cultures sought the means of formulating the elixir.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elixir_of_life

Examples of Wishful Thinking & Emotional Bias: Panacea

Panacea (medicine)

The panacea /pænə'si:ə/, named after the Greek goddess of universal remedy Panakeia, Panacea, also known as panchrest, **was supposed to be a remedy that would cure all diseases and prolong life indefinitely.** It was sought by the alchemists as a connection to the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone, a mythical substance which would enable the transmutation of common metals into gold.

[...]

A panacea (or panaceum) is also a literary term to represent any solution to solve all problems related to a particular issue. The term panacea is also used in a negative way to describe the over use of any one solution to solve many different problems especially in medicine.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panacea_\(medicine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panacea_(medicine))

Examples of Wishful Thinking & Emotional Bias: Philosopher's Stone, Elixir of Life, & Panacea

- There is no Philosopher's Stone**
- There is no Elixir of Life**
- There is no Panacea**

Yet many cultures and civilizations (Chinese, Egyptians, East Indians, Africans, Arabs in the Middle East, and Europeans) pursued these things for many centuries. WHY?

There might be other factors, but part of the explanation is that people strongly WISH and DESIRE that such magical things exist. Wishful thinking and emotional bias propelled ALCHEMY across cultures and across time, for much of human history.

The Christian Worldview Proposes a PANACEA

- The Christian Worldview presents Christianity as a PANACEA, as a solution to all (or nearly all) of the most important human problems.
- Critical thinkers are aware of the problems of wishful thinking and emotional bias and consistently strive to exercise healthy skepticism and to avoid evaluating claims and beliefs on the basis of desires and wishes (or fears and revulsions) as opposed to facts and reasons.
- Belief in a PANACEA is a classic example of *wishful thinking* and *emotional bias*.
- Critical thinkers, therefore, exercise healthy skepticism in evaluating the Christian worldview, and strive to avoid accepting the claims of the Christian worldview on the basis of desires and wishes (or fears and revulsions) as opposed to facts and reasons.

The Christian Worldview Proposes a PANACEA

- The fact that the Christian worldview presents Christianity as a PANACEA does NOT show that this worldview is false, but for a critical thinker this does raise *reasonable doubt* and suspicion about the truth of the Christian worldview.
- Some other religions and secular worldviews also claim to identify a PANACEA, so the Christian worldview is NOT the only worldview that raises reasonable doubt and suspicion for critical thinkers.
- Although the Christian worldview presents Christianity as a PANACEA, it does not promise perfect health, perfect harmony, and perfect happiness in this life, so it is less subject to *disconfirmation by experience*, compared to more this-worldly PANACEAs.

Analysis of Possible Evaluations of the Christian Worldview

EVALUATING THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Case	ATQ1	ATQ2	ATQ3	ATQ4	TCW	Comments
1	F	F	F	F	False	Obviously, if the worldview answers to <u>ALL</u> of the basic questions are wrong, then the worldview is false.
2	T	F	F	F	?	
3	F	T	F	F	?	
4	F	F	T	F	?	
5	F	F	F	T	?	
6	T	T	F	F	?	
7	T	F	T	F	?	
8	T	F	F	T	?	
9	F	T	T	F	?	
10	F	T	F	T	?	
11	F	F	T	T	?	
12	F	T	T	T	?	
13	T	F	T	T	?	
14	T	T	F	T	?	
15	T	T	T	F	?	
16	T	T	T	T	True	Obviously, if the worldview answers to <u>ALL</u> of the basic questions are right, then the worldview is true.

What If the Christian Worldview Answer to ONE of the Four Worldview Questions is WRONG?

If the Christian Worldview answer to just ONE of the four basic worldview questions is **WRONG**, then Christianity would *fall seriously short* of what it claims to be (a *Panacea*: the solution to the most important problems of human life).

1. If the problems identified and targeted by TCW include none, or only a small portion, of the most important human problems, then TCW would fall seriously short of what it claims to be.
2. If the root-cause problem identified and targeted by TCW is not the root cause problem underlying the most important human problems, then TCW would fall seriously short of what it claims to be.
3. If the solution proposed by TCW (for resolving the root-cause problem that underlies the most important human problems) is no good, then TCW would fall seriously short of what it claims to be.
4. If the plan for implementation proposed by TCW for use of the solution is such that the solution would likely fail to be effective, then TCW would fall seriously short of what it claims to be.

What If the Christian Worldview Answer to ONE of the Four Worldview Questions is RIGHT?

If the Christian Worldview answer to just ONE of the four basic worldview questions is RIGHT, then Christianity would be at least “partially true”.

1. If the problems identified and targeted by TCW include most of the most important human problems, and if the “spiritual problems” identified by TCW are among the most important human problems, then some basic Christian beliefs would be true.
2. If the root-cause problem identified and targeted by TCW is the root cause problem underlying some of the problems identified by TCW, and the root-cause for the “spiritual problems” was correct, then some basic Christian beliefs would be true.
3. If the solution proposed by TCW for resolving the root-cause is a good solution, then some basic Christian beliefs would be true.
4. If the plan for implementation proposed by TCW for use of the solution is such that the solution would likely resolve the problem that is believed to be a root – cause problem, then some basic Christian beliefs would be true (NOTE: the solution would have to be largely correct in order for the implementation plan to be correct).

The Christian Worldview: Further Analysis

I have analyzed the Christian worldview in terms of four basic worldview questions. The Christian answers to those questions are brief summaries of core Christian beliefs.

A clearer understanding of the Christian worldview can be presented by expanding those brief answers to provide more details. For each one of the Christian answers to a basic worldview question, I have formulated four claims or assertions to present that answer in more detail.

Since there are four claims for each of the four answers, this more detailed ANALYSIS of the Christian worldview breaks the worldview down into sixteen different claims.

The Christian Worldview: Symptoms

1. What are the most important problems of human life? (Symptoms of Disease)

A. SPIRITUAL: Alienation or separation from God in this life, and in the next life we face the threat of divine eternal punishment, these are some of the most important problems of human life.

B. PHYSICAL: Injury, disease, and death are some of the most important problems of human life.

C. PSYCHOLOGICAL: Sorrow, fear, pain, and suffering are some of the most important problems of human life.

D. SOCIAL: Conflict and disharmony between humans (anger, hatred, cruelty, injustice, violence, oppression, and war) are some of the most important problems of human life.

The Christian Worldview: Diagnosis

2. What is the root-cause problem(s) behind the most important problems of human life? (Diagnosis of Disease)

A. SPIRITUAL: Sin (wrongdoing and disobedience to God and the human propensity towards wrongdoing) is the root cause of alienation or separation from God in this life, and will ultimately result in eternal divine punishment.

B. PHYSICAL: Sin (wrongdoing and disobedience to God and the human propensity towards wrongdoing) is the root cause of physical death, injury, and disease.

C. PSYCHOLOGICAL: Sin (wrongdoing and disobedience to God and the human propensity towards wrongdoing) is the root cause of sorrow, fear, pain, and mental suffering of human beings.

D. SOCIAL: Sin (wrongdoing and disobedience to God and the human propensity towards wrongdoing) is the root cause of conflict and disharmony between humans (anger, hatred, cruelty, injustice, violence, oppression, and war).

The Christian Worldview: Cure

3. What is the best solution to the root-cause problem(s)? (Cure for the Disease)

- A. Out of love and mercy for human beings, God sent his son Jesus to be the divine savior of humankind.
- B. God sent his son Jesus to suffer and to die on the cross in order provide salvation from sin, to atone for our sins, and to reconcile us with God.
- C. Jesus is God incarnate, and Jesus lived a perfect life of obedience to God, so that his death on the cross could atone for the sins of humankind.
- D. After Jesus died on the cross and was placed in a tomb, God raised Jesus from the dead to show that Jesus was the Son of God and savior of humankind, and to show that those who receive salvation from Jesus will one day be raised from the dead and given eternal life.

The Christian Worldview: Treatment Plan

4. How should we implement the solution to the root-cause problem(s)? (Prescribed Treatment Plan for the Disease)

- A. If one repents of one's sins, and believes in Jesus as the divine savior of humankind who died for our sins and rose from the dead, then one's sins will be forgiven by God, and the process of salvation from sin will begin.
- B. When a person repents and becomes a believer in Jesus, God sends the Holy Spirit to that person to help that person to obey God, to follow Jesus, and to become a truly good person.
- C. Christians sometimes sin and disobey God, but if they repent of their sins and ask for forgiveness, they will be forgiven, and their relationship with God and Jesus will be restored.
- D. So long as a Christian believer continues to believe and follow Jesus until his/her death, that person will be raised from the dead and given eternal life in heaven.

Closing Remarks

The Next Podcast:

In Podcast #6, I will consider **Questions 8 and 9:**

8. Does the Christian worldview correctly identify and describe the most important human problems?

9. Does the Christian worldview correctly identify the root-cause problem that underlies the problems it claims to be the most important human problems?

Thank You:

Thank you for listening to my fifth podcast of the series *Thinking Critically About: "Is Christianity True?"*. I hope that you will join me again for future podcasts as I continue to investigate this important question.

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