

Additional Notes on Culture, Existentialism and Rationalism

CULTURE AND CHRISTIANITY

Question: "What is cultural Christianity?"

Answer: Cultural Christianity is religion that superficially identifies itself as "Christianity" but does not truly adhere to the faith. A "cultural Christian" is a nominal believer—he wears the label "Christian," but the label has more to do with his family background and upbringing than any personal conviction that Jesus is Lord. Cultural Christianity is more social than spiritual. A cultural Christian identifies with certain aspects of Christianity, such as the good works of Jesus, but rejects the spiritual aspects required to be a biblically defined Christian. Some people consider themselves "Christians" because of family background, personal experience, country of residence, or social environment. Others identify as "Christian" as a way of declaring a religious affiliation, as opposed to being "Muslim" or "Buddhist." Famed scientist and atheist Richard Dawkins refers to himself as a "cultural Christian" because he admires some of the ceremonial and philanthropic aspects of Christianity. Dawkins is not born again; he simply sees "Christianity" as a label to use.

In free nations, the gospel is often presented as a costless addition to one's life: just add churchgoing to your hobbies, add charitable giving to your list of good deeds, or add the cross to the trophies on your mantle. In this way, many people go through the motions of "accepting Jesus" with no accompanying surrender to His lordship. These people, who do not "abide in Christ," are cultural Christians. They are branches that hang around the True Vine but have no true attachment (see John 15:1–8).

There was no such thing as cultural Christianity in the days of the early church. In fact, to be a Christian was to more than likely be marked as a target of persecution. The very term Christian was coined in the city of Antioch as a way to identify the first followers of Christ (Acts 11:26). The first disciples were so much like Jesus that they were called "little Christs" by their detractors. Unfortunately, the term has lost meaning over the years and come to represent an ideology or a social class rather than a lifestyle of obedience to God.

Cultural Christianity is not true Christianity. A true Christian is one who has received Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour (John 1:12). Christ's death and resurrection has been appropriated to that person as his or her substitute for sin (Romans 10:8–10; 2 Corinthians 5:21). The Holy Spirit indwells that person (Romans 8:9). "Receiving" Christ is far more than a mental acknowledgment of truth. Satan acknowledges the identity of the Son of God (Mark 5:7). The faith that saves us also changes us (see James 2:26). Jesus said that anyone who wishes to become His disciple must "deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). While we cannot earn salvation by sacrifice or good works, a lifestyle transformation and desire to please the Lord are direct results of being "born again" (John 3:3).

The following are some identifying marks of cultural Christianity:

- Denying the inspiration of Scripture or parts of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).
- Ignoring or downplaying true repentance as the first step toward knowing God (Matthew 4:17; Acts 2:38).
- Focusing on Jesus' love and acceptance to the exclusion of His teaching on hell, obedience, and self-sacrifice (Matthew 4:17; 23:33; Mark 9:43; Luke 12:5).
- Tolerating or even celebrating ongoing sin while claiming to know God (Romans 1:32; 1 Corinthians 5:1–2; 1 John 3:9–10).
- Redefining scriptural truths to accommodate culture (Numbers 23:19; Malachi 3:6).
- Understanding Jesus to be primarily a social reformer, rather than God in the flesh who is the sacrifice for our sin (Matthew 10:34; Mark 14:7).
- Claiming God's promises while ignoring the requirements included with them (Psalm 50:16; Jeremiah 18:10).
- Denying or minimizing Jesus' claim that He is the only way to God (John 3:15–18; 14:6).
- Performing enough religious activity to gain a sense of well-being without a true devotion to Jesus (Galatians 5:16–17; Romans 8:9).

- Talking much about “God” in a general sense, but very little about Jesus Christ as Lord (John 13:13; 14:6).
- Seeing protection and blessing as goals to be achieved, rather than byproducts of a love relationship with God (Mark 12:30; Deuteronomy 11:13–17).
- Choosing a church based upon any or all of the above (Revelation 3:15–17).

Jesus’ warning in Matthew 7:21–23 should be a wake-up call to cultural Christianity: *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*

<https://www.gotquestions.org/cultural-Christianity.html>

Experience – the Atheist’s point of view.

Since God does not exist, therefore what may be known of life comes only from reason (the philosophy of rationalism) and experience i.e. what is derived from our senses.

This latter philosophy is known as **existentialism**. In simple terms, existentialism is a philosophy concerned with finding self and the meaning of life through free will, choice, and personal responsibility. The belief is that people are searching to find out who and what they are throughout life as they make choices based on their experiences, beliefs, and outlook.

Twentieth century existentialists (e.g. Jaspers) placed great emphasis on the need to have a non-rational ‘final’ or ‘ultimate’ experience. The Christian’s ultimate experience is based on his acceptance of God’s revelation and the work of Jesus Christ in time and history. While the atheist who subscribes to existentialism looks only to an ‘experience’ to validate himself. Right up to his death, Aldous Huxley spoke of using drugs in order to get a ‘first-hand experience.’

And yet, this philosophy leads only to despair. In fact, many who followed this philosophy urged their students not to commit suicide, as they could not be certain that taking one’s own life would be an ultimate or final experience.

Rationalism

Rationalism is the practice or principle of basing opinions and actions on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response. Reason and intellect is the chief source of knowledge, not sensory experience.

During the 18th century (the age of so-called Enlightenment) Its followers believed that human reason was the only thing able to ‘light’ the way to human happiness. During the French Revolution, the people declared that God was dead, and enthroned the goddess of ‘Reason’ instead.

Some accepted the existence of one God, Creator of the Universe, but they denied that He intervened in human history. ‘Creation submits only to the laws of nature’ – this concept is known as Deism.

A literal interpretation of the Bible was no longer accepted. Everything that could not be explained by reason was rejected e.g. miracles.

‘Man has only one duty – to be happy’ was their philosophy.
