

Fall Series 2020:

World Religions & Cults 101

Book

World Religion & Cults 101 by Bruce Bickel & Stan Jantz

Dates

Each night beginning at 5:30pm on:

- September 13 – Worldview & Christianity
- September 20 – Judaism & Islam
- September 27 – Hinduism & Buddhism
- October 4 – Cults, New Age & Atheism

Purpose of this Study:

The purpose of this study is to familiarize ourselves with mainstream/popular world religions and cults so to be able to better defend our Christian faith in a world of skepticism and diversity. This, in no way, will cover all world religions or even exhaust the religions chosen to study. This will cover the largest of world religions and people groups of belief that we may find ourselves most likely in contact with in daily life such as school, work, etc. Again, this is not an exhaustive study, but one that will introduce us to popular world beliefs.

It will also help us to better understand what we say we believe as Christians, and to become better thinkers in regards to our faith. To help us see statements made by family, religious leaders to political candidates and better understand the origins of their statements. It will help us to better understand the confusing tapestry of conversation going on in our society today, to sort out confusing narratives, and ultimately help us better navigate to God and His truth so that we can again be light and salt in a dark and bland culture.

Worldviews & Christianity

Worldviews:

I. What is a Worldview?

Worldview - a particular philosophy of life or conception of the world.¹

II. Why are studying Worldviews important?

We simply cannot study all the World's Religions, but all World Religions come from worldviews in which we can study. If we find a worldview illogical then it follows that any world religion derived from such a worldview would, therefore by definition, be illogical as well, and therefore, be canceled.

III. The role of logic in studying Worldviews?

Logic is simply the laws of reality. Aristotle only recognized the laws of logic but did not create them because they are embedded in the fabric of reality.

- **Law of Identity** - states that each thing is identical with itself.
- **Law of Excluded Middle** - states that for any proposition, either that proposition is true or its negation is true.
- **Law of Non-Contradiction** - states that contradictory propositions cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time,

Going back to the question, logic plays an enormous role because whatever comes from an illogical premise is illogical as well. In this, we see that if a system of thought does not adhere to logic then it detaches itself from reality and either becomes an illusion or delusional.

Logic is the train, such as train of thought that takes us to the city of Truth.

¹ Soanes, C., & Stevenson, A. (Eds.). (2004). [*Concise Oxford English dictionary*](#) (11th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The word “Logos,” a word that John used in John 1 to describe Jesus, is the word where the English word “Logic” is derived.

IV. What are the major Worldviews?

- Atheism – no god
- Agnosticism – *Hard agnostic* (I know that you cannot know)
Soft agnostic (I don’t know but open to knowledge)
- Deism – God is separate from the world, but is impersonal
- Polytheism – many gods
- Pantheism – god is everything and everything is god
- Monotheism – God is separate from the world, but is personal.

V. What does the “Logical Outworking” of a Worldview mean?

Logical Outworking is simply seeing where a particular train of thought is taking you.

- For example, in atheism the only game in town is the “survival of the fittest” so if an Atheist gives to charity or helps in a case of goodwill the weak and needy such as in altruism (*selfless concern for the well-being of others.*²) then they would be going against their worldview that necessitates that only the strong should survive.
- Another example would be for an atheist to support the lifestyle of homosexuality would be an illogical outworking of atheism because homosexual by definition don’t reproduce, therefore, they need to be eradicated, according to the logical outworking of atheism, because they do nothing to support the survival of the species.
- To hear a Christian speak of Karma or a divine spark within us all is illogical in their worldview of Christianity. They are what you might say cross threaded.

² Soanes, C., & Stevenson, A. (Eds.). (2004). [*Concise Oxford English dictionary*](#) (11th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Christianity:

Christianity is the religion based on the person and teachings of Christ.

I. Why Start With Christianity?

“When considering the topic of spirituality or religion, I would encourage you to look at Christianity first. It is a testable religion. That is, it is based on evidence. The evidence is philosophical and historical. It can be examined and then we can all make our decision.”

— **Jon Morrison, Clear Minds & Dirty Feet: A Reason to Hope, a Message to Share**

II. The Founder of the Christian Faith is....

- Jesus of Nazareth

III. The Reliability of Christianity

- Historical

Dr. William Lane Craig - How Christianity Is Unique Among the World Religions

- Evidential
- Logical

“The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.”

— **F.F. Bruce, The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?**

IV. The Role of Scripture

The role of Scripture is either an authority or the authority in church life. This was one of the issues in the reformation. Martin Luther believed, as one of the foundations of Protestantism, in *sola scriptura*, which is that Scripture is the source of final authority and truth.

Catholics and even some protestant denominations hold to Reason, Tradition, and Scripture as the source of authority.

V. Church History

The Three Sects of Christianity:

Catholic simply means “universal”

From the time of Christ to the time of Emperor Constantine Christians were persecuted, but Constantine made Christianity the religion of the State. Constantine also moved the head of the Roman Empire to Constantinople which is in Asia Minor.

- 1. Roman Catholicism** – the authority of the Church was in Rome, hence Roman Catholicism, and maintains Papal authority, the Pope, through the Apostle Peter. “The Roman Church believed that the Apostle Peter was the first pope, followed by an unbroken succession of popes, each one acting as a “vicar” (or substitute) for Christ on earth. Catholics believe the Pope is infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra* (with authority).”
- 2. Eastern Orthodox** – the Roman Church insisted on maintaining authority over Christians everywhere, therefore a split occurred in 1054 A.D. between the Roman Church and the four Eastern Regions creating the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Orthodox, or Eastern Orthodox Church in the East.
- 3. Protestantism** – simply means protestors. As Roman Catholicism grew in the West it dominated political and cultural life as cathedrals and universities were built by the church. From the eleventh to the fourteenth century’s great internal corruptions and fighting took place within the Catholic Church which led to the idea of reformation. The early reformers didn’t want to start a new movement but rather protested what the church had become and wanted to see its reform back to what it used to be. This lead to what is known as the Reformation. The primary issue was the doctrine of salvation. ***The major difference was the Catholic church believed ‘you get to Christ through the Church’ whereas the reformers believed ‘you get to the Church through Christ.’***

The beginning of the reformation started in 1517 when German professor of theology, Martin Luther, published his 95 theses. Nailed to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

The History

“Committed to the idea that salvation could be reached through faith and by divine grace only, Luther vigorously objected to the corrupt practice of selling indulgences. Acting on this belief, he wrote the “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences,” also known as “The 95 Theses,” a list of questions and propositions for debate. Popular legend has it that on October 31, 1517 Luther defiantly nailed a copy of his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church. The reality was probably not so dramatic; Luther more likely hung the document on the door of the church matter-of-factly to announce the ensuing academic discussion around it that he was organizing.”³

95 Theses of Martin Luther

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (*Mt 4:17*), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.
4. The penalty of sin remains as long as the hatred of self (that is, true inner repentance), namely till our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
5. The pope neither desires nor is able to remit any penalties except those imposed by his own authority or that of the canons.
6. The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.
7. God remits guilt to no one unless at the same time he humbles him in all things and makes him submissive to the vicar, the priest.
8. The penitential canons are imposed only on the living, and, according to the canons themselves, nothing should be imposed on the dying.

³ <https://www.history.com/topics/reformation/martin-luther-and-the-95-theses>

9. Therefore the Holy Spirit through the pope is kind to us insofar as the pope in his decrees always makes exception of the article of death and of necessity.
10. Those priests act ignorantly and wickedly who, in the case of the dying, reserve canonical penalties for purgatory.
11. Those tares of changing the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory were evidently sown while the bishops slept (*Mt 13:25*).
12. In former times canonical penalties were imposed, not after, but before absolution, as tests of true contrition.
13. The dying are freed by death from all penalties, are already dead as far as the canon laws are concerned, and have a right to be released from them.
14. Imperfect piety or love on the part of the dying person necessarily brings with it great fear; and the smaller the love, the greater the fear.
15. This fear or horror is sufficient in itself, to say nothing of other things, to constitute the penalty of purgatory, since it is very near to the horror of despair.
16. Hell, purgatory, and heaven seem to differ the same as despair, fear, and assurance of salvation.
17. It seems as though for the souls in purgatory fear should necessarily decrease and love increase.
18. Furthermore, it does not seem proved, either by reason or by Scripture that souls in purgatory are outside the state of merit, that is, unable to grow in love.
19. Nor does it seem proved that souls in purgatory, at least not all of them, are certain and assured of their own salvation, even if we ourselves may be entirely certain of it.
20. Therefore the pope, when he uses the words "plenary remission of all penalties," does not actually mean "all penalties," but only those imposed by himself.
21. Thus those indulgence preachers are in error who say that a man is absolved from every penalty and saved by papal indulgences.
22. As a matter of fact, the pope remits to souls in purgatory no penalty which, according to canon law, they should have paid in this life.
23. If remission of all penalties whatsoever could be granted to anyone at all, certainly it would be granted only to the most perfect, that is, to very few.
24. For this reason most people are necessarily deceived by that indiscriminate and high-sounding promise of release from penalty.
25. That power which the pope has in general over purgatory corresponds to the power which any bishop or curate has in a particular way in his own diocese and parish.
26. The pope does very well when he grants remission to souls in purgatory, not by the power of the keys, which he does not have, but by way of intercession for them.

27. They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.
28. It is certain that when money clinks in the money chest, greed and avarice can be increased; but when the church intercedes, the result is in the hands of God alone.
29. Who knows whether all souls in purgatory wish to be redeemed, since we have exceptions in St. Severinus and St. Paschal, as related in a legend.
30. No one is sure of the integrity of his own contrition, much less of having received plenary remission.
31. The man who actually buys indulgences is as rare as he who is really penitent; indeed, he is exceedingly rare.
32. Those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.
33. Men must especially be on guard against those who say that the pope's pardons are that inestimable gift of God by which man is reconciled to him.
34. For the graces of indulgences are concerned only with the penalties of sacramental satisfaction established by man.
35. They who teach that contrition is not necessary on the part of those who intend to buy souls out of purgatory or to buy confessional privileges preach unchristian doctrine.
36. Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without indulgence letters.
37. Any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the church; and this is granted him by God, even without indulgence letters.
38. Nevertheless, papal remission and blessing are by no means to be disregarded, for they are, as I have said (Thesis 6), the proclamation of the divine remission.
39. It is very difficult, even for the most learned theologians, at one and the same time to commend to the people the bounty of indulgences and the need of true contrition.
40. A Christian who is truly contrite seeks and loves to pay penalties for his sins; the bounty of indulgences, however, relaxes penalties and causes men to hate them -- at least it furnishes occasion for hating them.
41. Papal indulgences must be preached with caution, lest people erroneously think that they are preferable to other good works of love.
42. Christians are to be taught that the pope does not intend that the buying of indulgences should in any way be compared with works of mercy.
43. Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences.

44. Because love grows by works of love, man thereby becomes better. Man does not, however, become better by means of indulgences but is merely freed from penalties.
45. Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives his money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God's wrath.
46. Christians are to be taught that, unless they have more than they need, they must reserve enough for their family needs and by no means squander it on indulgences.
47. Christians are to be taught that they buying of indulgences is a matter of free choice, not commanded.
48. Christians are to be taught that the pope, in granting indulgences, needs and thus desires their devout prayer more than their money.
49. Christians are to be taught that papal indulgences are useful only if they do not put their trust in them, but very harmful if they lose their fear of God because of them.
50. Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that the basilica of St. Peter were burned to ashes than built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.
51. Christians are to be taught that the pope would and should wish to give of his own money, even though he had to sell the basilica of St. Peter, to many of those from whom certain hawkers of indulgences cajole money.
52. It is vain to trust in salvation by indulgence letters, even though the indulgence commissary, or even the pope, were to offer his soul as security.
53. They are the enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid altogether the preaching of the Word of God in some churches in order that indulgences may be preached in others.
54. Injury is done to the Word of God when, in the same sermon, an equal or larger amount of time is devoted to indulgences than to the Word.
55. It is certainly the pope's sentiment that if indulgences, which are a very insignificant thing, are celebrated with one bell, one procession, and one ceremony, then the gospel, which is the very greatest thing, should be preached with a hundred bells, a hundred processions, and a hundred ceremonies.
56. The true treasures of the church, out of which the pope distributes indulgences, are not sufficiently discussed or known among the people of Christ.
57. That indulgences are not temporal treasures is certainly clear, for many indulgence sellers do not distribute them freely but only gather them.
58. Nor are they the merits of Christ and the saints, for, even without the pope, the latter always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outer man.

59. St. Lawrence said that the poor of the church were the treasures of the church, but he spoke according to the usage of the word in his own time.
60. Without want of consideration we say that the keys of the church, given by the merits of Christ, are that treasure.
61. For it is clear that the pope's power is of itself sufficient for the remission of penalties and cases reserved by himself.
62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.
63. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last (Mt. 20:16).
64. On the other hand, the treasure of indulgences is naturally most acceptable, for it makes the last to be first.
65. Therefore the treasures of the gospel are nets with which one formerly fished for men of wealth.
66. The treasures of indulgences are nets with which one now fishes for the wealth of men.
67. The indulgences which the demagogues acclaim as the greatest graces are actually understood to be such only insofar as they promote gain.
68. They are nevertheless in truth the most insignificant graces when compared with the grace of God and the piety of the cross.
69. Bishops and curates are bound to admit the commissaries of papal indulgences with all reverence.
70. But they are much more bound to strain their eyes and ears lest these men preach their own dreams instead of what the pope has commissioned.
71. Let him who speaks against the truth concerning papal indulgences be anathema and accursed.
72. But let him who guards against the lust and license of the indulgence preachers be blessed.
73. Just as the pope justly thunders against those who by any means whatever contrive harm to the sale of indulgences.
74. Much more does he intend to thunder against those who use indulgences as a pretext to contrive harm to holy love and truth.
75. To consider papal indulgences so great that they could absolve a man even if he had done the impossible and had violated the mother of God is madness.
76. We say on the contrary that papal indulgences cannot remove the very least of venial sins as far as guilt is concerned.
77. To say that even St. Peter if he were now pope, could not grant greater graces is blasphemy against St. Peter and the pope.
78. We say on the contrary that even the present pope, or any pope whatsoever, has greater graces at his disposal, that is, the gospel, spiritual powers, gifts of healing, etc., as it is written. (*1 Co 12[:28]*)

79. To say that the cross emblazoned with the papal coat of arms, and set up by the indulgence preachers is equal in worth to the cross of Christ is blasphemy.
80. The bishops, curates, and theologians who permit such talk to be spread among the people will have to answer for this.
81. This unbridled preaching of indulgences makes it difficult even for learned men to rescue the reverence which is due the pope from slander or from the shrewd questions of the laity.
82. Such as: "Why does not the pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there if he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money with which to build a church?" The former reason would be most just; the latter is most trivial.
83. Again, "Why are funeral and anniversary masses for the dead continued and why does he not return or permit the withdrawal of the endowments founded for them, since it is wrong to pray for the redeemed?"
84. Again, "What is this new piety of God and the pope that for a consideration of money they permit a man who is impious and their enemy to buy out of purgatory the pious soul of a friend of God and do not rather, because use of the need of that pious and beloved soul, free it for pure love's sake?"
85. Again, "Why are the penitential canons, long since abrogated and dead in actual fact and through disuse, now satisfied by the granting of indulgences as though they were still alive and in force?"
86. Again, "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?"
87. Again, "What does the pope remit or grant to those who by perfect contrition already have a right to full remission and blessings?"
88. Again, "What greater blessing could come to the church than if the pope were to bestow these remissions and blessings on every believer a hundred times a day, as he now does but once?"
89. "Since the pope seeks the salvation of souls rather than money by his indulgences, why does he suspend the indulgences and pardons previously granted when they have equal efficacy?"
90. To repress these very sharp arguments of the laity by force alone, and not to resolve them by giving reasons, is to expose the church and the pope to the ridicule of their enemies and to make Christians unhappy.
91. If, therefore, indulgences were preached according to the spirit and intention of the pope, all these doubts would be readily resolved. Indeed, they would not exist.
92. Away, then, with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace! (*Jeremiah 6:14*)

93. Blessed be all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, "Cross, cross," and there is no cross!
94. Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their Head, through penalties, death and hell.
95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through the false security of peace (*Acts 14:22*).⁴

****A Dark Period called The Crusades***

One of the most controversial periods in the history of the church started in 1095, when Western European Christians launched a series of wars, known as the Crusades, to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy Land, then controlled by the Muslims. The Crusades lasted well into the 13th century and were eventually expanded to include any military effort against non-Christians. (pg. 35)

Denominationalism

Believing Community groups that often have developed over time because said group adhere to an individual person's specific teaching or a specific movement within church history.

For example, Methodist go back to John and Charles Wesley. Presbyterian goes back to the teaching of John Calvin. The Church of Christ is the only denomination that developed here in America and did not come originally from overseas.

Local Congregations

The local body of believers are either autonomous (having the freedom to govern itself or control its own affairs) authority or under a hierarchal denominational authority or autonomous authority within a denomination.

⁴ <https://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>

The Influence of the Church in Culture

Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It’s no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men. “You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”⁵

The Great Commission

Matthew 28:18-20

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁶

Basic Beliefs

Key Founder

Jesus Christ

Key Writing

The Bible, both Old and New Testaments

Who is God?

The one God is Triune (one God in three persons, not three gods); Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is a spiritual being without a physical body. He is personal and involved with people. He created the universe out of nothing. He is eternal, changeless, holy, loving and perfect.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: Holman Christian standard version.*](#) (2009). (Mt 5:13–16). Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: Holman Christian standard version.*](#) (2009). (Mt 28:18–20). Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers.

Who is Jesus?

Jesus is God, the second person of the Trinity. As God the Son, He has always existed and was never created. He is fully God and fully man. (Two natures joined in the person of Jesus. As the 2nd person of the Trinity, He is coequal with God the Father and Holy Spirit. In becoming man, He was begotten of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus is the only way of salvation and the only giver of eternal life. He died on a cross according to God's plan and the sacrifice for sins. He rose again physically the third day defeating death and becoming the first born of New Creation. He was seen by over 500 hundred over a 40 day period after His resurrection. He physically ascended to heaven and will return to usher in God's New Age visibly and physically at the end of the world to judge and establish God's Kingdom.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God, the third Person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a force or energy. He comforts, grieves, reproves, convicts, guides, teaches and fill Christians.

Salvation?

Salvation is by God's grace, not by an individuals good works. Salvation is received by faith alone. People may believe in their hearts that Jesus died for theirs sins and physically rose again, which is the assurance of forgiveness and resurrection of the body. God's loving plan is to forgive sinful people.

What happens at death?

Believers go to be with Jesus. After death, all people await the final judgement. Those saved will live with God in the New Heavens and New Earth referred to as New Creation. Those who are lost will be judged and sent to an area of eternity called Hell enduring torment and suffering apart from the goodness of God. Both lost and saved will be resurrected, the lost to eternal judgment, the saved to eternal life.

What is The Church?

The church is the community of those who follow Christ living out the character and nature of Jesus in their local communities of influence. Daily following the commission of the Lord to be salt and light until He returns. The two main ordinances of the Church are Baptism and the Lord Supper, also known as the Eucharist.

Notes: _____
