



WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL
Volume 15 Number 26
July 8, 2020

What is "Historic Christianity?" Part 1

By Tal Davis

The college professor faced his Comparative Religions class on its first day. He took a poll, "Who among you consider yourselves Christians?" Most students in the class raised their hands. He then asked for other faiths: Jewish, Hindu, etc., even atheist. One or two raised their hands for each.

After the class, Jack, a strong evangelical Christian, spoke to the guy sitting next to him. "So you're a Christian?"

"Yes," the classmate replied.

"Tell me about when you received Christ as your personal Lord and Savior," inquired Jack.

"What do you mean?"

"You know, when did you become born-again?"

"Oh," answered the fellow. "I don't think of my Christianity like that. To me, being a Christian means following the teachings of Jesus and trying to think positively and rid my mind of false thoughts."

"So, then, who is Jesus according to your understanding?" Jack pried.

"Jesus is the 'Way Shower.' He was the one who showed us how to adjust our thinking and find inner spiritual healing as he did."

Jack was puzzled. He had not heard Christianity described quite that way before. "I'm curious, where do you go to church?"

The classmate smiled, "I attend the Church of Christ, Scientist."

Yes, the young man honestly considered himself a Christian. But the more he and Jack conversed it was obvious they had totally different ideas of what that term means. They used the same words but had radically divergent beliefs. So how could Jack know if someone or some group is authentically "Christian?" How would he determine if anyone is really part of what historically is called "Christianity?" In this three part series we will explore just what Historic Christianity is and what is necessary for any church, movement, or individual to be included in it.

To begin with, defining Historic Christianity is something like defining the term "football." I am sure 95% of you reading this article know exactly what that means (or at least assume you do). It is a game played on a turf field measuring 100 yards long from goal line to goal line. From sideline to sideline the field is 53 1/3 yards, with 10 yard scoring zones at both ends (end zones). Each team has 11 men on the field, with four downs to go 10 yards to reset the down count (make a first down). A touchdown over the goal line counts six points. The conversion play after the touchdown is either one point for a place kick through the goal posts or two points for a run or pass. A field goal, also a place kick through the goal post, is three points. The only other way to score is if a team is downed behind their own goal line which is two points for the other team (a safety). But I imagine most of you all already knew this.

Yes, the rules for American football are well known, though there are a few differences between the col-

Permission to Reprint

If you wish to reprint this article in your own print or electronic newsletter, please include the following text:

*Reprinted from **Worldview Made Practical**; a free e-zine produced by **MarketFaith Ministries** featuring practical teaching and life tools to help Christians become more effective in their faith life. Discover **MarketFaith Ministries** at www.marketfaith.org.*

Speaking Schedule

If you are interested in having Freddy Davis or Tal Davis present one of our **Worldview Seminars** or to share about worldview and its practical implications at your church or organization, please contact **MarketFaith Ministries** to schedule your event. All contact information is at the bottom of this e-zine.

Worldview Resources

It is one of the primary purposes of **MarketFaith Ministries** to provide resources to help Christians understand the practical implications of worldview. You can find many free resources that will help you in your quest at <http://www.marketfaith.org>.

lege and professional (NFL) games. But what if you go to Canada? If you say "football" in that country you will find they have a very different way of playing it than we do here in the USA. They even have their own professional league called, appropriately, the Canadian Football League (CFL). Though the Canadian game is similar, and athletes often transition from one to the other, the rules are essentially incompatible. In Canadian football, the field is 110 yards long, goal line to goal line, and is 65 yards wide! The end zones are 20 yards deep. Each team has 12 men on the field with only three downs to go ten yards to make a first down. A touchdown is six points, with a one (place kick) or two point conversion (run or pass). A safety is two points. However, unlike American football, the Canadian game includes a one point score called "a single" when a ball is downed behind the goal line much like an American touchback (which is no points).

So we can see they are similar. However, football in the USA and Canada are not really the same game. If you go to Australia, the rules for football are even more distinct.

So what has this to do with Christianity? On the surface, nothing of course. But this relatively innocuous contrast of American and Canadian football is illustrative of how we define what Christianity really is. Same name, different

game. As in the vignette above, people call themselves Christians and say they believe in Christianity who have entirely different concepts of what they mean by the term. This is often confusing when we interact and look for commonalities with people we meet. We may hear someone say they are a Christian and be excited to meet them. However, we may find their understanding of Christianity may be totally contrary to what we think.

So, how do we define the terms Christian and Christianity? Let me start by saying that literally thousands of churches, denominations, organizations, movements, and individuals call themselves Christian and say they are part of Christianity. They may have widely varying, even contradictory, beliefs and practices. That is why we have to be careful in using those generic terms. To avoid the misunder-

Would You Consider Supporting Us?

Would you consider financial support for **MarketFaith Ministries**? I feel confident that what we are doing is consistent with your beliefs about spreading the gospel and equipping the saints for ministry. Would you let us be one element of your hands and feet in this process? **MarketFaith Ministries** is a 501 (c) (3) not for profit corporation, so your contributions are tax deductible. If you would consider this we would be very grateful. Also, if you would like to know more about the ministry, it would be my pleasure to share with you personally what we are working on and how you can plug in. I can be reached at 850-383-9756 or by e-mail at Freddy@marketfaith.org. As for any donations, they may be sent directly to **MarketFaith Ministries** at 321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312, or you can contribute through our secure website at www.marketfaith.org. Simply click on the "Donate" button at the bottom of the homepage. We are deeply grateful for your support of this ministry.

And, as always, if you have any thoughts, opinions or suggestions about how **MarketFaith Ministries** can help you, please feel free, at any time, to call (850-383-9756) or e-mail (info@marketfaith.org). We are here to serve you.

Subscription Information SUBSCRIPTION NOTICE:

A subscription to **Worldview Made Practical** is complementary for anyone interested in receiving it. If you received this email as a forward from a family member or a friend and wish to subscribe for yourself, you may do so at www.marketfaith.org. If you wish to unsubscribe from this newsletter, simply follow the instructions found at the bottom of each edition.

Contact Information

If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:

info@marketfaith.org

Phone: 850-383-9756 (Tallahassee, Florida)

Fax: 850-514-4571

You can order our products and examine our services at

<http://www.marketfaith.org>.

This issue of **Worldview Made Practical** is a production of **MarketFaith Ministries**, © 2020. All rights reserved.

standing, we often use the term "Historic Christianity" when referring to the belief system that originated with Jesus and the Apostles as found in the New Testament. This consists of the basic Christianity that is historically common to all Christian movements and people. It is commonly called "orthodoxy," or what C. S. Lewis called "Mere Christianity." It does not refer to any specific ecclesiastical group, but to a general perspective that has characterized authentic Christian movements throughout history.

So then, how do we go about evaluating a particular church, denomination, organization, movement, or individual to determine if they are part of Historic Christianity? That is not always easy since even groups that are part of Historic Christianity have differing doctrinal distinctives. They differ on ways and styles of worship, the meaning of the ordinances or sacraments, beliefs about predestination and eschatology, etc..

At some point, however, we have to define the rules and boundaries of authentic Christianity. So, can we narrow the basic principles to a working level wherein we can gauge if any specific movement is within the borders of the Historic Christian domain? I would say yes.

To start with we must have clearly defined theological tenets which define those essential boundaries. Those doctrines are those that are absolutely necessary for any person or movement to affirm in order to be regarded as authentically Christian. They are the ones that have been derived from sound principles of Biblical hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) and agreed upon by genuine Christians in every generation from the First Century.

Early in church history believers the world over codified from Scripture certain foundational teachings. They

then standardized them in universally agreed upon creeds and statements of faith. Those included the Apostles' Creed (AD 120), the Nicene Creed (AD 325), the Chalcedonian Creed (AD 451), and the Athanasian Creed (AD 500). It is fair to say that all Historic Christian churches and denominations agree in principle on the contents of these early statements and that they are essential to the Historic Christian faith.

Thus, in order to determine if a movement or person is part of Historic Christianity, the subject being analyzed must clearly adhere to those essential doctrinal beliefs. So just what are the specific elements of those doctrinal statements that are deemed essential? A good place to begin is the Apostle's Creed. Though it varies slightly from denomination to denomination, below is one of the most commonly known versions. This comes from the United Methodist Book of Worship (1989), but is not the property only of that denomination.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead (note: some versions do not include this phrase).

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic (universal) church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

We assert that any church, denomination, organization, movement, or individual calling themselves Chris-

tian must adhere to the points of the above doctrinal statement (with the exception of "he descended to the dead" – more on that later). That being said, each of the lines of this creed must be clearly defined so as to know what they fully meant when they were written. Some cults, for instance, will recite this historic creed, or others, but have totally revised meanings for the individual words. So before we can evaluate a movement's orthodoxy we need to define each point and then analyze what a specific movement means by each one. In the next two installments in this three a part series, we will explain the meanings of each line in this creed from the Historic Christian position, and compare and contrast how some so-called Christian movements redefine them.