



*The Podcast Focused on  
Revitalizing Conventional Christianity  
—One Person at a Time*

Inside Jimbo's Head™

Series 1, Cultural Christianity Versus Kingdom  
Christianity

Episode 3, What Is Cultural Christianity? Part 1,  
The Basis of American Culture©

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## **Introduction:**

Isn't it interesting how, at certain times and in certain ways, our authentic self-emptying, self-sacrificial love can touch people who we have never met? That sure was true with the love Lois had for the kids in JDC.

You know, I have been blessed with two very special wives—Lois, who went home to be with Jesus in 2013 and now Tracey, my wife for over five years. Both recognized how they were entrusted with God's love, and both allow it to flow freely and sacrificially to others.

One thing we often forget is that behaviors and especially cultural behavioral patterns just do not grow out of thin air. Our behaviors and our cultural behavioral patterns come from key ideas, principles, and belief systems ingrained into our culture many generations before we live.

Today I will talk to you about the core ideas, principles, and belief system of America's key Founding Fathers, which heavily impacts, even today, the American Culture.

## **1. Basic Review**

Ok! Let's get down to business by continuing to look at the question, "What is American Cultural Christianity." But first, I need to give you a couple of reminders, set the background a little deeper and then . . . Well, let's see how far we get.

In every one of these episodes in this series, I will always remind you why these hard questions and difficult statements I ask and make are so important. At some point, you will ask yourself why you should be listening to these things that are so different from what you normally hear in the church. Remember this? "When the desert wind blows, it shapes the sand, and the Church has become more like the sand than the wind." That came from a statement that started out, "As we face the new millennium, we acknowledge that the state of the Church is marked by a paradox of growth without depth." The truth of the matter is that we have been on a downward spiral ever since that statement was released by evangelical leaders in 1999.

Today, on my way back from meeting with a young man I am disciplining, I actually heard a Christian leader say this on the radio. "We are in the golden age of Christianity." Why did he say such a thing? His point was that we now have more information about Christianity available and more ways of sharing that information than at any other time in the history of the church. By now, you should understand the two reasons that statement sent shivers down my spine as I heard such an absurd statement.

First, if we are indeed living in the golden age of Christianity, why did John S. Dickerson, after pulling together all the studies and facts available in 2016, describe the church as, Sputtering because of declining numbers, Bleeding because of failing discipleship, Bankrupt because of depleted dollars, and Hated because of our antagonistic host culture? With that question running through my mind, there in my car listening to the radio, I realized I ran across one more ostrich with his head buried in the sand. Now please listen to this. I'm not looking for agreement with me on every point I make, but come on! We have to face the reality of our situation and stop putting out such false statements made from behind rose-colored glasses. When we make those kinds of statements with our eyes blinded to the facts, we are not doing our fellow Christians any favors, nor are we doing the church any favors, and definitely, we are not doing God any favors.

Then there is the reality I mentioned in the last episode and that you will hear me bemoan over and over again throughout this series on Cultural Christianity Versus Kingdom Christianity. The solution the average leader in North American Evangelicalism gives to any problem we face, even when they have a clear view of the problem, is "more information." We definitely live in a church that is inundated with rationalistic intellectualism at the cost of authentic spirituality. But more on that soon.

## **2. Remembering What Culture Is**

I also want to remind you of some very important information I shared with you in the last episode as we began to answer our question of the day.

First, you must remember that human culture is a man-made system of learned ideas and behavioral patterns developed to cultivate both identity as well as the harmonious relationship among people of a particular society while passing that kind of relationship and identity on to the next generation. What I did not share with you at that time is that there is a God created culture which, in all most all points, runs counter-clockwise to every humanly developed culture. We will discuss that culture, the kingdom culture as soon as we finish with our look at American Cultural Christianity.

Here is a little side note. I need you to know that as I begin to point out the way our American culture and the basic beliefs of our Founding Fathers run counter-clockwise to God's kingdom culture, I am not anti-American. You could think that I am simply bashing America and American culture because I do not like America. That would be a false assumption. Being brought up in the American culture and having lived in it for many many many many (ok you get the idea how old I am) many years, I think it is one of the best if not the best man-made country and culture in history. It is not that I hate or even dislike America or any other country or culture that has been established by people. Yet I, and anyone who is "in Christ," am a part of a different kingdom—a higher kingdom and a different culture—a higher culture. And it is on that kingdom and culture we must base our thinking and the lives we live.

You see, this different, this new culture, often runs counter-culturally and grates against many of the basic ideals that form the behaviors of the American culture. Actually, that is true for any man-developed culture you can name. So I am never saying the things I have said and will say to bash America or any other country or culture which exists physically on the face of this planet or any planet for that matter. Yet I, and you, if you are in Christ, are under a different, God-created system (actually community) of ideas and behaviors that we have not only learned but now through the work of the Holy Spirit have them ingrained in our inner persons. This gives us a new identity and a new way to live in relationship with the king of this new kingdom and other people who are both a part of this kingdom as well as those who are not yet a part of this new kingdom. You will understand what I mean by these things as we move forward and reach the episodes on Kingdom Christianity.

### **3. Understanding The Basis of American Culture, Theistic Rationalism<sup>i</sup>**

Ok, let's get back on the main road and continue with the review of the last episode. I shared a few other things in that episode, yet the most important to remember, because you live in the American culture, is how the basic ideas or beliefs which form the American culture, instilled by the founding fathers, are based on the modernistic thinking from the Age of Enlightenment or as others call it, the Age of Reason. Now I know that opens up a can of worms for many of you who are listening to this podcast. I do not have the time to get deeply involved in this issue other than to point out a few key reasons I make such a statement. To not do so would be just plain foolish and dishonest no matter what your reaction to these reasons may be. I will also share the title of a very important book which anyone, from any camp, who is a seeker of truth,

should thoroughly study if they wish to be credible in their understanding of the ideals that formed America and thus our American culture.

First, we have all been lulled into a dualistic mindset. We see that today in politics, in religion and certainly in the way we have been taught to look at the history of the United States of America. Today there are basically two camps from which we are told we must choose when trying to understand the mindset of our founding fathers. Each cherry-picks through historical documentation to find support for their position.

On the one hand, we have those who see the Founders as forerunners of today's secularists who prize a "wall of separation" between Church and state. Often Deism is the belief system this group points to as the basis of the Founder's beliefs. (Another side note. Deism was developed to counter Christianity.) This camp, which espouses secularism and deism as the basis for the beliefs of our founding fathers, is represented in the academic community by the majority of historians and political scientists. The popularity of this camp can be found on university campuses and in groups like Americans for the Separation of Church and State.

On the other hand, we have those who want to show that the Founders intended the United States to be a Christian nation built upon Christian and, specifically, biblical principles. Those who espouse this idea are usually either lawyers or pastors, not historians. Peter Marshall and David Manuel published a book entitled "The Light and the Glory," which inspired a revival of this camp around the time of the American bicentennial. It has become the classic text for this group. However, the historical documentation in this book is shallow, and it is filled with speculations, suppositions, personal musings, and "insights" with little or no proof or documentation for its extraordinary claims. The most prolific of the proponents of the Christian America camp is David Barton, who has created an entire organization to promote his views and to market his mountain of materials.

However, when you study not only the public records of the Founders but their personal letters and journals, you discover both camps are sadly wanting in their options. The problem comes when one studies only the public record. While the key founding fathers' philosophy was not orthodox Protestant Christianity, even for their day, they were politically Protestant and could, consequently, use familiar and socially acceptable language in their public speeches and writings. Since I was a young man becoming interested in politics, every President and most other politicians claim Christianity as their religious viewpoint regardless of their behaviors and conduct or the depth of their belief in Biblical truths. This is no different than what we find with the key Founding Fathers.

The key founding fathers include Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Jay Adams, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Gouverneur Morris, and James Wilson. A full study of the personal documents of these men made from an unbiased historical perspective shows that the political theology of the American Founding era was neither Christianity nor deism/secularism. The prevailing political theology of the American Founding era was something called theistic rationalism.

With that introduction, let me give you a few points about theistic rationalism pertinent to our subject, and then I will suggest a book for those who are truly seekers of truth and desire to go deeper into this subject.

The key Founders and patriotic preachers were decidedly and explicitly "theist." They believed in a personal God above nature, about whom they had well-formed and well-defined ideas. These theistic rationalists believed in a powerful, rational, and benevolent creator God who established laws by which the universe functioned. Their God was a unitary personal God who was present and active and who intervened in human affairs. Consequently, they believed that prayers were heard and effectual. They believed that the main factor in serving God was living a good and moral life, that promotion of morality was central to the value of religion and that the morality engendered by religion was indispensable to society. Because virtually all religions promoted morality, they believed that many—perhaps all—religious traditions or systems were valid and led to the same God.

Thus they could call for prayer in national times of difficulty as they did during the constitutional convention and throughout the revolutionary war. They also could use such terms as, "In God We Trust," "All men are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights," and "God Bless America." Jefferson also, because of this belief system, could pass out copies of the New Testament to every member of congress, an act which continued up until the 1950s. However, these were not the New Testament of today or even of his time, but one in which he removed all unreasonable aspects and presented basically only the moral teachings of Jesus and His early disciples, which he found rationally correct.

That the theistic rationalists had some slight connection to Christianity but were not full proponents of it can be seen in the fact that although they did not believe that Jesus was God, they considered Him a great moral teacher and held a higher view of Him than did most deists. They believed in a personal afterlife in which the wicked would be temporarily punished, and the good would experience happiness forever. Although they thought that God primarily revealed Himself through nature, theistic rationalists believed that some written revelation was a legitimate revelation from God, but all scripture had to pass their test of reasonableness. In other words, some scriptures were from God, and others were simply human ideas. Thus the Jeffersonian Bible.

Though they believed that reason and revelation generally agreed with each other, they had a firm belief that revelation was designed to complement reason (not vice versa). Reason, human reason, was the ultimate standard for learning and evaluating truth and for determining legitimate revelation from God.

Those who followed theistic rationalism were not trying to establish a new religion but to transform religion, specifically Christian religion, into something more reasonable that all men of goodwill could agree upon. By "men of goodwill," they meant men who were enlightened by education in reason. This was happening at all the major universities, like Princeton, which were

also seminaries. This led them to discard many fundamental elements of Christianity while preserving a set of core convictions grounded on reason rather than on revelation or Scripture.

They were first and foremost men of the Enlightenment and believed religion could be preserved in the modern age only by rationalizing and simplifying it to include the belief in a rational morality or universal benevolence that required religious toleration, human freedom, and scientific progress. This caused them to discard nearly all doctrines of traditional Judaism and Christianity as irrational relics of a less enlightened age in which modern people, especially educated, enlightened people, have outgrown. However, they still preserved residual connections with Christianity, even when they attacked specific Christian dogmas and practices. Again let me point out that the adherents to theistic rationalism were not Christian, and the system was not a subset of Christianity. The eight key Founders denied every fundamental doctrine of Christianity as it was defined and understood in their day.

By the way, a look at the basic beliefs of orthodox Christianity, as seen in the five denominations active in America at the time of its founding, looks very much like the basic tenets of Evangelicalism. These included the doctrines of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, original sin, the virgin birth, the atoning work of Christ which satisfied our debt of sin, the resurrection, justification by faith, and the inspiration and authority of Scripture over all things.

Here is another little tidbit about this era in American history. Only 17% of all Americans at the time of its founding were involved in a church.<sup>ii</sup> This carries even heavier weight when you realize that at that time if you were not a part of a local congregation, you were not considered, nor did you consider yourself a Christian.

Ok, settle down. You see, I know that if you are a student of the book "The Light and the Glory" or of David Barton, you are at this moment beginning to get hot under the collar. But before you get even more steamed at me for making such statements, please do some research. I suggest starting with the book "The Religious Beliefs of America's Founders: Reason, Revelation, and Revolution" by Gregg L. Frazer. Frazer is a Baptist seminary professor of history with a specialty in the era of America's founding. In this book, he gives you a step by step look into theistic rationalism and its roots in the Age of Enlightenment, including demonstration of specific personal writings and journals of the key eight Founding Fathers I have mentioned.

Now you may ask, "So why Jim did you take so much time on this subject? You are simply alienating a large part of your audience.

I realize that possibility my friends, but a Christian is not to promote political concepts and structures, but the kingdom of God no matter how "Christian-like" those political concepts and structures may present themselves. Where there are differences, a follower of Jesus must recognize them because to not do so perverts their understanding of Christianity, their proclamation of Christianity, and it also keeps them from the fullness of life in Christ. And that my friend is exactly what has taken place in America, producing American cultural Christianity.

If you followed along with my description of theistic rationalism, you could see how easy it is to take the religious comments by founding Fathers and interpret them as "Christian." This is what happened, and the result of this is the confusion of American ideals and basic principles with those of Christianity. If America is a "Christian Nation," then our basic ideals and practices must be Christian. They are not. In fact, as we will soon see in subsequent episodes, they are far removed from the teachings of Jesus and His early disciples. They are just as far removed from Biblical teaching as the Founding Father's beliefs were from orthodoxy. This is true in all areas except the area of morality for the Founding Father's believed the purpose of Christianity or any other religion was to establish a moral framework which would allow our society and our democracy to flourish.

The interesting fact is that the Founding Fathers were more correct in their understanding of Biblical morality than the average person who considers themselves a Christian today. Today, as we saw in the first episode of this series, the average Christianity, including many who identify as Evangelical, sees Biblical morality as a smorgasbord of ideal from which they can pick and choose depending on the situation in which they find themselves.

#### **4. Culture is Based on Ideal and Basic Beliefs Not Just Behavioral Patterns**

Finally, there is one more, over-arching reason why this is important to our study of American cultural Christianity. Most people see culture as a pattern of behaviors, as you saw in the definition I gave you from anthropologist E. Adamson Heobe in the last episode. However, behaviors and behavioral patterns do not just form out of thin air. There is always something at the root of those behaviors, whether they be individual behaviors or cultural behaviors common to the people of a society.

In a class that I teach to young men and women in juvenile detention called, "Why do I do what I do when I do what I do," we discuss this very topic. For many of them, it is a life-changer. The basic concept of this class is that most people allow their experiences and feelings to drive their behaviors. This leads to many wrong behaviors that put those who live like this in a very difficult situation. You know . . . Like juvenile detention. However, it is not limited to juveniles, but all age groups who live by their life experiences and feelings. The way to change this is to understand that our belief system drives our thinking, which drives our attitude, which drives our behaviors, which in turn creates the majority of our life experiences and feelings. For the Biblically minded Christian, our belief system is set by revelation, not rationalism, as the Founding Fathers believed.

#### **5. Four Ideals or Basic Beliefs of American Culture Introduced.**

So, here is the bottom line. The culture of America, or any society, comes from basic beliefs or premises, which eventually drive our behaviors, which form our life experiences and feelings, establishing cultural, behavioral patterns. Thus to understand a specific culture, we must look far beyond specific behavioral patterns to the basic beliefs or premises of that culture. This is why I have taken so much time, at the possible expense of listeners turning this podcast off, to outline how the basis on which America was founded was something far less and far different

from Christianity and especially Evangelical Christianity. The belief that America was founded by Christians on Christian principles is one main reason why it is so hard for American Christians to differentiate between American Cultural Christianity and Kingdom Christianity.

Here are a few of the ideals and basic beliefs, which produce American cultural behavior patterns and have turned American Christianity into a cultural Christianity.

- Rationalism, which is promoted at the expense of Spirituality
- Individualism, which expresses itself in self-reliance and self-sufficiency, as well as many other activities that fill up the hearts and minds of those attached to the American culture.
- Pragmatism, which feeds off all the advancements of a society based on rationalism and scientific discovery and causes people to trust more in modern methodologies than in the Biblical spiritual principles of Christ and His early followers.
- Independence, which in turn feeds individuality over community, competition over cooperation, and trust in oneself over trust in God.

Once again, please remember, I am not simply against these basic premises of Americanism. They have done well for the American people. But the kingdom of God is not about doing well for the American people. Because all Jesus followers belong to a higher culture, which was inaugurated and established by Jesus in His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, we must speak to these issues. I am not anti-American or anti any other government or culture. I, as you are if you are in Christ, are simply a part of a completely different kingdom with completely different values.

The only reason I am talking about these things is so that we can move toward the revitalization of conventional Christianity—one person at a time. “Why do we have to revitalize contemporary Christianity? The American culturalization of Christianity is a big reason why this revitalization must take place. Always remember the desperate situation the church finds itself in, which we discussed in the first episode of this series.

Here is the big question I want you to consider today. Will you be one of those who are a part of this revitalization movement? For it will only happen one person at a time.

## **6. Closing**

Obviously, I have taken up our time on this episode of inside Jimbo’s head. That was not my original intent, but it is our reality. Because of that, we will continue, in the next episode, this discussion on Cultural Christianity and four of the areas of Americanism which have been ingested by the American church initiating American Cultural Christianity at the expense of God’s Kingdom Christianity.

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<sup>i</sup> Many of the statements made in this section come directly from the book: Gregg L. Grazer, *The Religious Beliefs of America’s Founders, Reason, Revelation, and Revolution*, University Press of Kansas, 2012

<sup>ii</sup> Richard Morin, *The Way We Weren’t: Religion In Colonial America*, November 26, 1995, *The Washington Post*; Quoting Rodney Stark University of Washington; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1995/11/26/the-way-we-werent-religion-in-colonial-america/6cb64903-30f4-435e-a415-6be0f0465bfe/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.3237e7be2af0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1995/11/26/the-way-we-werent-religion-in-colonial-america/6cb64903-30f4-435e-a415-6be0f0465bfe/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.3237e7be2af0)