

Questions for thoughtful Christians

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Christianity offers the promise of eternal life for those who believe and accept Jesus as saviour. According to this promise, mortals can become immortal, and those who are saved through their faith and their acceptance of Jesus will exist in a state of eternal bliss. This “good news” promise works efficiently provided believers are not inclined to ask too many questions and are willing to keep their religious faith strong through prayer, reassurance from clergy, and from Christian fellowship.

The Big Bang occurred approximately 13.7 billion years ago. When astrophysicists are asked if the Big Bang was created by God, they reply that astronomy can make no evidence-based comments on this question.

A question arises as to what came before the Big Bang. Consider the musings of an ancient Hindu writer of the Rig Veda, X, 129, the oldest of the 4 Vedas:

*Was neither Being nor Non-Being then,
Neither Air nor Space beyond.
What was It, forcefully stirring?
Where? In whose Keeping? Was it
Water deep beyond sound?
This creation, where it came from,
Whether a foundation or not, He who
Surveys from highest heaven, Alone knows.....
Unless He knows nothing about it?*

Christians are less humble about the things the Rig Veda writer and astronomers don't know. They claim that God, as the prime mover or first cause or uncaused cause, created the universe.

A useful convention employed in science, logic, and legal systems states that those who present a claim are the ones upon whom the onus falls to bring forth evidence in support of their claim.

Here are some questions thoughtful Christians might consider:

1. If humans are at the apex of God's creation, which began 13.7 billion years ago, but did not appear on earth until approximately one million or more years ago, and if

Jesus came to earth as God's son only about 2000 years ago to save humankind for all eternity, this hardly seems to be an efficient plan for the salvation of all humankind. Why did God wait for 998,000 or more years before sending his son, Jesus, to offer salvation and eternal life for all humankind?

2. We are off-spring of our parents. We are children of this planet or of the universe. But the universe is finite according to the Christian view. That is, it began about 13.7 billion years ago. As children of the universe, we are mortal and finite. Is it really to be believed that if we accept Jesus as saviour, we are the only living thing that can exceed the bounds of a finite universe and become infinite or eternal? Eternity means having no beginning and no end. (*Encyclopaedic Edition Webster's*). If we don't accept Jesus, or in some parts of the world, have never heard of him, are we still eternal beings? Is eternity for Christians a concept that begins only at birth and continues on timelessly? If so, is this truncated concept of *eternity* the correct word to use?

3. Christians believe theirs is a religion of humility, favoured by God for all eternity. The various Christian varieties of religion make up about 1.5 billion followers, a number which approximates the number of followers of Islamic religions. That is, in a total population of seven billion, about 80% of the world's population is not Christian. Does this statistic give Christians pause for thought when they claim that eternal life is to be had only by Christians?

4. Eternal salvation through acceptance of Jesus may lessen the importance that Christians place on what we do here on earth. Such a belief may negate the personal responsibility of taking charge of one's own ethical growth and development in the here and now. Does it lessen, or does it enhance, the importance of preserving and caring for our planet in favour of a preparation for a promised eternal life elsewhere?

Of course, there are thoughtful and caring liberal Christians who have concerns and "answers" for these questions. Do their answers allow their fellow believers to accept a faith that promises too much on too little rational thought and on little or no evidence?

I have heard various answers to these questions, but I would like to hear yours also.