



## What is the Point of Being a Christian?

*Timothy Radcliffe*

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***What is the Point of Being a Christian?* has been awarded the prestigious Michael Ramsey prize for the best in theological writing. For more information please visit: [www.michaelramseyprize.org.uk](http://www.michaelramseyprize.org.uk)**

What is the Point of being a Christian? One is pointed to God, who is the point of everything. If one thinks of religion as just 'useful' then one has reduced it to another consumer product. But if we are pointed to God, then this should make a difference to how we live. This is not a moral superiority. Christians are usually no better than anyone else. But the lives of Christians should be marked by some form of hope, freedom, happiness and courage. If they are not then why should anyone believe a word they say? In this new book, Timothy Radcliffe is at his best, writing with a prophetic edge. His argument for Christian belief is profoundly Catholic and profoundly human. But what is just as remarkable, Radcliffe's argument for and interpretation of Christian Gospel is couched in a deep understanding of human nature and the problems and anxieties of modern men and women. Radcliffe is far distant from the theologian's ivory tower and yet his understanding of the Gospel is profoundly theological. The frame of reference for this book is wide, and it is based amongst other things on Fr Radcliffe's pastoral experience of dealing with people with problematic marriages, those struggling with celibacy, those trying to understand the nature of religious authority and those trying to remain loyal to the Church which finds their sexual orientation 'irregular'.

## What is the Point of Being a Christian? Details

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## **From Reader Review What is the Point of Being a Christian? for online ebook**

### **Marc says**

Short tracts (sermons?) on various topics, illuminating the added value of the Christianity. Interesting, but not really heartwarming. Perhaps too intellectual?

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### **Karen says**

Encouraging and affirming; it looks at the big picture of faith and encourages full commitment rather than a half-hearted lipservice

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### **John Larrere says**

Starts very well. Loses steam toward the end.

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### **Rachel Murphy says**

I really loved this book. I was initially put off by the title, which felt too utilitarian or something, but when I got into it, I felt like it was such a wealth of insight. Radcliffe is incredible at applying biblical concepts and virtues and looking at them from the perspective of the culture. You can see that he has a beautiful relationship with God and the book is incredibly deep and challenging. I feel like I highlighted like 10% of the book, there were so many really well expressed thoughts.

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### **Sean Goh says**

The point in the title addresses the "How" question more than the "why" question, prepare your mental framework accordingly. Slowed down towards the middle chapters, but good summarising conclusion.

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We talk about love, freedom, happiness and so on, but unless our churches are seen really to be places in which people are free and courageous, then why should anyone believe us? Is our good news really treated as such?

There can be no preaching of the good news unless it springs from joy.

Who are we? This is placed between questions about the past and the future. We can only know who we are if we have a longer story which looks backwards and forwards. Our Christian ancestors lived within the story that looked back to Creation and forward to the Kingdom. We come from God and go back to God again.

The point of Christianity, before anything else, is to show that there is a point to our lives. Our lives are pointed towards some ultimate end.

Every one of us, surely, has known that moment when we are drifting towards some sin that we do not admit to ourselves. We set out to sin, fooling ourselves that we are going to do something else, hating ourselves for the buried intentions that we do not acknowledge even to ourselves.

Ethics is entirely concerned with doing what you want, that is to say, being free. Most of the difficulty arises from the difficulty of recognising what we want.

Regret is being sorry for what one did in the past. Remorse is discovering that one never really wished to do it at all. Spontaneity is the fruit of being single-hearted.

So spontaneity is not doing the first thing that comes into one's head. It is acting from the core of one's being, where God is, sustaining one in existence.

Maybe one reason why so many young people believe but have no desire to belong is because they do not find a shared rejoicing at the heart of our Christian celebrations.

The mechanisms of approval train us in deceit. Delight invites us to come into the open and be seen as we are.

In infatuation, the beloved is elevated to the position of God. Of course, what we are worshipping is our own creation. It is a projection. Perhaps nearly all true love goes through this insane, obsessive stage. The only cure for it is to live with the person day by day, and see that they are not God, just his child. Love matures when we are healed of this illusion and find ourselves face to face with a real person and not a projection of our desires. As Octavio Paz says, 'Love reveals reality to desire.'

In opposition lust reduces the other person to a mere sexual object, something only to satisfy one's sexual needs. In lust, one claims to be God oneself, dominating the other.

Enter chastity, retaining the dynamic balance along this spectrum. If egoism takes over then one tips into lust, and if infatuation then self-denial may be so absolute one loses all identity.

Ethics is not about what is permitted or forbidden, but seeks to articulate the meaning of what we do. The Christian claim is that to give one's body to another person is an act with an intrinsic meaning and that if we sleep around promiscuously we are contradicting the meaning embedded in our bodies, which is bound to lead to frustration and unhappiness.

Humility is liberation from compulsion to claim the centre of the stage, accepting to play a part in the story that one shares with others, but not necessarily always with the leading role. As so often, virtue is about living in the real world in which we are not always stars.

Walter Davis: 'the self is not a substance one unearths by peeling away layers until one gets to the core, but an integrity one struggles to bring into existence.'

Rowan Williams: 'We do not grow without competition, but competition without mutual recognition and mutual need is barbarous and self-destructive.'

The three idols whose worship deforms the global village: Cultivation of limitless desire, absolutisation of private property and the deification of money.

Often, the issue in political correctness is not what one says but the message 'that might be sent'. One must not give the wrong signal. This implies a profound distrust of the intelligence of people and an understanding

of language in terms of sound bites rather than as a subtle tool with which to search for understanding.

Dissonance, if you are interested, leads to discovery. When one dares to entertain two truths that seem to be incompatible, then one is forced to look for the larger horizon in which they may be reconciled.

On the Sabbath: We need moments of leisure where we serenely let ourselves be naked before God and in the eyes of those whom we love. It takes time to unveil ourselves, to let ourselves be seen in our complexity and our contradictions. You cannot show yourself in a moment.

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### **A.L. Stumo says**

He never fully answers the title question, but he does discuss his views on what Christians should think and feel. He is very eloquent and quite often incisive. If the title question was How do I become a complete Christian, then he'd be closer to answering it.

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### **Denise says**

I am not sure that everyone reading this book will "get the point" of a Christian world view, but he argues for a perspective beyond "what's in it for me" as a way of life. Good reading for those in despair about the current state of affairs in the RC Church.

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### **Susan Bradley says**

Very interesting from a theological standpoint but Radcliffe also adds practical points and applicability as well. It gets a bit involved toward the end of the book with all the material he covers however it is an excellent summary of what we as Christians believe and why to believe it. It can make for a challenging read.

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### **Shantanu says**

good book.

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### **Brendan says**

Timothy Radcliffe presents a more positive outlook on the Church's stances regarding sexual ethics, politics, etc; and certainly emphasizes "what we're for" as opposed to "what we're against."

While I think he attempted to address a few too many topics for one book, he certainly seems to understand the intricacies of doctrine, and espouses the power of a unified Church, the only Church that can really blossom in modern times.

Key takeaway: The relationship he derived from the Last Supper and sexual ethics was unlike any I've heard before. Awesome perspective on the fundamental story of the new Christian covenant.

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