

CANA eLetter JULY 2024

What is the point of Christianity?



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What is the point of Christianity?

What would your answer be?

‘The question asks what is ‘the’ point in Christianity, as if it can be boiled down to one idea or statement. I think the best answer to this question is many sided. Christianity can mean different things to different people – and that’s a good thing – we are all made differently and need different things on our spiritual journey.’ Ian Mowl (Interfaith Minister and Green Spirit Co-ordinator)

‘For me there is only any point in ‘Christianity’ (i.e. the community of professed followers) if Jesus’ divinely inspired teachings are genuinely attempted to be lived out daily. It is my life-long commitment to do that.’ Carol Beck

What is the point of Christianity?

Jane Upchurch



This takes me to the question ‘What is the point of Jesus?’ which unfortunately does not seem to have the same answer. (In my comments, when I use the term ‘we’ I mean my experience of traditional Christian understanding and the voice I added to it for many years.)

Jesus came as ‘the son of God’, a man embodying God or what some call the Christ energy. This was not in order to be worshipped – in fact he spoke against this. But to show that all of us, made in the image of God, can be as close to God as Jesus was. He taught and embodied an intimacy available to us all. He came to bring us closer, but we have shoved him back to a throne in heaven that we can never attain.

He came to tell us that we do not need to fear death and that he has prepared a place for us to be with him when we die. But we have misunderstood ‘hell’. This is our translation of gehenna which was the rubbish tip outside Jerusalem and was often on fire. Jesus taught that this is how our lives would feel if we made wrong choices. Much of his message was to help us to live our lives here and now, for our own sake and others’, but we have made it a litmus test for entry into heaven. Many people I know, including faithful church-attending Christians, fear death and hell.

He came to show that God’s love is for all, for Jews and gentiles, men, women and children, the religious and the ‘sinner’. He had women as disciples and leaders, historically forbidden by the church. And his message for us was to love. I have seen a lot of love in churches, but I have also seen judgement and exclusion. The underlying message of hell for unbelievers is one of exclusion and not love. Jesus showed that God was a God of justice but we have made him a God of judgement.

Jesus came to empower us (‘Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven’) but seeing him as the Saviour that we all need to depend on has disempowered us. We have taken up the identity of sinners and have bound following him into a set of tight rules, allegiance and attendance when he came to set us free.

We still have a male God, but Jesus didn't call him Father but rather Abwoon (in the Aramaic) which includes male and female and is verb not noun, our ongoing parenting from our divine source.

Jesus' main message was about the Kingdom of heaven, a realm within us and beyond, that we can enter into or not. This translates from the Aramaic as 'the reign of unity', and we now have the science to understand that all of reality is a unified field; there is no separation between us and God, the planet or each other – the kingdom of heaven. But Christianity has been one of many voices teaching separation.

Without the church and Christianity the message of Jesus would have died, and there is much embodied there that is or has been helpful and God inspired. But there is so much we have missed out on. Jesus came at a time of great upheaval and change such as we are in at the moment. Let us hope that his message can make the difference it intended to now in a way that it has never before.

What is the point of Christianity

Don MacGregor



What is the message that Christianity is trying to convey? My view is something like this:

- There is a God of love in whom we live and move and have our being.
- Jesus showed us what it is like to fulfil human potential, to be a god-filled human being, which led to his death and changed the information pattern, the morphic field, for all humanity. He demonstrated for us the Christ path.
- In this one man, humanity and the Christ aspect of God were joined. Divine Love and Wisdom shone forth in human form.
- In following the path blazed by Jesus the Christ, we are all on a journey of transformation into wholeness.
- There are new spiritual energies coming in at this auspicious time which are raising the consciousness of humanity.
- This is the way forward for the human race, to be slowly transformed for the betterment of humanity.
- The gospel message should be, 'Awaken now to the reality of the divine presence within and embrace the mind of Christ.'

D. MacGregor. *Christianity Expanding: Into Universal Spirituality*. Alresford UK: Christian Alternative Books. 2020

What is the Point of Christianity?

Judy Hanmer



For two thousand years Christianity has given meaning to many millions of lives. In this country Christian values have permeated society and the language of the Bible has profoundly influenced our language and literature. But in our multi-cultural world many of us are beginning to recognise that other faiths are also valid. If I had been born in another country and culture I might well have grown up as a Muslim, or a Hindu or a Buddhist. For me these faiths would have been just as relevant to a beneficial foundation for life. So perhaps the question should be 'what is the point of having a faith?'

I can only answer this question from a personal point of view as I am aware that other people might give very different answers: for me a faith provides a framework, a map or pathway by which to live one's life and despite my doubts about the obviously man-made nature of Christian theology, I find I need that framework in order to make sense of life in a world when everything seems to be in flux.

This is reinforced by the strong sense I have had since childhood that there is a benevolent creative force behind the universe and that the natural world is somehow sacred. I don't know where this came from, but when attending a convent for a term aged seven the atmosphere in the chapel there spoke to me much more deeply than words, and this remained with me despite assemblies at other schools where the emphasis was on correct behaviour rather than any sort of inner spirituality. Later I encountered some inspiring Christian teachers from various denominations, including some very radical nuns and Jesuits who were often in trouble with church authorities for thinking outside the box.

I didn't realise that the form of Christianity which I had discovered for myself was unorthodox until attending an Alpha course at a local church: Three reasons for believing in God: one, two, three! I didn't believe in the sort of God which could be pinned down in comfortable categories like that. However I still greatly value the aspect of Christianity which gives God (whatever one means by the term) a human face and its emphasis on the need to extend the commandment on loving one's neighbour to loving one's enemies as well. Other religions tend to place their main

emphasis on doing the right thing. Reading the psalms one cannot imagine the writers of the Old Testament ever attempting to love their enemies.

Care for the community is one of the reasons I hang on in with my local church because a village church represents something solid within a community, a place which is available to celebrate the important events of life such as baptisms, marriages and funerals and which, at its best, offers support, kindness, compassion and spiritual succour when they are most needed, especially in times of illness and bereavement. There may be only a small congregation on a Sunday but village funerals and memorial services are packed, with standing room only.

So for me there is a point in having a faith, and because I grew up in a culture which owed much of its ethos to Christianity the path I have followed has been a Christian one, latterly deeply influenced by the philosophy of other faiths rather than their belief systems.

What's the point of Christianity – a personal reflection

Jenny Cuff



As I began to think of this knotty question, I was drawn back into my first impressions of Christianity. My dad related a World War II story of how, as a patient in a military hospital, he saw the padre visiting the men on the wards. As he moved from bed to bed, the padre asked each man whether they were Church of England or Roman Catholic. When the answer came C of E, the Padre moved on without another word. My sick dad was sickened even more and from that day on had a kind of bitterness towards the cruel abandonment he had felt so keenly at this time, far away from home and uncomfortably, very vulnerable.

That didn't stop my parents choosing a convent education for me when it was my turn to experience the otherness of my non-catholic background. Catholic girls, wearing their black veils, would attend morning and evening prayers in the chapel, while the non-Catholics knelt before a sacred heart Jesus statue in a little vestibule in a different part of the building.

During the school day, we recited the Hail Mary before each lesson, and as grace at meal times, and we seemed to hear continuous talk of sin, punishment, purgatory and how Jesus had suffered on the cross to save us from those sins. The creed, most earnestly professing belief in it all, was frequently intoned.

I do remember setting up a little altar in my bedroom with holy pictures printed in Italy, illustrating highly coloured beautiful depictions of holy Mary mother of God, Jesus and Joseph and saints from the Bible stories. I had the idea that I needed to keep on the right side of all this, and by kneeling in front of these icons and praying I would be seen as working towards being holy and good. Maybe, just maybe, one day I might achieve this goodly status as long as I continued this practice.

Thus the stage was set for me of a Christianity where the point was to be good and to such a degree as to avoid being sent to hell. Perhaps even earning a place in heaven, albeit unlikely.

Slowly, and over many years, I have managed to get past those old messages, recognising them as a myopic view. Today, through years of study and meditation, what matters to me comes down to Jesus' life of service and his message of love to all, friend or foe. Through cultivating in our own selves, the qualities of unconditional love we can be sustained and can follow his example to be alongside those in need of comfort and support.

This then can open the door to understanding one's own hardships and from this perspective and in all humility the point of Christianity can offer us an opportunity to be of service to one another, to a cause, and the wider world.

***'Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Emotional Sense'* by Francis Spufford. Review by Judy Hanmer**

The blurb describes this book as 'a brief, witty, personal, sharp-tongued defence of Christian belief, taking on Dawkin's *The God Delusion*'. It is certainly witty – I laughed a lot – but I would add a warning that it is not a read for anyone who objects to strong language!

Francis Spufford begins by describing all the things that people dislike about Christianity; for instance 'Over the last fifty years, we really have been escaping, as a culture, from a set of cruel and restricting rules, which (yes) did have the sanction of religion behind them.' I didn't find this section particularly valuable, having heard most of it before, but the chapter on Yeshua was, for me, a very refreshing and inspiring look at Jesus' life. No 'gentle Jesus meek and mild' here; the Jesus Spufford portrays says 'I am not what you were told. I am not your king or your judge... I am the father who longs for every last one of his children... I am the friend who will never leave you... I am the light behind the darkness... I am the shining your shame cannot extinguish ... I am the refining fire ... I am gift without cost ...'

Spufford admits to having simplified and selected and heightened the story but somehow, in so doing, he brings to life what it might have been like to listen to Jesus, rather than listening to the pontifications of some of the churchmen who have attempted to use his life to control and coerce us into obedience, ignoring the freedom to take risks, without fear for the future, that Jesus himself offers to us.

**From John Shelby Spong, *A New Christianity for a New World*,
(Harper San Francisco, 2001)**

‘This God is not a supernatural entity who rides into time and space to rescue the distressed. This God is the source of life, the source of love, the Ground of Being. The theistic God of yesterday is a symbol for the essence, the being of life which we share.

- God is life, we say, and we worship this God by living fully
- God is love, we say, and we worship this God by loving wastefully
- God is Being, we say, and we worship this God by having the courage to be all that we can.’ (p73)

‘What human life needs is not a divine rescue. What we need is a life so open, so free, so whole, and so loving that, when we experience that life, we are called into the reality of love. We are opened to the source of love and enter the empowering presence of love. Such a life then becomes our doorway into the infinite and inexhaustible power of love. I call that love God. I see it in Jesus of Nazareth, and I find myself called into a new being, a boundary-free humanity, and made whole in its presence. So God was in Christ, I say. Jesus thus reveals the source of love, and then he calls us to enter it.’ (p.141)

What is the Point of Christianity?

Jonathan Robinson



Are we talking about Christianity as it is now or how it was in its origins? How far have we and the Church strayed from the original beauty and simplicity of the foundations of the faith. The written gospels are inevitably selective and to a degree subject to the intentions, understanding and memories of the authors.

I don't think we should expect definitive answers, and we can all contribute something to this debate. People often say 'Spirituality, yes, but not religion'. Religion can ossify the faith. But maybe that is too simplistic. So as a contribution I want to make two points which seem especially relevant today:

The first is *the valuing of nature and the natural world around us*. So many people make their spiritual connections through nature. That quiet walk in the natural world when we can be alone, listening to birdsong, the beauty of flowers and trees. The parables of Jesus are about nature. 'The lilies of the field, the birds of the air, the fig

tree, the mustard seed, the clasp of a child's hand....' Nature can be and always has been a gateway to the beyond, to an overpowering sense of awe, beauty and sense of presence. However, in the time of Jesus they did not have the marvels of modern technology nor the material affluence which we have today. Technology and affluence can be both a blessing and a curse.

But the Old Testament contains passages which corrupt this nature loving image. God gives us dominion over every living thing (Genesis 1.26). Dualism becomes rampant, and the brutality we have inflicted on nature has become an act of blasphemy which religion sadly has so often supported.

My second point is *sharing*. Sharing implies relationships. 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them' (Matthew 18. 19-20). Through good relationships our lives are enriched and we become more than our individual selves. Relationships are about how we connect with each other, with the world around us and with the sacredness of cosmic consciousness (a substitute for the word 'God') which is both within us and around us everywhere. Hence the emphasis on peace, forgiveness, compassion, empathy and love and all that gives meaning to our lives.

Christianity encourages our connections with each other, thus providing us with a pathway that can lead us beyond our own natural self-centredness into a larger experience of life, a gateway to the 'beyond', to the 'more than' that beckons us and somehow never leaves us. 'He that will lose his life will find it, and he that grasps at life will be disappointed'. 'From darkness, lead me to the Light.'

What is the point of Christianity? It invites us on a journey. It encourages us on a pathway. But the journey and the pathway are not set in the cold stones of rigidity of belief, control and regulation. The journey is the journey into the unknown. The pathway leads us into the unfathomable mystery of the Divine. It is a dynamic journey of discovery and unfolding; not into the rigidity of institutional Christianity which we so often find.

This is why I call my new liturgy 'Becoming Ourselves', because to truly become ourselves is to lose ourselves in that which is infinitely greater than this little thing I imagine as 'myself'. 'From the unreal, lead me to the real.'

What is the Point of Christianity?

Bill Upchurch

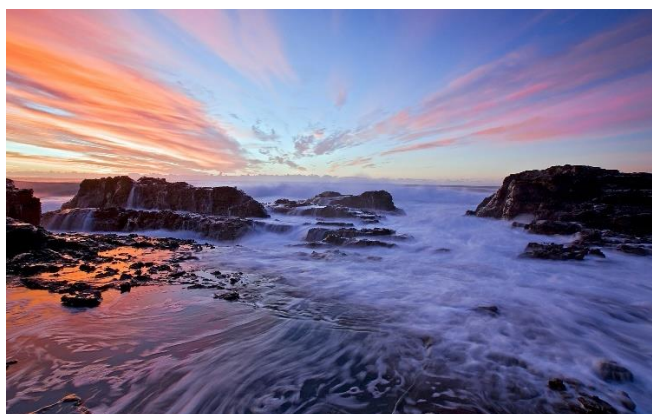
Which Christianity? The one that Jesus intended or the one that we are experiencing? Following the sayings of Jesus should stem from 'Loving God and your neighbour as yourself'. This lifestyle could be seen by the early church of the people known as The Way who as in the Acts of the Apostles cared for each other and society. This changed in 380CE when the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official state religion and thus control started of the People of The Way.

I found the 2008 book *Saving Paradise - How Christianity traded love of this world for crucifixion and empire* by Rebecca Ann Parker & Rita Nakashima Brock (Beacon Press) very informative. There are no images in churches before 960CE of Jesus dead but rather of him in an earthly paradise, filled and blessed by the Spirit of God. This was the work that Jesus did and offered us.

The early church believed that as God had become human in Jesus, so humanity would become divine – in this sense Jesus was not unique. The Holy Spirit empowers the body of Christ to divine deeds – healing, teaching, resisting oppression, working for justice, practicing love and non-violence, living with integrity. Could we restore this kind of Christianity, living by Jesus' message of love?

What is the point of Christianity?

Janice Dolley



It can seem to us living today that unless western society can re-discover the essential teachings of Jesus the Christ we will find it impossible to breakthrough the egoic pursuit of power by those working towards materialistic ends in politics, economics, business, finance and other aspects of the way society currently works. A key question, however, is what version of the essential teaching are we referring to? Mainstream orthodoxy through the centuries has increasingly focused on the man Jesus and the necessity of believing in him to be 'saved'. This has been an exoteric or outer stream of understanding within which the esoteric - deeper and hidden meetings have surfaced periodically.

Many aspects of this deeper understanding derive from the teachings of the Essenes within which tradition it seems that Jesus was raised. The Essene brotherhood flourished from 200 BCE to 100CE. They saw the universe as a gigantic cosmic order in which inexhaustible sources of energy, knowledge and harmony were at the people's disposal. In an essay I have recently discovered written in 1977 by Sir George Trevelyan he says that the Essenes conceived of an ocean of life, of living thought and of love and that these great oceans were seen as an organic unity of which humanity was an integral part. They also envisioned many realms of being including the angelic who did not need free will because they are an aspect of the consciousness of God in whose service they exist. It is man, 'a little lower than the

angels', who having been given free will as part of the divine experiment, is able to 'err and fall into evil ways'.

It is as though we are currently rediscovering that unless we stop doing things that put us out of tune with the Law of God as understood by the Essenes our world could indeed be faced with the possibility of disaster unless we undergo a great change of thinking. Sir George saw this and stressed that 'any tribulations could be seen as a prelude to a great cleansing of the planet in preparation for the descent of the New Jerusalem and entry into the Golden Age'.....and that our need was to 'recognise that the Avatar of love, peace, harmony and synthesis, who can redeem our world, if we will in freedom call upon him, is no less than the cosmic Christ that overlighted the great Essene teacher, Jesus.'

Maybe the point of Christianity is twofold: Those with an understanding of the promise 'Behold I make all things new' need to ask on behalf of the whole for this redemption and at the same time encourage the more secular world to adopt the Golden Rule enshrined in every faith tradition of 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'

From J Cannato, 2010. *Field of Compassion*. Notre Dame IN: Sorin Books

'While Jesus was the evolutionary first, those who follow after him must enter into the process of accepting as fully as they can the divine self-communication that is at the heart of evolutionary history and human life. In this sense, 'The Christ' is not a reference to a person, but to a kind of consciousness that is resonant with the Spirit and expresses itself in freedom and love.' p. 56

Lodestone

Jesus is a mark of God
filling and affirming the natural world,
incarnating the carnal,
blessing the physical by taking on flesh,
destroying the barriers between material and spiritual,
between sacred and common,
between senses and sensing,
between sanctity and self.

Jesus is my lodestone
for a spirituality which is not emasculated,
a God who is not distant,
a world that is not worthless,
a faith that is part of life.

Now I know God can be
as intimate as blood,
as real as breath.

Jane Upchurch

EVENTS

CANA Online Sacred Space for Lughnasadh (COSS)



10.30 Wednesday 31st July

Cana Conscious Conversations (CCC)



Saturday 14th September 2024 10.30-12.30 by zoom
Spiritual roots in stormy times
with Alan Heeks

Saturday 30th November 2024 10.30-12.30 by zoom
Revelations of the Aramaic Jesus
With Neil Douglas Klotz

Collaboration with While Eagle Lodge



Saturday 2nd November 2024 2.00-5.00 by zoom
Our journeys of transformation – death, dying and rebirth

Please email Bill at admin@cana.org.uk to participate in any of these.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

CANA is organised and managed by a small team of volunteers – the ‘Core Group’. We are looking for some new faces to join us, as the existing group is inevitably getting older and we need to plan for the future. We meet online using Zoom about once every month or two, depending on what is being organised, and share something of our personal lives and a short meditation/attunement at the beginning of the meetings. Ideas and direction often emerge out of the meditation. Before the pandemic, we met in person about three times a year, but Zoom has meant that we can organise and facilitate meetings more easily. Using this for our Conscious Conversations has meant that we reach far more people – our list of supporters has doubled in the last four years!

As you are probably aware, we are seeking a spiritual path that retains the central teaching of Jesus, and yet sees it as a universal path, not just Christian. To that end, we would like to invite volunteers to join the Core Group who have sympathies with that viewpoint and would like to help develop our programme of events – and have a basic level of computer skills to take part. Particular skills that would be of help are:

- taking notes from meetings and distributing them,
- graphic design for leaflets and publicity,
- website maintenance using Wordpress,
- experience of managing Zoom meetings.
- experience with Mailchimp

If you feel you could offer your time and energy in any capacity, or want to discuss it further, please get in touch with Don MacGregor (donmacg@live.co.uk, 07900 003199) or Jane Upchurch (janeupchurch@blueyonder.co.uk, 01895 639476)

DONATIONS

CANA operates on a gift economy so if you would like to contribute and do not already, then contact us (see below) and we will send details, or go to the page on our website [Donate](#)

To make your own suggestions on this topic, or any other comments, please email info@cana.org.uk, ring Jane or Bill on 01895 639476 or write to them at 20 Manor Road, Ruislip, Middx HA4 7LB.

*May love and light fill your life and our world
bringing healing and wholeness*

CANA (*Christians Awakening to New Awareness*) is a network of people responding to the new impulse of Spirit at this time, companions on the way. Many of us recognise its resonance with the teachings of Jesus as a way of transformation. Our hope is to rediscover and re-imagine a path leading towards a more universal spirituality that can operate with respect for all living creatures and all faiths, a path of love and service for the betterment of all. This is not just about the transformation of the individual, but the global shift of humanity to a higher way of being and of love that Jesus termed ‘the realm of God’.

www.cana.org.uk