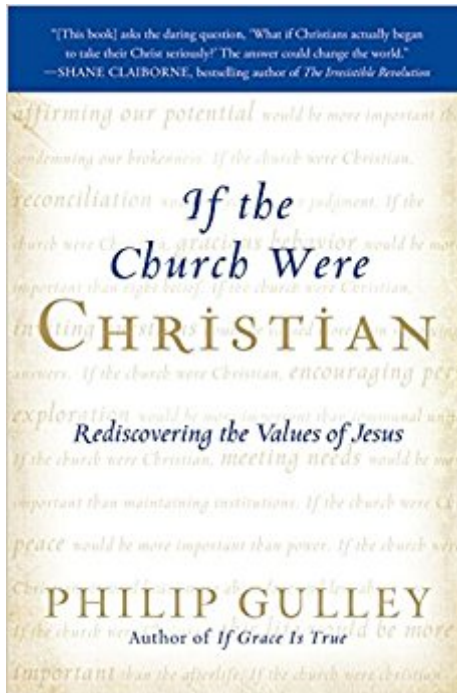




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If The Church Were Christian: Rediscovering The Values Of Jesus



Synopsis

The largest group in American religious life may be the disillusioned "people who have been involved in the church, respect Jesus, but question what Christianity has become. In *If the Church Were Christian* Philip Gulley provides a profound picture of what the church could look like if it refocused on the priorities of Jesus.

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Customer Reviews

• "Filled with memorable, insightful and revealing stories. I recommend it." • (Marcus Borg)
• Philip Gulley separates wheat from chaff, experience from explanation and purpose from function in this book. He calls the Jesus message into a new vision - one that has both power and integrity." • (John Shelby Spong, author of *Eternal Life: A New Vision*)
• Gulley puts the Christ back in Christian. This manifesto is a call not just to worship Jesus, but to follow him. It asks the daring question, "What if Christians actually began to take their Christ seriously?" • The answer to that question could change the world." • (Shane Claiborne, bestselling author of *The Irresistible Revolution*)
• Gulley has done a fine job pinpointing the flaws of the Christian churches and suggesting transformative paths to follow." • (Spirituality and Practice)
• [Gulley's] effortless and uncomplicated style allows for easy reading over some heavy material." • (Library Journal)
• Gulley's newest book is thoughtful, insightful and a joy to read." • (Indianapolis Star)

While many denominations claim to be growing, the largest group in American religious life is the disillusionedâ "people who have been involved in the church yet see few similarities between the church's life and the person of Jesus. In the midst of elaborate programming, professional worship teams, and political crusades, they ask, "Is this really what Jesus called us to do?"While the church has dismissed these people as uncommitted and lacking in faith, perhaps the opposite is true. Their commitment to authentic spirituality over institutional idolatry might be the very corrective the church needs. These people respect Jesus, but question what Christianity has become.

In *If the Church Were Christian*, Quaker pastor and author Philip Gulley explores how the church has lost its way. This eye-opening examination of the values of Jesus reveals the extent to which the church has drifted from the teachings of the man who inspired its creation. Many Christians might be surprised to discover how little Jesus had to say about the church, and that he might never have intended to start a new religion. But the church is here to stay, and Gulley is determined to help the church find its soul. If the church were Christian, Gulley argues, affirming our potential would be more important than condemning our brokenness. If the church were Christian, inviting questions would be valued more than supplying answers. If the church were Christian, meeting needs would be more important than maintaining institutions. These simple statements return us to the heart of what Jesus cared about during his ministry. Gulley provides a profound picture of what the church would look like if it refocused on the real priorities of Jesus. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It is not surprising, really, that in many main-stream denominational churches the sayings of Jesus have not been taught, interpreted, nor understood. Therefore little value has been placed on Jesus as the Way, the Truth, the Life. The author does an excellent job exposing the truth of the Christian Church: what it is lacking, what needs to be done to restore credibility and foster true believers in Christ. His descriptive style of writing, along with plenty of "right on" illustrations, drive home the sad state of affairs across our land. I felt right at home with the theme and points to challenge my life. Truly an amazing book on a highly controversial subject. Get fired up with this text!

The premise of this book is that if you call yourself a Christian, you should model your life and actions after Christ, ie.... care for the sick and poor, love your neighbor, work for peace, etc..... Philip Gulley is right on target when he says that if you call yourself a Christian Church, then the things that mattered to your founder (Christ) should matter to you. He expresses the frustration that many long time Christians and younger Christians have expressed recently: that the Church is more

caught up in its own bureaucracy and perpetuating mediocrity than it is in encouraging members to live meaningful lives, dedicated to the values of Christ. As a life-long Christian, it is good to see that there are devout, modern Christians who feel the same way. Suggest frustrated believers who are tired of the current wave of mega-churches and overly judgmental church bureaucracies might be comforted to hear Gulley's message- I know I was.

Throughout this book, it becomes obvious that Philip Gulley lives in the love and grace which Christ taught and lived. Though the whole book is a critique of the church, none of it is done in a harsh, in-your-face way. The entire approach is incredibly graceful. In almost every chapter, he includes an extremely vulnerable account of his own shortfalls in the subject the chapter discusses. He sincerely confesses his own experience with what he talks about. Because of his experiences, he understands the mindsets he is critiquing and is able to provide good solutions in a very Christ-like way. The whole book is made up of stories he uses to convey his points--examples of Christians or churches who have failed to live the Gospel (including himself), and examples of Christians who live the Gospel in an undeniably Christ-like manner. That all being said, you should know that Gulley is a liberal theologian. In fact, Gulley is as liberal as one can be within Christianity (can he be considered an actual Christian?). This Quaker Pastor does not believe in the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, or in Christ's sinlessness. He doesn't believe in the inspiration of Scripture. His belief about the Bible (or at least the Gospels--he doesn't talk about his views on the other books) is a combination of the theories of Schleiermacher and Bultmann. Actually, he's like Schleiermacher in a lot of ways. There's reason to believe that he doesn't believe in miracles. He doesn't believe in anything that doesn't make sense to modern beliefs. He is also a universalist and doesn't believe in hell or Satan. He doesn't think homosexuality is a sin, I'm sure he's a theistic evolutionist, and he doesn't believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. However, on average, he only says something once a chapter that would rattle the orthodox Christian cage. So don't think the entire book is one giant liberal theology rant. But at times, his beliefs are somewhat confusing. For instance, he says that "ancient people, moved by their encounters with Jesus, sought to convey their appreciation for him in the only language they knew--miracle stories, parables, and wisdom sayings." Does this mean he believes Jesus didn't actually say what the Gospels said he did? Yet, a couple pages later, he quotes Jesus--and continues to quote him throughout the book. He sometimes says things that contradict other things that he claims. For example, he believes God is going to save every person, yet he says a couple of times that Heaven is a place no one knows even exists, suggesting that maybe he doesn't believe in Heaven--so what does he mean when he says God saves them? It seems to me

that he should have either not voiced his liberal theology in order to make his opinion valid to more Christians, or he should have provided an introduction to his belief system that would make reading his book less confusing. All of that being said, I don't want to put him in a bad light or suggest that you shouldn't read the book. We can all learn a lot from Gulley. In fact, I would say anyone in ministry--especially in church ministry--should read this book. He has a lot of great things to say from which we can learn a lot. We just have to read the book with a grain of salt. I definitely recommend it. It is very thought-provoking, challenging, convicting, and inspiring.

For readers of this review who thought Quakers were a staid, conservative lot who hung on to the traditional beliefs that have characterized the organized church for generations, hang on to your hat. Philip Gulley is none of these! He is a flaming liberal in something of the mold of retired bishop John Shelby Spong and Prof. Marcus Borg. To get the flavor of the book one needs only to note some chapter headings. For example "Jesus Would Be a Model for Living Rather Than an Object of Worship". Gulley says that to be Christian is to live by the example of Jesus. Furthermore, Jesus, he says, would likely not be pleased with all the high praise and adulation that he receives in our Sunday morning services or in our hymns or praise songs. Gulley describes in terse language why he does not believe in the virgin birth and how that belief contributed to the denigration of women. Still another chapter, "Peace Would Be More Important Than Power" There are those who in every-day life take advantage of positions of power over others and abuse power in areas beyond their expertise. He is no longer surprised that "some of the most strident voices for military force emanate from Christian quarters." The church and the nation have become so closely allied that the prophetic voice of Christ's peace is no longer heard from many in the church. One more: "This Life Would Be More Important Than the Afterlife." On this position Gulley echoes Marcus Borg, who says that in a list of 10 of Christianity's worst contributions to religion would be the emphasis on the afterlife. Gulley insists that Christianity is about this life, the one we live on earth now! While Gulley does not wish to diminish the importance of hope, he realizes that for many people the importance of "getting to heaven" is an all consuming preoccupation, which focuses all efforts in working toward "saving our own skin" rather than caring for each other here on earth. Philip Gulley, in writing "If the Church Were Christian", has uncovered the misdirected efforts of many of us and has pointed up how we might more accurately be called Christians by actually living out Christ's example rather than simply "believing". It's a great read, but do hang on to your hat! Ernest G. Barr

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