

Editor's Note

Melissa Foucar's "Christians or Christ" analyzes the process of broadening her world view. The essay critically examines some of her closely cherished assumptions, revealing how those assumptions formed and what caused her to reevaluate them. Does the author's process appeal to a certain audience? How would readers' beliefs and assumptions affect their responses to the text? Clearly, Foucar wants the reader to understand how she has changed as a result of her experiences, but is that the only rhetorical purpose here? The essay relies primarily on support drawn from the writer's personal experiences. Should she have balanced that with outside information? Why or why not?

A provocative title, series of one-word sentences, and quotation from Gandhi—how do these elements serve to engage a reader? Consider these instances of informal tone: "screwed up," "Whoa. Is this guy on crack?" or "He was sure pissing me off." What rhetorical effect is evoked by this use of casual language? Another distinctive feature is the use of italics to indicate self-reflection. How do these embedded elements work to support the essay's purpose?

Christians or Christ?

Melissa Foucar

Hypocritical. Judgmental. Boring. The number one response: mean. The words stung my ears as I watched a video interview of several people on the streets of Las Vegas saying the first word they thought of when they heard the word "Christian." *Is that seriously how we are viewed?* I thought to myself. I was saddened as I watched more and more people with similar reactions. Occasionally there was an exception from the normal responses and someone would say "nice" or "Jesus."

**"I like your Christ.
I do not like your
Christians.
They are so unlike
your Christ."
—Gandhi**

Those answers were few and far between, though, and their rarity caused my heart to ache. The words of Gandhi reverberated in my mind: "I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. They are so unlike your Christ." I had never seen those words placed before me quite so obviously.

I was born into a Christian home, raised in a Christian church, and educated in a Christian school. Basically, I have been around Christians all my life. I was baptized on June 14, 1998. Surrounded by my family and friends, I began my journey with Christ at the young age of eight. I was a typical Bible school kid: my world centered around church, and I was at the

top of my Bible class in school, able to shoot back any verse reference or Scripture thrown at me. When I became aware of the stereotype placed on Christians, I took a lot of time trying to understand it. I have spent years trying to break away from that image.

As I heard the words of the people in the video, I was shocked at first. The Christians in my life were wonderful people. Could someone really think that they are mean and judgmental? Could someone think I am mean and judgmental? I thought about it and realized that, yes, they could. Visions of people with microphones yelling on street corners flashed through my mind. I began to examine my world, the people in it, and this church that I belonged to. When I finally decided to open my eyes to the reality around me, it did not take me long to figure out just what it was that the people in the movie were referencing.

I was walking through LA one day when a man on a bullhorn came up to me, got in my face, and asked if I knew where I was going to spend eternity. I calmly answered, "Yes, in heaven" and walked on. My heart, however, was pounding with fury. *So this is what the people in Vegas were talking about.* As I passed the man I saw that he had a coffin on the corner with a mirror in it for anyone who dared to look in. No wonder people hate Christians. Another evening, I strolled down the street of a farmers market, my mind far from anything regarding Christianity, when I saw a crowd of people by one of the sidewalks. I sauntered over to see what was going on. As I approached I saw a man standing in the middle of the crowd, holding small tracts and yelling. "Have you ever committed adultery? Probably not. But have you ever lusted? That is just as bad! If you do not repent of your sins, you will go to hell!"

Whoa. Is this guy on crack? Saying all that was just going to piss people off. He was sure pissing me off. The answer to my questions regarding people's views of Christianity was becoming more and more evident; in fact, even I was beginning to hate the Christians.

I love Jesus, though. I don't do all that stuff, and I did not see people in the church that I grew up in behaving in that manner either, so there had to be other, better Christians. I turned back to the place where I was raised as a Christian to try and find another version of Christianity, the kind that acted like Christ.

I sat in church on Sunday, looking through the church bulletin: "New Softball Team Forming," "Need \$5,000 for a New Landscaping Project," and "Movie Night on Friday for the Middle Schoolers" headlined the columns. Some of that seemed kind of frivolous to me. Did we really need to re-landscape in front of the building when people were starving all over the world? I began to see the other, less radical side of my religion. This side, though not condemning people to hell, seemed to have its priorities rather screwed up as well.

About the time I came to this conclusion, I found myself reading a book that really helped me discover the Christianity I was looking for. In *The Irresistible Revolution*, Shane Claiborne refers to himself as an ordinary radical, just a normal guy loving Jesus and therefore loving others. No condemnation, no judgment, just love. He believes in community, in sharing with people who need it. He fed the homeless, questioned unfair authorities, and went to live in the slums of Philadelphia to start a project he called Simple Way. As I compared the text to Scriptures, I found that this way of living was a whole lot closer to Jesus than anything I had seen so far. I started developing my own beliefs, and in doing so became rather disenfranchised with the whole idea of corporate Christianity.

I began to tire of hearing people grumble about the worship in church on Sundays. They would complain about bad vocals or too much bass, and I could not believe that they were talking about praising God. I figured out that worship is not about singing or music, and it sure is not about how good all that sounds. It is a way of life. It is about walking and talking and living and breathing in a manner that brings glory to God. I became weary of seeing people whisper behind the backs of a young single mother, or cross to the other side of the street when passing a homeless family. One of Jesus' best friends was a prostitute, and he himself was homeless, for heaven's sake! I see Christians judging people all the time, and I can see why other people are upset by that.

I began to love people, regardless of any flaws, and try to look at everyone the way God sees them- as incredible people that He created for a specific purpose. There is one girl in particular that comes to mind. I had her in my yearbook class, and she absolutely drove me crazy. She would spend class rolling her eyes and mouthing off to anyone who crossed her path, and would be quick to say rude things to me and my friends. When I started trying to view her through God's eyes, though, she became a lot more likeable. I found that it made life a lot easier for me to stop worrying about what everyone else was doing right or wrong. I began trying to implement Claiborne's idea of community, offering to spot my friends for money or give them a ride even if it was out of my way. I found that even if I did this without expecting anything back, I was still generally treated with the same generosity I showed. My group of friends became like a little community, sharing anything we had. I think that this was the form of fellowship that Christianity is all about.

I can now see that my life is less about what I do and much more how I do it. I try to do everything in love, and I think that is what God really wants from me. When I discovered that God will love me regardless of what I do and I stopped worrying about every little move I make, I began to enjoy my life and love and appreciate my God a whole lot more.

Gandhi said that he did not like Christians because they are not like their Christ, and I can now understand what he was talking about. Christians have twisted and perverted the Gospel until it is so far from what Christ originally intended that Christians look nothing like what He wanted. I want to be different than that. I want to get back to what Christ wanted in the first place, a religion that has a sense of community and love and a relationship with God, not with the rules. I try to live that every day. Each day brings a new challenge, but I will continue to work towards becoming more like the perfect being of Christ, who went His whole life without being hypocritical, judgmental or mean. Until then, I will love God, love others (even the Christians), and love myself.

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Works Cited

Claiborne, Shane. *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.