

Am I still a Christian?

In the messy web of identity and associations, I'm weary of arguing about beliefs, practices, and labels.

By [Cindy Wang Brandt](#)

September 12, 2018



iStock / Getty Images Plus

The day my dog died, I took off the cross necklace I had been wearing every day for ten years.

My dog was hospitalized for acute renal failure and perished while at the vet. After I had recovered from that devastating phone call, I called back to ask when we could come in and see her body (the kids were still in school). The vet gave me a timeframe and informed me that her body was laying in a room where they were playing Christian hymns to my dead dog. I found out that the belief in Taiwanese folk

religion is that animals retain their sense of hearing for eight hours postmortem, and judging from my cross necklace, the vet assumed I was Christian and wanted to honor my beliefs.

I asked, “What if I had been Buddhist?” “We would play Buddhist chants, in that case,” he said.

I love how tolerant my society is and respectful of the variety of beliefs people hold.

But as much as I appreciated that gesture I didn’t like the presumption that I was a Christian, not the least because my relationship with Christianity is ... complicated. And that’s why I took off my necklace, which for me had been mostly decorative. Because I wanted the space to navigate my relationship with my faith without the interference of public perception.

My faith shift has happened privately and [then publicly](#). **Telling my truth out loud has in many ways hastened and solidified the evolution of my faith.**

Many people ask me, “So do you still identify as Christian? Are you an atheist? What are you?”

Having experienced the volatile movement of my faith, I have been hesitant to give a definitive answer, because I know it may change, just as it has so dramatically over the past decade of my life.

If I exist on an isolated island by my lonesome self with nothing but me and the sky and the waters, the answer is YES, I am still a Christian. Christianity is such a large part of my life story—from the Anglican Girls’ Primary School where I learned English, to the evangelicalism that was the soil of my identity formation in adolescence, to my missionary and writing vocation. **I can’t reasonably see a way of cutting Christianity out of my life without also gouging out vital parts of my history and my being.** Christianity is my story, for better or for worse.

Now of course, it is possible to tell new stories moving forward, but to be honest, I’m a bit too lazy to adopt a brand new religion, not after investing years of study, both formal and informal, in the Christian tradition. But also because Christian theology offers a beautiful specificity of vision to the moral value of caring for the disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed. I’m not willing to give that up; it is a dominant driving force of my personal ethic.

I don't currently practice any Christian rituals. I stopped going to church several years ago and given our options of local churches, this has been a tremendously healthy move on our part for our family. I don't read the Bible as a personal devotional practice, and I don't pray. But I am aware this is because the spiritual wounds of my toxic upbringing has made these practices triggers of my pain.

In order to heal, I need a break. It may be that I don't ever reclaim these practices, but when I do, it will be on my own terms according to my own spiritual health development. This is to say I am not ANTI Christian rituals, but that they are not personally tenable right now in my spiritual journey. But it is a factor in my hesitancy to self-identify as a Christian.

Can you be a Christian if you don't do any Christian-y things? Well, that brings me to my next point.

I exist and interact with a complex multitude of sociopolitical spheres, with a long, contentious, and beautiful history of a variety of branches of this thing we call Christianity. Out here, in this messy web of personal identity and political association, **I am weary of being a Christian, precisely because I am so uninterested in negotiating that identity.**

I don't want to argue about whether I have to believe this or that, do this or that, feel this way or that way, to be designated the Christian label. It's exhausting and honestly almost completely meaningless to me.

I know a lot of my progressive Christian friends are not willing to concede the definition of Christianity to fundamentalists or white evangelical Trumpists. I get that, I don't think it's fair, and I want progressive Christianity to have a louder voice in public. Which is why my public presence is niched quite comfortably under the progressive Christian tent.

But let's not kid ourselves into thinking progressive Christianity is some sort of utopia. No, plenty of negotiations are taking place under this tent and will continue to for the foreseeable future.

I don't have time for that. Or, I should say more truthfully, I am unwilling to prioritize spending my time in that way.

This is simply not a question I'm personally concerned with at this present time. I think it's a question others have of me, and I wish them the best in their negotiation of my identity, but it is not something that keeps me awake at night.

I can tell you this: I am more fully myself than I have ever been my whole life. I am learning lots every day, growing in my curiosity and expanding in my capacity to love more deeply. I continue to navigate my faith, picking out shards of toxicity lodged beyond what my naked eye can see but also healing bravely. As my wounds close over, I can begin to speak from my scars to hopefully help others towards their wholeness and I'm grateful for every opportunity to do this.

The best is yet to come, and all of my energy is going into embracing this hope.

Originally posted at [Brandt's blog](#)