

Why I'm not going to the Church of Magnolia this Christmas

On the last weekend before Christmas there seemed a lot on TV that made an impact on the Riley household.

The legend that is [Spit the Dog](#), who sadly no longer visits our TV screens enough, was on BBC 1's Pointless. '[Take That](#)' danced like [The Drifters](#) on Strictly but for me and millions of others Gary, Jason and Mark still shone. A one hour special on the late great Rik Mayall saw moving footage of him sharing his [personal 'mantra' for life with students from Exeter University](#) but the summit of the weekends viewing was the Fern Britton interview with the Rev Richard Coles.

Richard who? The Reverend Coles is one of the former founding members of [The Communards](#) (you'll remember Jimmy Somerville) who after a career of sex, drugs and debauchery gave it all up, went to church, liked it and now is a Parish Priest in middle class rural Northamptonshire. He's Gay too.

Richard said two things of immense clarity that brought together much of the mixed emotions I hold over church, faith and religion.

The first was that the 'blandness of religion' kept him away from Church for so long. The 'magnolia message' we hear at Church when so many people, young and old, seek and desire colour from the world goes a long way to explain for me and for many others why we are not rushing though the local chapel doors on a Sunday morning. Lots of us believe. I mean truly believe with a passionate and meaningful faith. We just don't want the life sucked out of it by others.

[Billy Connolly](#) explained it perfectly when he said that the first thing a Vicar ever said to him was 'we are one in him and he is one in us.' Billy never went back as he hadn't got a clue what the man in the white colour was on about.

The second was Reverend Cole's view of why the Christmas message is more important than ever.

Richard explained that the centre of Christmas is a dark, cold and lonely night, in a place far away. In the middle of that, all of sudden there is a little glow of light from a crib. In that crib is a tiny and vulnerable baby and yet that baby is the power that lit the stars and set the whole thing in motion.

That baby, that light, that gift, enables us to move away from the cold hopelessness of life and walk, live, grow and love in that light of hope in front of us.

That is why so many more people go to church at Christmas. It is the reason for the season. It's the colourful message in a world of magnolia that so many want, need and desire to hear.

Sadly the Church of Magnolia is why so many of us don't venture out for the other 51 Sunday's of the year.

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