

The God Problem

Alternatives to Fundamentalism

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Study & discussion guide

Chapter 1: Setting the Scene

The book was written in 2006 but many years later the situation still seems to be the same. It is religion that has the 'bad' name; and religion seems to be the underlying source of conflicts around the world. Fundamentalisms (of many flavors) propose that their version of God is the only one that people should follow. Yet we know that there are (to take an example from Christianity) 28,000 different denominations. Which God being promoted is the correct one? How do we decide between them? At the same time militant atheists assert that there is no God and that human reason is much more credible than belief in an imaginary friend in the sky who can even demand that you kill those who disagree with you.

Questions:

1. Is it religion; or is it God that is the problem?
2. Why have fundamentalisms become popular again?
3. Whose side is God on?
4. Are religions human creations?
5. Why have people not totally embraced secularism and still practice religion?

Chapter 2 Panentheism

The default position for most liberal Christians is panentheism: God is found in everything in the world/cosmos/universe but cannot be defined solely in terms of the world/cosmos/universe. God is 'the more'. God is not limited to us and our religion.

Questions:

1. Is God only to be found/revealed in my religion?
2. Who is Jesus for you?
3. What kingdom/empire did Jesus preach about?
4. Why do we build churches? What are they for?
5. Can all be saved?

Chapter 3: Non-Realism

Don Cupitt and Lloyd Geering argue that many 'Western' people have let go of God but still adhere to the teachings of Jesus. This lack of belief is due to a loss of supernaturalism whilst still retaining Christian ethics – "love your neighbor as yourself," 'the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount' etc. When people talk about God they do not believe in 'an old man in the sky' but they use it to refer to their 'deepest feelings and concerns'. People come to church to form communities of care, respect and concern for others and not necessarily because they believe in a creator God.

Questions:

1. What/Who is God for you?
2. Can you be a follower of Jesus and not believe in a supernatural God?
3. Is Christianity only about ethical living?
4. Does a faith for the future have to include concern and care for the environment?
5. "Jesus preached the kingdom, but it was the Church who came". Do you agree?

Chapter 4: The Spirituality Revolution

"I'm not religious but I am spiritual" is the cry of the postmodern person. People seem to have a myriad of ways to 'worship' and 'to follow'. Sometimes they combine (what in another era) would have been considered contradictory or competing systems of belief. Many 'new age' practices have become mainstream – acupuncture, aromatherapy, Reiki, Pilates etc. What do we make of this acceptance of such practices?

Questions:

1. What do you say to someone who tells you: "I'm not religious but I am spiritual"?
2. Why is being 'spiritual' more acceptable than being 'religious'?
3. Is spirituality only interested in 'me'?
4. List and evaluate the different spiritualities that you find in your locality.
5. How 'spiritual' is your Church?

Chapter 5: Religious Naturalism

Humans are so overcome by the awe, wonder and mystery of the universe that they speculate whether 'they are alone'. The complexity and immensity of the universe make us reflect upon our finitude and insignificance. Is it the universe that we should worship and respect; and even have 'religious' feelings for?

Questions:

1. Is there 'a point' to existence? Why are we here?
2. Is this 'all there is'?
3. Should we worship the cosmos/universe?
4. To whom should we be grateful for our existence?
5. Where is God in all this?

CONCLUDING QUESTION:

Which, *if any*, of the options would you choose and why?