



# Bringing God Back to Earth

*Bringing God Back to Earth — Confessions of a Christian Publisher*

John Hunt

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For me the book was like a doughy Christmas pudding with a lot of silver threepences embedded in it. But the threepences were so good, I happily kept on going through all the doughy bits. Here are some of the bits I liked:

‘Religion began as a response to the dilemmas that self-awareness created. For instance, rather than act in the interests of the species, individuals could override their biological programming and act in the interests of the self. But to act solely in the interests of the self is self-destructive for everyone in the longer term. Religions grew to connect us again with the larger whole, replacing our lost instinct ... So in the first meaning of the word, religion helps us provide the framework for relating to each other, rituals for the key moments of life, for building societies’.

‘Religion is nothing special. It’s not something you do on Sundays, or in quiet times. It’s not something you can separate from loving, or living. It’s not different from washing the dishes, or dreaming at night. It’s not either “real” or “imaginary”. Both God as reality and imagination are just different ways of coming to terms with with the polarization of the world into “me” and “it” that came with self-awareness’.

‘Over time we encounter the deity we’ve been taught to expect. In every spiritual experience, vision, dream, near-death-experience, the God we see takes the forms we’re familiar with. All beliefs are learned. They’re not written in our DNA.’

‘The problem with theism is that it tends to push God out to the heavens as a remote, separate figure it can be hard to believe in. The problem with monism is that it makes Her or ourselves indistinguishable from the world around us. The extraordinary appeal of Christianity over two millennia has been to combine the best of both worlds by having a transcendent God who incarnates Himself into matter. Its weakness is that it muddles the two different approaches to God, reducing spirit to flesh. Its major internal disputes have accordingly centered on how far Jesus is one or the other’.

‘So has Christianity been a good thing? Does it make a difference for the better? The most Christian nations on earth today, those with the highest proportion of churchgoers, have had some of the worst records, being amongst the most racist (South Africa and apartheid), the most genocidal (Rwanda), the most tribal and murderous (Northern Ireland), the most nationalistic (Serbia), etc. And the evil-doers are often part of their communities, sincere Christians, certain of their salvation. Those who are not, as with Germany in the 1930s, commit acts with the support of the wider Christian community and the church, or they couldn’t flourish ... But Christianity should have made a difference that is beyond

argument. It makes more explicit claims than any other religion to be both one of love and of equal relevance for everyone. ... Logically history should show a steadily increasing gap between the morality of Christian countries and their pagan neighbours. It hasn't happened.'

'So why aren't Christians better than other people? Partly because the effects of good religion on practice are also true for Buddhists and Muslims, for all believers in all religions. It's the kind of God you believe in that matters rather than the doctrines that churches shape around Her. Sadly, simply believing in God doesn't make you a better or happier person than your neighbour. At most it can make you a better or happier person than you would otherwise have been.'

'The divide in the world is not between religions, or between believers and atheists. If there's a divide anywhere it's between those who have faith that the universe is meaningful and act accordingly, and those who don't, and act for their own benefit. Between those who will fight to make the world a better place, and those who can't see the point. Between those who are happy helping others along the way of life, and those who see it as a race to win. Between those who will sacrifice their selves in favour of others, and those who want to impose their cultures or creeds. .... Between those who see us as chimps occasionally granted glimpses of the divine mystery, and those who think they're saved and everyone else is going to hell.'

*Don Feist, Dunedin*