

Paul Walker

**I still haven't found what I'm looking for: God for agnostics**

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I wanted to like this book and there are some insightful and challenging passages. That is particularly true of Paul Walker's description of the morality taught by Jesus, and especially the emphasis on a distinctive Christian contribution to the whole notion of generosity. Walker may be right to chide the Church for ignoring, even blatantly contradicting, Jesus' most insistent teachings, about the life of self-sacrifice, and about our response to the poor. I can agree too with much of what he says about the true nature of faith - that it is "stepping out into the void, not knowing if there will be anything there to catch you", that it is "to put one's trust in a goodness that lies at the heart of the universe" - which seems to fit the descriptions of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. Faith and certainty, or the intellectual assent through gritted teeth to particular doctrines, are clearly not the same thing. I share the author's vision of groups of people, truly open to each other and welcoming of newcomers, meeting together without barriers of race, creed, sexuality, disability, poverty or intellect, to eat and to explore the meaning of life - it is wonderful when the Church truly blesses and facilitates such human encounters, as I believe it actually does sometimes. Yet one wonders just how welcome expressions of traditional belief would be in such a group if the author was present. I cannot agree with him that "faith has nothing to do with belief" [My italics.] He tells us in Chapter 1 about his life-changing decision not to pray any more (incidentally he calls the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer "alternatives to praying"). He makes it clear all the way through how unhelpful he finds doctrines, particularly such ideas as the incarnation. This Anglican priest and hospital chaplain goes on to describe the Eucharist as "a vaguely magical ceremony", rejecting the theology behind sacramental worship, whilst more evangelical styles of worship are described as simply "banal". This is not so much a book for people who are agnostics but rather a book against belief, and not only fundamentalist belief but rather mainstream Christian belief, the Faith of the Church. I cannot recommend it.

***Desmond Alban SSF***