

BOOK REVIEW

Rupert Shortt, amongst his other jobs, is the religion editor of the Times Literary Supplement. In his book **God is No Thing** (Hurst 2016, £9.99) he demonstrates that Christianity has a beautiful intellectual coherence which is often lacking in today's atheists.

While Dawkins, Coyne and others are praised for exposing the ignorance and misguided beliefs of many Christians they have their own 'blind spots'. Their dismissal of Christianity is not only shown to rest on a serious of parodies but they are also wrong in their forecast that secularism will remove religion. Religion, both good and bad, is in fact on the increase.

Shortt demonstrates that there is a place for 'grown up Christianity' between scepticism and fundamentalism. He bemoans the way in which the digital revolution has led contemporary people to scorn the lessons of past. In exploring 'God is no thing, but not nothing' he takes us first of Thomas Aquinas' 'Five Ways' in order to explore the nature of causality before moving on to the insights of modern philosophers like John Polkinghorne and Roger Scruton. He affirms Pascal's belief that God can be expected to appear openly to those who truly search for Him but will remain hidden from those who do not seek.

In later chapters he shows that authentic religious pluralism has an integrity which religious relativism does not. 'Secularism is already proving to be increasingly unsound' while the growth of the religious fundamentalism is 'a shallow modern response to shallow modern assumptions.' Christianity's future lies

in steering a course between these two and by engaging in a robust dialogue of ‘interactive pluralism’. He wants the church to give more attention to public issues as a way of doing this.

His book ends with a flourish. He reflects, all too briefly, on the problems of Iraq, WMDs, the use of violence, environmentalism, economics and social justice. He concludes that the contemporary idols of materialism and consumerism have to be dethroned because they do not encourage individual and social flourishing.

Not having read much philosophical theology for a while I was initially daunted by these books but once started I was completely captivated. Which should I recommend? It is like asking which of the Gospels you prefer, John or Luke. Shortt’s book reminds me of John’s presentation rather than Luke’s.