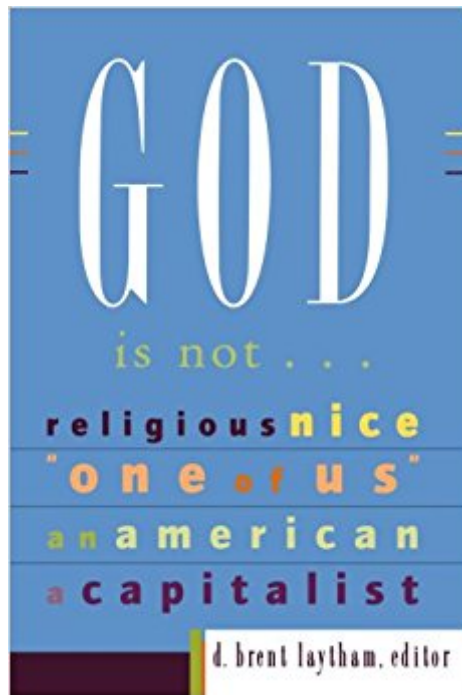




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God Is Notâ€¦: Religious, Nice, "One Of Us," An American, A Capitalist



Synopsis

God Is Not . . . takes on today's prevailing misconceptions about who God is by boldly stating who God is not. Rodney Clapp critiques pop culture's anthem to a slobby, ineffective "God like us," while D. Stephen Long, in "God Is Not Nice," questions our therapy-fed longing for a useful, nonthreatening deity. If God is not an American or a capitalist or "religious," as contributors Michael Baxter, Mike Budde, and William T. Cavanaugh go on to argue, then who is God? Laytham concludes with a stirring essay on who God is, calling the church to visibly demonstrate where its primary allegiance lies. Audacious without being rude, God Is Not . . . is a lively, necessary, and intelligently reverent read.

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Customer Reviews

Move over, Joan Osborne. In this collection's first essay, Rodney Clapp brilliantly refutes the singer's notion that God is "one of us" and "just a stranger on the bus," passively along for the ride. Rather than a rant against popular depictions of God, this essay draws upon two key biblical events (the construction of the golden calf and Jesus's humble entry into Jerusalem on a donkey) to suggest that sometimes, the fickle masses can crowd God out and create gods in their own image. Other essays in the book also iconoclastically smash popular notions of who God is: God is not a red-blooded American, not a capitalist who urges churches to behave like for-profit corporations and ministers to be "spiritpreneurs," not a relativist and, ultimately, not a nice, benign, wholly ineffectual Santa Claus. The authors (all men-and wouldn't it have been nice to include a woman's essay on how God is not a man?) draw from the highbrow (theologians and

church historians) and the lowbrow ("The Simpsons," Laurie Beth Jones, "The Jerry Springer Show") to demonstrate more clearly what God is by highlighting what God is not. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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So far I've read the first 3 essays and I'm just not impressed with this book. It has several very simple essays with poor arguments and poor conclusions. For example, the first essay argues that popular culture's perception of God is frivolous by going after the hook from one particular song that I don't think is saying what the author thinks it's saying. And then he asserts that Christians have to be wary of being swept up in popular rhetoric about God without ever acknowledging that Christians have as much to do with the popular perception of God as anyone else. These essays also seem to treat arguments as very black and white. In *God is not American*, the author repudiates the notion that America is favored by God but then suggests that God has as little approval of America as he does of Al Qaeda. And the author of *God is not nice* rejects the "Buddy Christ" model of God and focuses on the grim reality of the crucifixion but goes so far in the other direction that he makes God out to be a jerk. The rest of the essays have the same types of problems. I don't disagree with any of the core points, but the way they are argued leaves much to be desired.

Thanks, good insights and help during my class!

This is a very good book with a very strong point that God is not like us.

This is a book about theology, which for Christians refers to the meaning of the story or stories that are central to Christian tradition. To title a book "God is not..." is a tad presumptuous. It seems to imply that I (the author(s)) know what God is, or is not, and you don't. If your faith is grounded in Barthian neo-orthodoxy, you will find that this book is both affirming and challenging. But if your theology, like mine, is more liberal, more questioning, more nuanced, more carefully acquired and scrutinized, then this book doesn't have a lot to offer. The essays on *God is not an American* and *God is not religious* are actually pretty good. The essay on *God is not a capitalist* is weak--I say that

as a person with graduate degrees in both economics and theology. God is not a capitalist, but this essay wasn't necessarily effective in illuminating that idea. Overall, however, I found this book to be a bit of a waste of time for anyone who takes theology seriously.

These essays were compiled to counter some common misconceptions about God. They do so by stating what God is not. The essays are at least thought provoking and at most inflammatory. Then again, the authors never claimed to not be controversial. In the book there are six essays, five of which speak to something God is not. The first claims that God is not a passive participant in creation. The second argues that God is not nice in the way that culture has claimed God to be. The third reminds that God is not American and this nation is not truly "under God." The fourth describes God's economics in contrast to capitalism, telling us that God is not capitalist. The fifth says that God is not religious because that term has come to stand for a generic faith and a generic god. The final essay speaks about God's being one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. I found these essays a quick read. That is because I have read and heard most of the arguments before. I found the essay on economics to be most useful. This book is great for undergrads or folks interested in examining their view of God. It challenges many commonly held beliefs, ones that truly need to be challenged. Highly recommended.

This book challenges the Christianity that is practised by many American Christians today. The basis of this book is that by negations - defining what God is not - we can better understand the true God. Separate articles address different faulty views of God and Dr. Laytham concludes the book but outlining what God is, and what the Church should be. An important aspect that should be noted, though there is no chapter dedicated to the myth of a 'masculine god', the gender neutral language throughout the book is appreciated and supports the over-arching theme of the book, that of dispelling faulty views of God. All of the articles are relatively easy to read and should be read with an open mind and heart. The opening article confronts the pop culture notion portrayed in a Joan Osborne song that 'God is one of us'. The following article, and my personal favorite, is titled "God is not nice". The blasphemous 'nice god' comes from cultural pressures "of late modernity where self-esteem and passion rule" and from theological pressures in favor of a "tolerant god who makes you feel good" (45,48). The book continues with articles that dispel the myths of an 'american god', a 'capitalist god' and a 'religious god'. Dr. Laytham concludes the book by writing that "God is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic".

We are far too careless with our words. In attempting to understand God, we are first better off clearing the path by understanding what God is not. Following Aquinas, these various writers remind us that whatever God is, God is first and foremost Holy (not a capitalist, American, or Nice). This is a very important read for Christians living, primarily, in the U.S. I do think, however, that both the chapters on capitalism and the U.S. could have been strengthened. The one on the US is unnecessarily convoluted, while the article on capitalism, while I would never peg God as capitalist, this chapter is a bit of a stretch in terms of hermeneutics. Otherwise, stellar book.

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