

REVIEWS

Alister McGrath. *Why God Won't Go Away: Is the New Atheism Running on Empty?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 191 pp. Pbk. US\$15.99.

Why God Won't Go Away is Alister McGrath's latest engagement with what has been referred to as the New Atheism. His primary area of concern centers on the work of its four leading proponents: Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. The book is organized into three parts, each building on the other to form a coherent picture of the current debates.

In part one, McGrath provides an historical overview of the beginning stages of the New Atheism, while highlighting the differences between the old and new strands. The primary difference has less to do with the essential belief inherent to atheism (God's nonexistence), and more to do with the New's emphasis on their hatred of religion in all of its forms (anti-theism).

Part two highlights three core themes that underlie the New Atheist's hostility:

1. its critique of religious violence
2. its appeals to reason
3. its appeals to science

McGrath points out in chapter three that religion can go wrong and promote violence. And, when it does, it should be challenged and changed. However, where most people see religion as something that can go wrong, New Atheism sees it only as something that is wrong. As a result, all religion should be eliminated.

In response, McGrath argues that the problem is not religion, but fanaticism, which can be found in many areas of life. Furthermore, upon closer examination, Christianity's leader (Jesus Christ) in particular offers a "transcendent rationale for the resistance of violence" (69). In Jesus, the cycle of violence was broken. So, when any of its adherents fail to follow Christ's example, they prove to be not very good Christians. In the end, New Atheist's appeals to violence as an argument against religions proves nonsensical. It is an unfair emphasis on the pathological forms within religions; forms that can also find a place in politics and science.

One of the hallmarks of the New Atheism is that it seems to think it has a monopoly on truth (a critique that even comes from other, more moderate, atheists). In fact, "the New Atheism makes rationality one of its core defining characteristics and emphatically

and aggressively denies that any alternative view can be regarded as rational" (83), a belief that does not find resonance in other forms of atheism.

However, New Atheism refuses to confront the truth that every worldview, whether religious or secular in orientation, goes beyond what reason and science can prove. Questions that pertain to value and meaning often cannot be proven through empirical methods, yet are nevertheless maintained as trustworthy. As McGrath points out,

religious faith is not a rebellion against reason but a revolt against the imprisonment of humanity within the cold walls of a rationalist dogmatism. Human logic may be rationally adequate, but it's also existentially deficient. Faith declares that there's more to life than this. It doesn't contradict reason but transcends it. It elicits and involves rational consent but does not compel it (89).

McGrath confronts the final core idea of New Atheism in chapter five - its appeal to science. He makes the statement that they do "more than simply reflect the cultural stereotype of the 'warfare' of science and religion," they actually "depend on it for its plausibility" (121).

They appeal to what has commonly been referred to as scientism, which claims that all that is known or can be known is capable of verification or falsification using the scientific method. However, as McGrath concludes, "to limit oneself to what reason and science can prove is merely to skim the surface of reality and fail to discover the hidden depths beneath" (129).

In the end, McGrath draws the conclusion that the angry, loud, and aggressive debate tactics utilized by the New Atheism, especially when faced with a high degree of clear evidence from the religious other, will not be able to sustain the movement for the long term. While the older, and better argued atheism, may have a degree of traction, the newer forms do not. While they believe their anti-religious rhetoric will be heard and make a positive impact, their weak and often illogical forms of argumentation will ultimately be the cause of their downfall.

The ironic fact is that New Atheist anger at the persistence of faith has inadvertently stirred a huge interest in the whole God question. It's made people want to reflect on the other side of the story.

I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in learning more about the New Atheism, its leaders, their writing, arguments and the general Christian response. It will help you to move past the rhetoric and embrace a more balanced approach that stems from well-researched and more persuasive forms of argumentation.

Jeffrey K. Clarke

Tripp York, *The Devil Wears Nada: Satan Exposed*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011. 154 pp. Pbk. US\$19.00.

When I received Tripp York's *The Devil Wears Nada*, I was intrigued. I loved the title and was very interested in where a professor of philosophy and religion would go with such a topic. My interest was not disappointed as this book was one of the most unique books that I have ever read.

The book begins with a conversation between two students on the evidence for the existence of God. Not satisfied with the traditional arguments, one of the students suggests finding evidence for Satan would go a long way toward proving the existence of God. Tripp York takes up the challenge and goes looking for the Devil.

Much of the author's quest is taken up with interviews with people from different backgrounds. A number of Christians, including a Nazarene pastor, a black preacher and a body-building evangelist, are quizzed on their knowledge of Satan. While all claim to have had some experience in opposing Satanic influence in their ministries, their zeal is no match for the author's quick wit. York quickly demonstrates that many of their claims do not stand up to scrutiny or consistency. Christians are not the only victims of York's sarcastic logic (or logical sarcasm). A Unitarian, pagan and a Satanist are also interviewed and made to look foolish. Among the topics that are raised are the supposed Satanic origin of things such as evolution and homosexuality. Not leaving the Bible behind, York examines a number of passages from the Old and New Testaments that deal with Satan. His study is far from dry exegesis and is filled with the same humor that is found in the rest of the book. The book concludes with the author's attempt to find the Devil by selling his soul (in exchange for paid student loans) and with a reflection on what all this means for how we understand God and life. This book was one of

the most difficult books to review that I have ever read. I read the book in two different ways and came away with two different responses.

The first way I read this book was as one who appreciates sarcasm, puns and a sharp wit. This book is funny. Very funny. There were many times that I laughed out loud in public as I read it. Both the situations that the author put himself into and his responses were described with great humor. Many books, especially those written by professors of philosophy and religion, can be extremely dry. York is able to draw the reader in with his wit make the reading of this book an extremely entertaining experience. No one will be bored reading this book.

I also read this book as a Christian pastor that is well aware of some of the foolish things said and done by the church. There are times that we communicate Christian cliches without taking time to compare them to either the Bible or reason. York applies both rigorous logic and quick wit to some of the statements common in churches. York's observations are good correctives to lazy and thoughtless claims. At the same time, there were times that I was uncomfortable with what I read. Not just the occasional profanity, but the mockery of certain people. York weaves in and out of the boundary between humorous observation and ridiculing for the sake of a cheap laugh. I was also uncomfortable with the selling of the soul to Satan chapter. I understand what he was doing, but it seemed to take the whole thing too far.

Do I recommend this book? If you are easily offended, no I do not recommend it. However, if you are open to having your theological and philosophical presuppositions challenged with healthy doses of humor and honest reflection, than you will benefit from this book. I continue to believe in a real entity known as Satan and this book did not change that. At the same time, the author uses popular images of the Devil as a mirror to show us who we really are, both as individuals and as a church. Whether you agree or disagree with the author's conclusions, one thing is certain, you will not be bored.

Stephen J. Bedard

Alister McGrath. Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 197 pp. Pbk. US\$16.99.

Alister McGrath has quickly become one of the most popular and well respected Christian apologists of our time. Having doctorates in science and theology certainly gives him the resources to respond to the questions of skeptics. It would be easy for someone of such intelligence to write over the heads of anyone but scholars. One of McGrath's strengths is that he is in touch with the needs of the average Christian trying to share their faith with their friends. His book, *Mere Apologetics*, is a good example of this.

This book comes out of McGrath's work with the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. The purpose of this book is not to provide a comprehensive introduction to Christian apologetics. If you are looking for a detailed presentation and analysis of all the arguments for the existence of God and the reliability of the Bible, you will not find it in this book. This book is more of a practical guide for the beginning apologist and a gentle reminder to the experienced apologist as to what is important.

One of the useful parts of *Mere Apologetics* is the reflection on the nature and definition of apologetics. Apologetics has become much more prominent in the church and as it has, the definition has widened beyond usefulness. McGrath sees the basic themes of apologetics as being the defense of the Gospel, commending the truth of Christianity and translating the message for our particular audience. In looking at the nature of apologetics, McGrath distinguishes its difference from evangelism, while acknowledging their close relationship.

McGrath does present the standard arguments for God's existence, but that is not his emphasis. Rather, McGrath takes those arguments and demonstrates how they are used in the real world with real people. For McGrath, apologetics is not just an academic exercise but something that should be put into practice to help skeptics overcome barriers to faith. McGrath looks at the postmodern challenges to Christianity and turns it around to present the postmodern opportunities for Christian apologetics.

Some may be disappointed with this book if they are looking for a detailed reference work that tackles every major apologetic question. However, the strengths of this book greatly outweigh any weaknesses. McGrath writes with a clear and engaging style that draws the person in. McGrath's passion for the presentation and defense of Christianity is clear throughout the book. McGrath includes many stories from his own experience, which both clarifies

the issues and reminds us that we are not just talking about theory. *Mere Apologetics* by itself is not an adequate introduction to apologetics. But when paired with a more technical reference book, this book is able to provide needed balance as a practical guide to what apologetics should look like.

Stephen J. Bedard

Douglas Groothuis *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for the Biblical Faith*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 752 pp. Hdbk. US\$40.00.

If one has even an entry-level knowledge of the field of apologetics, one knows some of the traditional textbooks in which to turn to for study. Norman Geisler's classic *Christian Apologetics* still stands strong a few decades after it was first written. J.P. Moreland's *Scaling the Secular City* and William Lane Craig's *Reasonable Faith* are others that are widely used, and rightly so. The scholarship and wisdom in the books I have just mentioned provide an intellectual analysis of the field of apologetics and how Christians ought to engage with it. Contemporary Christians interested in apologetics can now turn to another text that is bound to become one of the most-used textbooks in apologetics. Douglas Groothuis' *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for the Biblical Faith* (InterVarsity, 2011) may have more breadth both in content and wisdom than any apologetics text to date. The subtitle is justified as the book, over 700 pages and 26 chapters long (not including two appendixes), presents the need for apologetics and explores the main philosophical arguments for the existence of God. Unlike other apologetics texts, Groothuis includes chapters examining truth in postmodern society, religious pluralism, and a tactful approach to dealing with Islam. Furthermore, biblical scholars (and Denver Seminary colleagues) Richard Hess and Craig Blomberg build on an already strong text by writing chapters on apologetics in the Old Testament (Appendix 2) and a historical approach to the person of Christ and the gospels, respectively.

It is difficult to provide an in-depth chapter-by-chapter review of any textbook, let alone a book that concludes at 752 pages. I will not be so naïve to think I could do such a thing either. Thus, this review will hit on what I believe to be the most important and substantial portions of the book. Groothuis divides the book into

three sections and I will structure this review in accordance to that division. While a few critiques may be included in the sectional review, I will leave what I believe to be the most pressing critiques (and they are few and minimal) until the end of the review. As one would expect with a book of this size, this review will be lengthy. I will be as concise as possible; however, I will not devalue the examination this book deserves simply to be brief. It is my role as a reviewer to do diligence to both the author and text itself to be as objective and comprehensive in my examination as possible.

Part one of the book, entitled “Apologetic Preliminaries” examines the need and reasons to engage in apologetics. I would recommend this section to any Christian scholar, pastor, missionary and layperson alike. Groothuis begins by laying out the need for apologetics as not something that Christians can do if they so choose, but rather as a biblical mandate. The contemporary attitude towards apologetics is often hostile. We live in a culture that thrives on tolerance between different worldviews and the defense of one position seems to rub against the grain of what is now considered normal. Groothuis masterfully breaks down this misconception in the opening chapters of the book. While Christian apologetics is the defense of a particular position, it is not one that is meant to be hostile. Rather, Groothuis says that Christian apologetics is “the rational defense of the Christian worldview as objectively true, rationally compelling and existentially or subjectively engaging.”¹³² Apologetics is shown to be crucial for both the presenter and receiver of the apologetic message. For the receiver, a logically and rationally compelling argument is given that promotes the objective truth of Christianity. For the presenter, the Christian, engaging in apologetics fortifies the Christian in their position as a Christian.

While apologetics is a field of its own, Groothuis makes the claim that an apologetic argument cannot be effectively presented without understanding its connection to philosophy and theology. Apologetics is not reducible to either of these fields but it greatly hinges on the content and discipline of these other areas of study. The systematic doctrine of theology is itself what is being defended. One cannot properly present an apology for Christianity without adequately understanding its truth-claims. In relation to philosophy, one must be skilled and trained in rational and logical styles of

¹³² Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for the Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 24.

argumentation. This makes the argument itself sound and eliminates philosophical fallacies. Furthermore, Groothuis grounds the field of apologetics as biblically mandatory. He presents biblical examples of apologetic interaction – including Jesus himself.¹³³

Groothuis wisely includes a chapter of the apologetic method and its core reliance on philosophical logic. As previously stated, one cannot be a good apologist without being familiar with logical argumentation. Groothuis, then, follows up on that claim with the inclusion of a chapter devoted to basic logical principles necessary for apologetics.

Apologetics 101 is knowing the content of the worldview that one is defending. Thus, Groothuis lays out the foundational beliefs of Christianity. Quite a lot is discussed in one chapter as Groothuis examines the theist's belief of metaphysics, epistemological foundation, the human condition, salvation and morality. Countless books have been devoted to subsets of each of these topics and thus the finer details of these areas cannot be adequately included in this type of book. However, Groothuis hits all the main and foundation beliefs of Christianity that one needs to know in order to engage in apologetic discussion. It is a chapter filled with the basic truths of Christianity and is a chapter that will serve as a nice complimentary piece to James Sire's *The Universe Next Door* for anyone interested in comparative worldviews. Should one want a deeper examination of the details of the topics discussed in this chapter, one will need to consult other books.

As a philosopher that is as focused on objective truth, it is to no surprise that Groothuis includes a chapter on truth in postmodern culture. Building on one of his previous books, *Truth Decay*, Groothuis states that objective truth is a staple of humanity, the “intellectual oxygen we breathe.”¹³⁴ Here, Groothuis tactfully examines and breaks down the postmodern thought that truth is not objective. Identifying two main enemies of truth in contemporary American culture, apathy and tolerance, Groothuis states that objective truth is dismissed in favor of the lauded view of tolerance,

¹³³ I will not go into further detail on this here. While the book gives examples of Jesus engaging in apologetic discussions, I would recommend also reading Groothuis' book, *On Jesus*, as the entirety of that book is devoted to examining Jesus as a philosopher. See Douglas Groothuis, *On Jesus* (Florence, KY: Wadsworth, 2003).

¹³⁴ p. 140.

which attempts to embrace all differing cultural norms, and apathy, the lackadaisical approach to knowing truth. The book wisely points out that these views are antithetical to sound philosophy. In philosophy, one is on the path of knowledge and engages in the discipline of knowing truth. The connection to Christianity is clear – the Bible presents truth-claims. If one believes these to be true, they must be objectively true. If one believes the Christian worldview to be true, it is the intellectual responsibility of the Christian to gain further knowledge about the worldview.

While much more can be said about the opening section of the book as I only highlighted crucial features of a few chapters, I can conclude this section encouraging anyone interested in apologetics consult this first section of *Christian Apologetics*. It provides the examination of the necessity for apologetics and is the portrayal of Groothuis' attitude towards the discipline. It is easy to deduce that Groothuis is passionate about the truth of the Christian faith and is direly concerned with its presentations to those outside the Christian worldview. If an academic book were to ever tug at one's heart and implore one to move, it will be found in this opening section.

Part two of *Christian Apologetics* is the heart of the book – the dense examination of the main philosophical arguments for the existence of God. Again, it would be irresponsible for me to do a quick and flippant review of each chapter and thus I will examine what I believe to be the most important and pertinent content.

Groothuis starts off with an ancient and controversial argument: the ontological argument. Hinging on both of Saint Anselm's arguments as well as the reformed version by Alvin Plantinga, Groothuis presents the ontological argument as one that is both rationally captivating and successful. I currently remain in limbo on the success of this particular argument. It has been widely (and unwarrantedly) ridiculed and yet has remained defended for centuries. The ontological argument works entirely off the notion of the existence of God without relying on empirical claims. If nothing else, the ontological argument gives evidence to the brilliance of human reason. This particular argument logically guarantees that God exists from the premise that one can conceptualize a Perfect Being. The (Anselmian) argument, deductive in form, can be summed up by saying that a person can think of a greatest possible being. From this, a thing either exists only as knowledge construct, or, as something that exists in reality. It is greater for a thing to exist in reality rather

than merely in the mind. But, God is the greatest possible being and he therefore exists in reality.

Groothuis provides a few examples of critiques of the argument and goes into a lengthy exploration of Kant's critique. While Groothuis, I believe, accurately dismisses Kant's critique, I have found little persuasiveness in this chapter that would lead me to accept the ontological argument as a success. This is no reflection on the author's ability to engage with difficult subjects. The very fact that Groothuis included a chapter devoted to this difficult concept exemplify his skill as a philosopher. The area that lacked, however, was a detailed examination on how the mind can construct a supposed reality about an immaterial Perfect Being from human reason alone. While I come to the same conclusion, that of believing God is a Perfect Being that is logically necessary, I still am not persuaded by this argument. Furthermore, Saint Thomas Aquinas' critique of this argument is quite compelling and is not examined in this book.

The chapter on cosmological arguments is superb and only further qualifies Groothuis as a proficient thinker. This chapter without question is the chapter I learned the most from. Groothuis engages very difficult scientific and philosophical concepts and communicates them in a way that even the beginner will be able to grasp. Though there are many different versions of the cosmological argument, the chapter hones in on the kalam cosmological argument as put forth by William Lane Craig. The kalam argument is superior to other cosmological arguments in that it supposedly secures the theistic doctrine of *ex nihilo* if the arguments proves successful (note: a minor quibble of this chapter is that Groothuis purports that the Thomistic cosmological argument does not endorse *ex nihilo*. I believe this to be false). This specific chapter was sensational – however I was left disappointed that no time was given to addressing the cosmological argument posited by Aquinas. In some respects, the Thomistic cosmological argument is the simplest form for people new to apologetics. The Thomistic version does not get into the technical issues of the metaphysics of time and Big Bang cosmology that the kalam version uses, nor does it require knowledge of the principle of sufficient reason that the Leibnizian version necessitates. While the kalam and Leibnizian versions are logical and sound arguments, they may confusing to people new to apologetics. Because of this, beginners ought to take the time to read this chapter slowly and more than once because of the finer technical details.

Chapters 12-14 are devoted to the design argument and issues relating to it. Groothuis opposes macroevolution and thus goes to great extent to battle Darwinism. Those interested in the philosophy of science will be drawn to these chapters. The chapter focused on intelligent design relies heavily on the work of William Dembski and Michael Behe. These chapters serve as a valuable introduction for those new to discussion between Christian and naturalistic sciences.

Chapter 15 is perhaps the most successful chapter of the entire book as it deals with the moral argument. It is my belief that the moral argument is the most successful argument for the existence of God as it appeals to everyone, Christian, atheist, and non-Christian religious persons. Ethical theory may perhaps be the most widely debated philosophical topic throughout history and thus Groothuis could have taken many approaches when discussing the moral argument. The way he structured his chapter, however, is nearly flawless. Building off his chapter examining truth in the postmodern culture (chapter 7), Groothuis correlates the denial of objective truth to the ridding of objective moral value. He unmercifully attacks moral relativism and brilliantly shows its dangers. He states that cultural relativism reduces to individual relativism, which, in turn, ultimately rests on nihilism. The setup of this *reductio ad absurdum* points the reader to a moral system that does not reduce to nihilism. Thus, a worldview that embraces objective moral truths must be embraced. Groothuis makes the claim that the source of objective moral truths is found in the absolute Being – God. Groothuis puts forth the notion that God is the source of all perfect moral code because he himself is incapable of an evil act as it would be a contradiction of God's Being.

Also included is an argument from religious experience. It is refreshing to see this argument given the attention that it deserves as it is not as predominately seen in apologetics as some of the other arguments already discussed. Groothuis supports the claim that one can know God through some experience of divine reality. He supports this by using the argument from divine longing and numinous experience. The argument from numinous experience is defended well via a phenomenological triad that correlates a revelatory experience to an intentional religious experience. That is, numinous experience, as intentional, find their source outside the person who is experiencing – thus correlating objectively to a divine Being.

The remaining chapters of section two surround arguments of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. This includes the chapter from Professor Craig Blomberg. Groothuis includes a defense of the incarnation, Jesus' miracles and the resurrection – all while refuting common arguments against these issues. These chapters are an appropriate end to a magnificent examination of the main apologetic methods.

The last section is contains chapters related to a few common objections to Christian theism: religious pluralism, issues surrounding Islam and the perennial problem of evil. The chapter on religious pluralism is wonderfully laid out and carefully examines the American ideal that all religions be treated equally and all lead to salvation. As Groothuis points out, “the dizzying plethora of religious pluralism has led many to believe that no religion can claim to be the only way of salvation. Religions should succumb to a more humble estimation ... in order to avoid religious dogmatism, controversy and strife.”¹³⁵ Such a statement is a profound summary of the current ideal. Groothuis goes to great lengths to argue against this worldview and states that the Christian worldview is objectively true and the only source of salvation. This chapter not only serves well as a stand-alone chapter, but the material is heightened when read in light of the opening chapters about truth in postmodern contexts. Groothuis examines other world religions and the worldview of perennialism to combat the pluralistic claims – including that of liberal theologian John Hick. This chapter serves well when read in the company of Harold Netland's *Encountering Religious Pluralism*.

I have attempted to examine and review this monumental work in as much detail as I can. I have left out many things that could otherwise be noted in this review. However, I tried to touch on what I felt was most important. This books lives up to its name and is truly a comprehensive case for the biblical faith. The mastery of difficult topics shows that Groothuis is highly qualified and profoundly motivated in the field of apologetics. This books comes with many treats that other apologetics texts do not offer, such as the argument from religious experience, a chapter on Pascal's anthropological argument and also chapters on Islam and Hell.

No book is perfect, and while *Christian Apologetics* offers much, it does have a few flaws worth pointing out. Many of my critiques within the main body of this review were centered around

¹³⁵ Ibid., 568.

exclusion of topics I felt worthwhile. Obviously, Groothuis could not hit on every topic, but the exclusion of subjects like the Thomistic cosmological argument leaves that specific chapter with a hole. Groothuis, at times, also too quickly passes over important objections to Christianity. This is evident in his dealing with the Euthyphro dilemma in the chapter on the moral argument (I believe his response can be considered question-begging by atheistic opposition). His chapter on the problem of evil is perhaps the chapter that kept me wanting most. Considering the book has 26 chapters and two appendixes (including the contributions of Blomberg and Hess), one chapter which lacks is not a bad feat. The problem of evil is only examined significantly under a compatibilist and Calvinistic standpoint. While I hold neither of these positions, I understand their viewpoint and do not feel as though the problem of evil is argued away sufficiently with these views held.

The book significantly can enhance one's knowledge of the argument and it deeply examines arguments not prevalently seen. The book, however, will be an influential source to any person that needs an introduction to this important field. All in all, this is a great book and one that I would highly recommend to anyone.

Michael D. Stark

James Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of Its Presence, Character, and Epistemic Status* Paternoster Theological Monographs (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 328 pp. Pbk. US\$43.00.

When some Christians hear the word paradox they reach for their guns. For them, paradox requires contradiction. However, the Protestant maxim *finitum non capax infiniti* entails paradox—finite understanding in light of God's infinite character suggests that not all knots can be nicely tied off. This is not to say that some fears of paradox are unfounded. Love for paradox can be taken so far that certainty is lost and the church is left awash in subjectivity. James Anderson helps readers navigate between the Scylla of rationalism and Charybdis of fideism.

Anderson is Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C. This book is the published version of his doctoral dissertation completed under the mentorship of David Fergusson at the University of

Edinburgh—he also has a PhD in computer simulation from Edinburgh. Though the book is written by a Reformed theologian, it is useful to Christians of any tradition.

Paradox is defined by Anderson as, “an apparent contradiction” (5). More fully, “A ‘paradox’ thus amounts to a *set of claims which taken in conjunction appear to be logically inconsistent*” (5-6, emphasis his). The essence of paradox is the appearance of contradiction, but not true contradiction. Anderson explains that he adopts this definition “so as not to beg any crucial questions about the logical status of Christian doctrines” (6). Anderson takes his definition and asks whether any essential Christian doctrines are genuinely paradoxical, and whether a person should rationally believe a paradoxical doctrine.

In the first major section Anderson explores the cardinal doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation as test-cases, both of which, at their heart, are paradoxical. For each, he begins with historical treatments of the doctrine, followed by contemporary interpretations. Anderson is well-grounded in the history of theology, though he deals more with creedal treatments and their later interpretation rather than a full-blown historical theology. Anderson is as much at home with fathers like Athanasius and Augustine as he is Richard Swinburne or Alvin Plantinga. The epistemological categories used by Anderson in his philosophy of religion—such as warrant, proper function, cognitive faculties and the like—have affinity with the latter two. While not in the forefront of his bibliography, but as much a voice between the lines, are the philosophies of Cornelius Van Til, John Frame, and Paul Helm; Anderson finds himself well-fitted to the growing discipline of “analytical theology” spear-headed by Oliver Crisp and Michael Rea, though he is more on the theological side of things. Frame’s multi-perspectivalism is also relevant to Anderson’s hermeneutical epistemology.

In the history of theology attempts have been made to soften the paradoxical quality of the Trinity and Incarnation. Anderson shows that such softening is a loss of the essential meaning of each doctrine. For the Trinity, Anderson concludes: “As the debate stands today, no writer from the first century to the twenty-first century has offered an explication of the doctrine of the Trinity that is both clearly orthodox and free from apparent contradiction” (59). The dilemma faced by the theologian is to either embrace paradox or heterodoxy. The same holds true with the Incarnation; an example of

heterodoxy that Anderson gives in this regard is the kenotic theology of recent theologians like David Brown or Stephen Davis.

In the second major section of the book Anderson turns to the question of how paradox can be rationally justified by those who self-consciously maintain orthodox theology. At this point he turns from questions of theology to philosophy; the work of Plantinga comes to the fore, especially the discussion of “warranted” belief. In a sense Anderson pulls Plantinga from philosophy into theology showing how this important philosopher’s work is relevant to the church. In his concern that orthodox theologians be warranted in their belief in paradoxical truths, Anderson develops what he calls a model for “Rational Affirmation of Paradoxical Theology” (RAPT). This is based on warranted Christian doctrines and shows how mystery is a “defeater-defeater” and a “defeater-insulator” (250-252). Defeaters are those aspects that can wreck plausibility structures and render a belief irrational. Mystery, however, holds the tension of two apparently contradictory truths, and thus defeats a defeater. An example of this is the problem of evil that is often used as a defeater for belief in an all-powerful and all-good God. Such a problem can “remain warranted even in the face of potential defeat by the recognition of paradox” (255). This mystery or paradox is rooted in God’s incomprehensibility.

Anderson’s book is an extremely important contribution to the philosophy of religion, as well as apologetics and systematic theology. In the face of challenges from those outside the faith, Anderson shows why it is rationally sound to believe in ultimately paradoxical doctrine in spite of the contrary claims of atheists like Michael Martin. For those challenges to orthodoxy from within the faith, he shows the importance of maintaining historic teaching without the need to make everything fit, or be abandoned. While the book is fairly technical, especially in the second half, the reader should not be daunted as there are great benefits to adopting Anderson’s conclusions.

An area that could be further developed is the relationship between the clarity of revelation and the comprehensibility of God. Here and there Anderson mentions inerrancy and inspiration, but answering how revelation can be received by human beings and why God can be known through revelation would bolster the importance of paradox. These are areas of concern for those who throw paradox under the bus, and answering such questions would be of further help in a book that is already of immense value.