

A BOOK REPORT ON THREE BOOKS  
(DECEMBER 8, 2022)  
“BELIEVING PHILOSOPHY”  
“THINKING ABOUT GOD”, AND  
“CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY”

TITLES OF BOOKS: 1) “BELIEVING PHILOSOPHY/A Guide to Becoming a Christian Philosopher” (Hereinafter Referred to as “Believing Philosophy”)  
2) “THINKING ABOUT GOD/First Steps in Philosophy” (Hereinafter Referred to as “Thinking About God”) and  
3) “CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY” /Third Edition (Hereinafter Referred to as “Christian Theology”).

AUTHORS:

1) OF BELIEVING PHILOSOPHY-DOLORES G. MORRIS (Hereinafter Referred to as “Morris”, Who holds a PhD from the University of Notre Dame, and is an Instructor in Philosophy at the University of South Florida, and who focuses her research on the mind-body problem).

2) OF THINKING ABOUT GOD-GREGORY E. GANSSLE (Hereinafter Referred to as “Ganssle”, Who is on the Philosophy Faculty at Rivendell Institute and is a part-time lecturer in Philosophy at Yale University, and who is the Editor of the Four Views Book, *God and Time*, and is the Co-Editor of *God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature*).

3) OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY (the third edition)-MILLARD J. ERICKSON (Hereinafter Referred to as “Erickson”, Who is viewed as being a giant among Evangelical Theologians and who has been a long time teacher in, author in, and noted advocate for Systematic Theology, and who holds a PhD from Northwestern University and has served as seminary dean and teacher at several schools, including Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Baylor University, and who has also held numerous visiting professorships, and who has authored many books, some of which have been Reviewed by this Reviewer)

PUBLISHERS AND DATES OF PUBLICATION:

1) FOR BELIEVING PHILOSOPHY: Zondervan Academic, 2021  
2) FOR THINKING ABOUT GOD: InterVarsity Press/IVP Academic, 2004  
3) FOR CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY (third edition): Baker Academic, 2013, with the earlier editions being published in 1983 and 1998.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: There are several trite statements which apply to Your Reviewer’s even approaching or starting this Review, including: “There Is Nothing For It But To Get To It”, and “The Longest Journey Starts With The First Step”. Candidly, I, your Reviewer, have looked for every possible excuse for not beginning this Review. Why is that? Well, in the first place I have made my job much more difficult by combining Reviews of three Books into a single Review or Report. Secondly, I have, in this Review, dealt with 3 Books, none of which can be read or



absorbed or even begun to be grasped in a single reading. Each of these 3 Books requires an initial reading, and then a second reading, and at least a third review of all of the parts of the Book which the Reader has underlined or highlighted. As you can imagine, such a necessary reading, re-reading, and study and review presents a monumental task, particularly for Erickson's Book, "Christian Theology", a monumental, 1145 page masterpiece, which takes months to even read, the first time, much less absorb.

So why do I seek to combine three Books, which require extensive readings and study, into this single Review? Why not just Review them one by one? Perhaps the answers to these questions rests both in my personal faith journey (or perhaps "faith struggles") and my belief that any Christian (and certainly any Evangelical) Pastor, Teacher or Church Leader or Serious Christian Student can benefit, hugely, by reading and studying these three books in the order in which they are presented here: 1) Believing Philosophy, 2) Thinking About God, and 3) Christian Theology.

So what does my personal faith journey have to do with my decision to incorporate Reviews of these three Books into this single Review? Well, perhaps, the answer to this question rests in my educational and professional backgrounds. I have a degree in Engineering, and a Law degree, and I engaged in a very busy private practice of law for over 53 years. I have always considered myself to be "poorly educated", as I have had minimal academic exposure to the liberal arts, including the field of philosophy, and certainly no exposure to the field of theology. I sometimes feel that I just attended two "trade schools", which prepared me to work in two highly concentrated fields, engineering and the law, but prepared me for little else. This educational background, and 53 years of intensive law practice (which will make anyone a skeptic) have caused me to be, at best, skeptical, and in some cases highly skeptical of accepting, as "gospel truth" (no pun intended) many things which are taught as Christian "Gospel" or "God's Law", including things that are stated from the Christian Pulpit. I like to think that I am a "critical thinker", but in any event, I want to critically study and examine things which I am told. While I am a devout Believer, I have to study, and critically examine many of the things which are taught, as "gospel", about Christianity, and its tenets and doctrines. I am not one who just accepts, as one of our authors, Morris, describes it, "Feel Good Christianity". I wish that I was, but I am not. I wish that I, like many folks with whom I have become acquainted and dearly love, could just accept things on blind faith. I need to understand, as Morris puts it, "What I Believe and Why I Believe it, and Whether or not that Belief is Reasonable". Therefore, for reasons which I will state below, these three Books have provided me with a huge benefit in the pursuit of my personal Christian journey and studies.

However, this Review is Not About Me. It is About You, the Reader. If you are a Pastor or Church Leader or Teacher, then you need these Books, and you need to read and study them so that you are able, sometimes using the tools of Philosophy, to teach and to defend, from the pulpit and wherever else you are called upon to teach or provide pastoral or helpful counseling, the beliefs, tenets and doctrines of Christianity and to answer questions (which inevitably occur) of those in your congregation and of those who God brings to you, as to what it is, specifically, that we as Christians (particularly Evangelical Christians) believe, and why we believe these things, and why our belief in these things is not just some pie in the sky, rote belief (e.g. "Jesus



Loves Me, This I Know Because the Bible Tells Me So”) or rote recitation of some Biblical passages or of things which are often preached, but, rather, are wholly reasonable beliefs that are grounded in reason, logic, truth, and historical fact. In other words such beliefs, tenets and doctrines are “True” in that they conform to reality. Our beliefs, as Christians, are beliefs, which are true, and which are grounded in sound, logical reasoning, and are beliefs that we can defend against the ever increasing, loud cries of “naturalism”, and “humanism”, and the argument that “science tells us all that there is”. You, as Pastors and Church Leaders and Teachers, need to clearly know, clearly understand and be able to clearly articulate and defend What We Believe, Why We Believe It, and Why These Beliefs are Sound and Reasonable and are Based in Sound Logic and Historical Fact, and to do so in the face of increasing public skepticism and the increasing headwinds against faith which are blowing from our educational system, particularly our college/university/higher educational institutions and increasingly from our lower levels of education.

Furthermore, if you are not a Christian Pastor or Leader, but are a “lay teacher” in your church or small group, or are a serious Christian Student, then I urge that you incorporate these three Books into your studies and library, and, perhaps, in your teachings. If you are in a Christian Book Study group, or in a Christian Small Group, then I urge that you try to incorporate these three books into the studies of your group. I readily admit that, before I read and really studied these three books, I had little (absolutely no) acquaintance with the field of Philosophy (thinking that it was just a bunch of worthless, liberal art mumbo jumbo used by folks who just like to argue with each other over meaningless issues, like how many angels can dance on the head of a pin) and that I had but a truly surface skimming knowledge of many of the very important doctrines and tenets of the Christian Faith. Respectfully, and with no intention to offend those who have a deep seated faith and who have no need to “know more” (and I wish that I was one of those) I submit that many, many of the people in your small group, book study or class are as bereft of knowledge in these areas as I have been. In fact, if I had the opportunity to suggest to a Christian Leader or teacher, who wants to offer a class to serious Christian students, I would suggest to him or her that he or she base a class around these three Books, and that he or she include them as required readings, perhaps together with some other books, such as those of C.S. Lewis (*The Great Divorce and Mere Christianity*), and William Lane Craig (*Reasonable Faith*) and a number of books authored by J.P. Moreland (one of my favorite Christian Philosophers because he graduated from the University of Missouri, my alma mater). Will a class, based on these books be one of heavy lifting, and one that requires some serious work over an extended period of time? Yes it will be, and it will not be a class for everybody, but those who take it, and seriously do the work and the reading and engage in the class discussions will be equipped to teach others, and to answer, with real knowledge, the serious questions of faith which are brought to them by those who God brings to them for answers. My hope is that some leader/teacher will offer such a class. I think that it is needed.

Perhaps the reasons for my rather strong thoughts in these respects will become more clear as we explore, at least in modest detail, the contents of these three Books which are the subject matter of this Review, *Believing Philosophy, Thinking About God, and Christian Theology*, which I think should be read and studied in that order.



OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOKS (WHAT IS THE AUTHOR SAYING AND WHAT IS HE OR SHE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH BY WHAT HE OR SHE IS SAYING):

I) BELIEVING PHILOSOPHY: In this book our author, Morris (a Christian teacher of Philosophy) attempts to demonstrate that the tools of the trade of Philosophers, properly used in conjunction with Scripture and Church Tradition, provide valuable tools for the study and understanding of Scripture, and of the essential doctrines of Christianity, and for dealing, in a logical, reasonable manner with some of the basic problems and issues which will confront almost every Christian, including *The Problem of the Pervasive Existence of Evil in this world* (including instances of what she refers to as “purely gratuitous evil”, evil for which we can find no reasonable explanation as to why a Wholly Good, All Knowing, All Powerful, Purely Moral All Loving God would permit such an evil to occur). Morris starts her Book with a description of just what the study of Philosophy is, submitting that it is or ought to be “the pursuit of wisdom...(with)...the method of philosophy (being) the asking of big questions: Why are we here? Why is there something rather than nothing? Is there a God, and if so what is God like? Do people have souls? How should we live? What makes one choice good and another bad? What is a good life, and how can I achieve it?” She states that Philosophy is basically the pursuit of truth and wisdom, a pursuit which requires that one raise and address big, fundamental, hard to answer questions, such as those stated above, and those raised by “...the prevalence of evil and suffering in this world, the spiritual fate of those born into cultures with little knowledge of Christianity, or how can it be true that God is in control and yet people have free will....”. Morris submits that “Philosophical reasoning requires that you spend some time determining not only what you believe but also why you believe it, and whether or not your reasons for what you believe are good, sound, rational reasons for that belief. Very simply stated, philosophy asks you to think more carefully about what you believe.”

Morris, our author of *Believing Philosophy*, contrasts the Philosophical Approach, if you will, to the fundamental questions which every Christian faces or eventually faces, to what she refers to as the “Feel-Good Faith” approach, an approach which she believes to be one that is being increasingly used by the Church in general. She asserts that the “Feel-Good” approach is “...symptomatic of a growing trend in our culture, both inside and outside of Christianity, to treat religious belief as a kind of self-help manual...(with)...in this view, all that really matters (being) the role that faith plays in your life. If it makes you happy, that’s great! If it doesn’t, ditch it!” Morris cites the example of J.D. Vance, the author of *Hillbilly Elegy* (recently made into a movie) and of *How I Joined the Resistance* and the recently elected U.S. Senator Elect from the State of Ohio) whose faith journey, one of unanswered questions, could have led to atheism, but who “...persisted in the pursuit of truth, continuing to examine what he believed, why he believed it, and whether or not those beliefs seemed to match the world as he knew it.” Vance found some of the essential answers to his questions in a passage written in *City of God* by Augustine, an early church father and philosopher, in which Augustine described the “debauchery of Rome’s Ruling Class”, a passage which Vance found to be “...the best criticism of our modern age that



I'd ever read...". This passage and other critical, extensive studies of Vance ultimately returned Vance to Christianity, and to becoming a devout Roman Catholic.

It is Morris's view that some philosophical training (hopefully a good deal of it) will, through the use of the tools of a philosopher, enable Christians who are of deep faith, but who also seek understanding and knowledge of that which they, as Christians believe:

- 1) To define, with clarity, what they believe,
- 2) To state, with clarity, good sound arguments for, and defenses of that which they believe,
- 3) To distinguish good, sound philosophical arguments from poor ones,
- 4) To meet challenges to the Christian faith, such as the ones presented by the *problem of evil*,
- 5) To, by critically examining their fundamental beliefs, and the challenges to those beliefs, before those challenges are raised, be better able to evaluate those beliefs calmly and rationally, thereby strengthening those beliefs and guarding them against challenges.

So our Author, Morris, proceeds to describe, in a clear and readily readable and understandable (very well written and easily read) manner the methods used by philosophers to state sound philosophical arguments, and to evaluate the arguments which are asserted by others (including the "new atheists") by: 1) first identifying the argument, whether you believe its conclusion or not, and stating it, or restating it in the strongest possible terms so that you can fairly and charitably evaluate it, and then 2) secondly, locating and stating, with clarity, the "conclusion" of the argument, remembering that an "argument" is not a fight but rather states a defense of a conclusion or a defense of some asserted "truth" which the person asserting the argument wants you to believe or accept, 3) thirdly, identifying the "premises" for the argument, meaning the matters which the person asserting the argument asserts that, if such matters are true, then the conclusion of the argument is necessarily true, 4) fourthly, determining whether the argument is well formed, meaning whether it is one where its conclusion logically follows from its premises, 5) fifthly, evaluating the premises for their truth, meaning whether they are supported by sound evidence, and 6) finally, identifying the nature or species of the argument, meaning whether it is a "deductive" argument (one where, if it is well formed, and the conclusion is clearly stated, and the premises asserted for that conclusion are true then those premises logically lead to the undeniable truth of the conclusion, or, in philosophical terms "entail" the conclusion) or whether it is an "inductive" argument, meaning one which is well formed, and where the conclusion is one of "probability" (meaning that the conclusion which follows from the premises is more likely true than not, or is more probably true than not, meaning that the premises, if true, do not "entail" the conclusion of the argument, but render the conclusion as being one which is "more probably true than not"). Having described for the Reader these methods of philosophy and of philosophical argumentation, our Author, Morris, then provides the Reader with numerous examples for the use of these methods.

Let's explore our Author's teachings in a bit more detail. She states that, if you are going to approach a belief in a philosophically sound matter, you must first, with clarity, state that



belief. What is that belief? Here language, terminology, words and the definitions of words become critical. Many disputes over beliefs stem from a failure of the persons engaged in such dispute to clearly articulate, in a manner to which both parties agree, just what the belief in dispute is. In other words, the “conclusion” in dispute needs to be stated with clarity. We cannot provide arguments for or against a conclusion or belief if we don’t know what we are arguing about. It is essential that the conclusion at issue be clearly stated. Now, having established just what it is that I believe about a given subject, the next question our Author would have us ask is: “Why Do I Believe It?.” The concern here is whether or not my belief is *reasonable*. “A reasonable belief is one that is rationally justified, that is, it is held on the basis of good reasons, ...(as)...rationally justified beliefs tend to be true beliefs and that is one of the reasons why they are valued.” It is true that “still, justification (for a belief) and truth can come apart, but it is nevertheless true that: In the rational pursuit of wisdom, one of the primary goals is the development of justified true beliefs. In a rationally justified belief, the reasons given for that belief (i.e. the *premises* (or the grounds or reasons)) asserted in support of that belief, are true and rationally, logically support that belief (i.e. the *conclusion*), either with absolute, undeniable certainty (meaning that the conclusion is *entailed*), or with strong probability (meaning that the conclusion is more probably true than it is not). However, our author asserts that we must keep in mind that not all “justified beliefs” are true, as “truth and justification” can come apart. Truth and justification are not the same thing, but “justified beliefs tend to be true.” The fact that you hold a belief requires that you have good reasons, good evidence in support of that belief. Our Author goes on to provide instruction as to how we might go about adequately evaluating the truth or falsity of a belief. In her view, the truth or falsity of a belief is determined by what that belief says about the world or about reality. True beliefs correspond with reality; whereas false beliefs do not do so. True beliefs correspond with reality, or with the world as it is or with what is happening or has happened in that world, but false beliefs do not do so. That said, sometimes the content of a belief is not readily ascertainable. Take, for example, the belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine which is difficult to understand or evaluate for most of us. How can we believe that God is One, and yet that God is Three Distinct Persons? Does our belief in the Trinity, a doctrine that is difficult for us to comprehend, mean that a belief in the Trinity is irrational? No! First, one can absolutely rely on, and defer to a trusted authority or trusted authorities with respect to matters that are beyond our understanding, such as the Trinity. Second, such a deferring to or relying on trusted authorities is not unique to religious believers. Reasonable, rational people constantly rely on trusted authorities with respect to matters beyond their understanding. So one source of rational evidence for a belief, or of sound *premises* which support a belief can be, and oftentimes is information provided by one or more trusted authorities.

The essence of the position asserted by our Author, Morris, in *Believing Philosophy*, is that the Church is in desperate need of Philosophically minded Christians, and that Philosophically minded Christians should work to understand what they believe and why they believe it, and whether such beliefs are reasonably grounded. However, she further asserts that this need for Philosophically minded Christians, does not mean that Philosophically minded



Christians must replace their faith with reason. “On the contrary a well-reasoned faith pursues wisdom with the confidence that comes from knowing that God himself is the source of wisdom. Reasonable faith seeks understanding whenever possible”.

So, our Author, Morris, urges that diligent Christians, particularly Christian leaders, teachers and pastors, need to be much more philosophically minded, and should be schooled in using the tools of the philosophical trade in order to be able to state, with clarity, and to then to provide rational, well grounded defenses for what Christians believe, and why they believe it, and why such beliefs are rationally grounded in reason and, in fact, correspond to the truth and to reality. She adopts, and argues for the “correspondence” theory of truth which holds that a “belief is true when it corresponds to reality.” She defends that theory against the increasingly prevailing beliefs or theories of “individual relativism” (my beliefs are my beliefs and they are true for me and that is all that counts) and “cultural relativism” (the beliefs of any culture, regardless of what they are, are ok or true for that culture and who is to say otherwise), and “subjective relativism” (where the truth of beliefs is determined by their popularity). Our Author asserts very cogent arguments against each of these “relativistic” theories of “belief” or “truth.”

With this extremely summary statement of some of what our Author of *Believing Philosophy*, Morris, asserts in her book, I will try to briefly outline some of her other assertions as follows:

1) An Aid Not a Threat: Philosophical reasoning, and the ability to think Philosophically and to assert and evaluate sound arguments using the tools of Philosophy are aids to, and are not threats to Theology or Christian Faith.

2) Wisdom Requires Thought, Sometime Critical Thought: True, all Wisdom comes from God, but that does not mean that God automatically imparts Wisdom into the minds of Christian believers. The acquisition of Christian Wisdom is not a passive endeavor. God grants Wisdom to those who prayerfully ask for it and seek it, in faith. While God does grant Wisdom, we humans have a role to play in seeking it and fostering it.

3) Clarity Inspires Confidence in Your Faith: “The natural consequence of increased clarity about your faith ought to be increased confidence in your faith.”

4) While Philosophy is Not Essential, it is Spiritually Beneficial: “Philosophy is not essential to the Christian life.....(but it)...is nevertheless, spiritually beneficial.” For example, unmediated, direct access to the Bible is not essential to the Christian Faith, but, in truth, most of us do not have such an “unmediated access” to Scripture. Our access is “mediated” by those who have gone before us to translate, into our language, the languages used by the authors of Scripture. “Translating a text in a way that captures both the meaning and connotations of the original language is a complex and difficult task.” “Furthermore, most Christians do not merely study the Bible on their own in their homes. When we receive teaching on Scripture from our pastors and teachers or professors, we also receive at least some degree of interpretation and application. We must similarly trust that these interpretations and applications are faithful to the original intention of the text.” That said, “We recognize that the perfectly accurate, true meaning of Scripture is neither transparent nor obvious to all readers. Instead, there is room for



disagreement, and sometimes that disagreement goes beyond the trivial to matters of great significance.” So we seek to properly read and understand the Bible using the wisdom, which has been developed over the centuries, by theologians who have gone before us (meaning the evolution, through church history, of the doctrines and tenets of our beliefs; sometimes referred to as the “Traditions” of the church, or also meaning that we seek to avail ourselves of the knowledge developed by “trusted authorities”), and also using “...the skills cultivated by philosophical reasoning...”. Stated in other words, in seeking to understand God’s Written Revelation provided by Scripture we rely on Scripture, the wisdom of “trusted authorities” (i.e. the Traditions developed by Church Fathers and theologians, over time) and our Philosophical Reasoning.

5) Philosophical Reasoning Important to Context: “The benefits of philosophical thinking are even clearer with respect to the challenge of understanding Scripture in its historical context....The challenge posed by contextualization is that we sometimes take the Bible to be saying something that it was not, in fact, intended to say. In these cases, the practice of using philosophical questions in the pursuit of wisdom is especially beneficial.” All Christians are impacted in their hearing and understanding by the times and places in which they are born and in which they live. This factor tends to cause us to import into Scripture meanings from our own culture and our culture’s contemporary values. Philosophical questioning and reasoning can help us in our attempts to read, hear and understand Scripture in the ways in which the original authors of the Scripture intended and in the ways in which their original audience would have heard and understood what was said or written.

6) Back Off and Evaluate Your Beliefs From Some Distance: “You should do what you can to gain a little distance from your beliefs to better understand where they come from and where they lead. Just as the past and future are relevant to how we ought to understand the here and now, so too are your beliefs related to one another in important and inextricable ways.”

7) Guidelines and Arguments: Our Author, Morris, provides helpful guidelines for reading philosophical texts. She provides extensive and excellent guidelines and instruction for the development of, and the evaluation of philosophical arguments. She provides very helpful guidance for developing distinctions between *deductive arguments* (i.e. those arguments which, are well formed, and in which, if the *premises* are true, then the *conclusion* inevitably follows and must be true) and *deductive arguments* (i.e. those arguments which are well formed, and in which, if the premises are true, then it is more probable than not that the *conclusion* follows or is probably true). She provides wonderful examples of good deductive arguments and of poor deductive arguments, and of good inductive arguments and of poor inductive arguments.

8) Truth and Provability Are Different Things and Can Sometimes Come Apart: Truth and Provability differ. Sometimes that which is True differs from that which we can know or prove. “Truth and Provability come apart. Truth is a question of how the world is, whereas provability is a question of what we can know about the world. For that reason our guiding standard must be reasonability, not provability. “If it is reasonable to believe that the premises of a well formed argument are true, then you may reasonably conclude that the argument is a good argument...(but)...if you have good reasons for believing one of the premises to be false, then you



may reject the argument as false. Truth is the goal, as it ought always to be, but reasonability will often be the best available means of attaining that goal”.

9) Suffering, Evil and the Goodness of God: Having given us the reasons why Christianity needs more philosophically minded and trained Christians, and having given us some of the tools used by philosophers in assembling, evaluating, defending and refuting arguments, our Author, Morris, then goes on to deal with one of the most serious issues which Christians and those who defend Christianity must face and deal with. That issue raises a direct question about the very existence of God. The issue was first raised, in ancient times, by Epicurus, who asked: “*Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then evil?*” Many atheistic scholars maintain that this question has never been satisfactorily answered. Hence, the “problem of evil.” “The problem of evil, broadly speaking, is just the reality of evil in a world created, sustained, and governed by a loving God”. Morris attacks both the *deductive* arguments to the effect that the presence of evil compels a conclusion that a Loving God does not exist (Note: These deductive arguments have been generally rejected by all reputable scholars, both Christian and Atheistic, as all agree that there are reasons why a Loving God might well allow some evils in order to maintain some greater good) and the *inductive arguments* which are asserted by atheistic scholars to the effect that *it is probable that God does not exist* (These inductive arguments are more difficult to deal with). Let’s outline, for a bit, what our Author, Morris, says about the problem of evil:

a) The Deductive Argument: The deductive argument of atheistic scholars goes as follows:

- 1) If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect,
- 2) If God is omnipotent, then God has the power to eliminate all evil,
- 3) If God is omniscient, then God knows that evil exists,
- 4) If God is morally perfect, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil,
- 5) Therefore, if God exists, then evil does not exist,
- 6) Evil exists,
- 7) Therefore, God does not exist.

This deductive argument has been extensively refuted, and generally rejected, for a number of reasons, including a conclusion that “Some evils are necessary conditions for the greater good.” So the deductive argument, for a number of reasons outlined by our Author, Morris, is not considered to be all that problematical. This version of the logical problem of evil is almost universally rejected by philosophers of religion.

b) The Logical Problem of Gratuitous Evil: Inductive arguments which raise the problem of evil as evidence that God *probably* does not exist, generally start with instances of evil which appear to be entirely *gratuitous*, meaning that there appear to be absolutely no conceivable reasons why such instances of evil should be allowed, as there are no conceivable goods which can be gained or furthered or protected by allowing such instances of evil. Our author cites several examples of such apparently gratuitous evil, including instances of torture and rape of very young, almost infant girls. Such examples are raised by atheistic scholars, with



arguments to the effect that: “These examples are such that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of some greater good that might justify God’s permitting these horrors to occur...”.

c) The Atheists’ Inductive and Evidential Arguments Against the Existence of God Based Upon the Existence of Gratuitous Evil: Our Author, Morris, asserts that the most difficult to deal with Philosophical Argument against the probable existence of God, which is asserted by atheistic scholars, is not a deductive argument but rather is an inductive argument, sometimes referred to as an “evidential argument”, that is based upon instances of what appear to be purely gratuitous evil, and which goes something like the following:

- 1) There are instances of intense suffering that seem to us to be gratuitous,
- 2) If God exists, then there are no instance of actually gratuitous suffering,
- 3) Therefore, either God does not exist, or none of these instances of suffering is gratuitous-each is justified by some (hidden greater good),
- 4) It is *more likely* that God does not exist than it is that each of these instances of intense suffering is justified by some (hidden) greater good,
- 5) Therefore, atheism is more likely true than theism.

“So understood, the inductive evidential argument from evil asks us to consider the following: In light of all of the suffering in the world, is it more likely that God exists and is acting for reasons beyond our ken or that God does not exist? The atheist advancing the argument concludes, of course, that the latter is more likely than the former.” The Author, Morris, concedes, as we all must that the huge prevalence in the world of suffering, and of instances of suffering which, to us, appear to be wholly gratuitous and cannot be explained by some (hidden) greater good of which we can conceive, are serious, weighty matters giving rise to some emotionally powerful arguments on the part of atheistic scholars, but she asserts that there are reasonable, rational responses to these arguments. She then goes on to describe these responses.

d) Leave it to the Reader: At this point, with a desire that the Reader carefully read and review Morris’ book, *Believing Philosophy*, I leave it to you, the Reader, to read, study and evaluate Morris’ arguments against the arguments of the atheistic scholars which are briefly described in section c) above. Respectfully, I, your Reviewer, submit that you need to be able to understand and assert these arguments. The Problem of Evil is a serious problem for Christians and we need to understand how to confront that problem. I will state, in brief summary, that Morris describes defenses, which she categorizes as: *Total Refutations* (i.e. God’s ways are higher than our ways, and we cannot expect to be aware of the divine reasons why God might take any actions, much less those allowing for some instances of evil, the primary Total Refutation defense being one referred to as “*Skeptical Theism*”), *Defenses* (i.e. the providing of reasons why God might allow evils, including the “*Free Will Defense*”, with the Author asserting her position in strong favor of *libertarian freedom*, an incompatibilist position as opposed to a compatibilist position), and *Theodicies* (i.e. The suggestion of actual reasons, whether on grounds of revelation or of common sense, why God might allow for certain instances of evil). All of these defenses or arguments are carefully described by our Author, and those descriptions are accompanied by some good citations to Theological Authorities and examples.



10) A World of Real Values/The Presence of Objective Moral Values and Objective Morality as Offering Evidence for the Existence of God: Lastly our Author, Morris, using excellent opening quotations from a London Priest and C. S. Lewis, offers well formed, philosophical arguments: 1) For the actual existence in this world of Objective Moral Values, 2) For the position that such existence of Objective Moral Values must have a source, and 3) For the position that the best explanation for such a source of Objective Moral Values is a Loving, Completely Good, Completely Moral God, who desires that His children, His creation, conduct themselves in certain ways. Again, I, your Reviewer, leave it to you, the Reader, to read our Author's excellent analysis of what I will call "*The Objective Moral Value*" argument for the existence of God. That argument is briefly outlined as follows:

- 1) There are objective moral values,
- 2) The best explanation for the existence of objective moral values is the existence of God,
- 3) Therefore, God (probably) exists.

Our Author presents this simplified version of the Objective Moral Values defense in various forms, and she presents the arguments which are asserted against that defense by atheists, including defenses based on *Individual Relativism*, *Cultural Relativism*, *Relativism in General*, and *Darwin's Evolutionary Theory*. For all of the reasons set forth above in this Review, it is strongly recommended that the Reader carefully read this book, *Believing Philosophy*, including the very thoughtful, well written chapters on Objective Moral Values.

*Summary Remarks About Believing Philosophy*: At this point, you, the Reader, are probably upset (possibly using strong language) with this part of the Review which covers *Believing Philosophy*. You probably believe (perhaps rightly) that this Review is far too lengthy and detailed. You might well be correct in this belief. However, in defense of my lengthy summary of this book I assert that it is my very strong belief that any, what I might call *Thinking or Reasoning Christian*, particularly any such Christian in a leadership or teaching position needs to read and study this book. I hope that, perhaps, my overly lengthy Review of this book might induce you to being or remaining such a *Thinking or Reasoning Christian*.

II) THINKING ABOUT GOD: Having likely over worked you, the Reader, with the lengthy Review of *Believing Philosophy*, I, your Reviewer, am going to spare you such a lengthy Review of the Second Book in our Series, *Thinking About God*, Authored by Ganssle. I am doing that because I find that *Thinking About God* provides the Reader with excellent examples of the use of the Tools of Philosophy, and the use of Philosophical Reasoning, as described in *Believing Philosophy*, in dealing with some of the very fundamental beliefs of Christianity, including the belief in the Existence of God, the belief that God Created the Universe, this World, and Mankind, the belief that God has chosen to reveal Himself, in part, with the written word of Scripture, and other fundamental beliefs which rest at the heart of the Christian Belief System. I had read this Book, *Thinking About God*, some years ago, and put it on my shelf and



frankly forgot about it. Then, as I read *Believing Philosophy*, it occurred to me that I had read a somewhat similar book, *Thinking About God*, some years ago. So, I pulled Ganssle's book off the shelf, and re-read it. I found that it was both an excellent reinforcement of Morris' *Believing Philosophy* arguments that Christians need to be more Philosophically minded, and an excellent provider of examples of the uses of the tools of Philosophical Reasoning in dealing with the very fundamental, foundational facts, tenets and doctrines of the Christian Belief System.

In my view, these two books, *Believing Philosophy*, and *Thinking About God*, fit together, hand in glove, and provide an excellent (even if only entry level) primer of the fields of Philosophy and Philosophical Argumentation, and of the uses of the tools of those fields in assisting thinking, reasoning Christians in knowing and understanding What They Believe, and Why They Believe Such, and Why Such Beliefs Are Reasonable, Rational, and Supported By Reasonable Evidence, and Are Far More Reasonable Than Are Contrary Beliefs. In the humble opinion of your Reviewer, the tools provided by these two books do not replace Faith in any way, but help to strengthen Faith. To quote St. Anselm's Moto: "*Faith Seeking Understanding*", I urge that these two books, with the third one in our series for this Review, help to lead to *Understanding of Our Faith*.

III) CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY: Now we finally come to the third Book which is the subject of this Three Book Review, *Christian Theology* Authored by Erickson. This Book is a monumental work of 1145 pages. Unlike our first two Books, *Believing Philosophy* and *Thinking About God*, which can be read (even re-read and then studied) in several sittings, this Book, *Christian Theology*, if it is read in an even remotely serious fashion, requires months to just read it the first time. So I, your Reviewer, must readily admit that it is impossible (at least for me) to even begin to do simple justice to the Contents of this Book or "to What The Author is Doing with What the Author is Saying". I am not going to even attempt to do that in this Review.

That said, this Book, this monumental achievement of Erickson, should be in the library of every Evangelical Pastor, Teacher and Church Leader, and, in fact, in the library of every person who I have called *A Thinking or Reasoning Christian*. You should read it (yes, that takes months), and be aware of what is in it, and should then consult it as you prepare to preach, teach, or lead, or respond to the difficult questions which are brought to you by those whom God has brought to you for answers that have given them a crises of faith.

You don't buy that assertion on my part? Well let me ask you some questions:

- 1) As a Christian Leader, particularly an Evangelical Christian Leader, do you know what all of the fundamental foundational facts of your Christian Faith are?
- 2) As a Christian Leader, particularly an Evangelical Christian Leader, do you know all of the very fundamental Doctrines and Tenets of your Christian Faith?
- 3) As a Christian Leader, particularly an Evangelical Christian Leader, are you aware of how knowledge of these foundational facts, and Doctrines and Tenets evolved over the history of the Church? Do you know how they were formed, initially? Do you know how they were



modified or changed, argued against, or defended over the History of the Church?

4) As a Christian Leader, particularly an Evangelical Christian Leader, are you aware of the conflicting positions asserted over the History of the Church as to these fundamental, foundational facts, and these Doctrines and Tenets?

5) As a Christian Leader, particularly an Evangelical Christian Leader, are you aware of the current conflicts over, and arguments for and against some of these fundamental, foundational facts, or these Doctrines and Tenets, or of the compromise positions as to such matters which might be appropriate?

Maybe you can affirmatively answer each of these questions. Admittedly I am not theologically educated or trained, but I would submit that I, as a devout Believer and an Evangelical Christian who has engaged in a good deal of study about my Faith, should be able to affirmatively answer some of these questions, but I cannot do so (or at least could not do so until I read and reviewed and studied Erickson's monumental book). As Erickson argues: "The issue of correct belief is ever so important in our time. We find numerous shadings of religious idea. And we also encounter myriad conceptions of Christian lifestyle, which are rooted in doctrinal conceptions. Our particular understanding of basic concepts, for example, the relationship between grace and works, has a profound influence on what we do in our Christian lives and the spirit in which we do it. HENCE, RIGHT BELIEF IS IMPERATIVE." (Emphasis Added) "...(R)eal theology, good theology, will enhance the reader's awareness of the greatness and grandeur of God." I don't think that any of us can argue against these assertions of Erickson. They are almost givens. That being the case, I respectfully submit to you, the Reader, that if you want to do "good theology", and enhance "right beliefs" in those who are entrusted to you by God, you need to read, and be fully familiar with, and be able to consult this monumental book of Erickson, *Christian Theology*.

Being a theologian, and a "systematic theologian", Erickson, in *Christian Theology* (and this is the third edition of that work) systematically (as outlined by the "Contents" for the book), one by one (again, "systematically" if I can use that term) states and analyzes and defends the fundamental, foundational facts, tenets and Doctrines of our Christian Faith. As outlined in the "Contents" at the beginning of the book, the book is broken down into 12 Parts, Parts 1 through 12, with each Part containing a number of chapters. The Parts (without some of the Chapters listed under each such Part being listed) are as follows:

Part 1: Studying God (with descriptions, in separate Chapters, of "Theology", and of the Method of Theology, and of Contextualizing Theology, and related topics),

Part 2: Knowing God (with separate Chapters on God's Universal Revelation, God's Particular Revelation, the Preservation of Revelation, Inerrancy, and the Power or Authority of God's Word),

Part 3: What God Is Like/What is His Nature and /What are His Characteristics, with separate chapters on The Greatness of God, the Goodness of God, God's Nearness and Distance (*Immanence and Transcendence*), God's Three-In-Oneness (*the Trinity*)

Part 4: What God does/What is His Plan, Creation, Providence, the Problem of Evil in the World, and God's special agents (i.e. angels),



Part 5: Humanity/Introduction to the Doctrine of Humanity, the Origin of Humanity, the Image of God in Humans, the Constitutional Nature of Humans, and the Universality of Humanity,

Part 6: Sin (with chapters on the very nature of sin, the source of sin, the results of sin, the magnitude of sin, and the social dimension of sin),

Part 7: The Person of Christ, with separate Chapters on Contemporary Issues in Christological Method, the Deity of Christ, the Humanity of Christ, the Unity of the Person of Christ and the Virgin Birth,

Part 8: The Work of Christ, with separate Chapters on an Introduction to the Work of Christ, Theories of Atonement, the Central Theme of Atonement and the Extent of Atonement,

Part 9: The Holy Spirit, with separate Chapters on the Person of the Holy Spirit, the Work of the Holy Spirit, and Recent Issues Regarding the Holy Spirit,

Part 10: Salvation, with separate Chapters on Conceptions of Salvation, the Antecedent to Salvation (i.e. predestination), the Beginning of Salvation, the Continuation of Salvation, the Completion of Salvation, and the Means and Extent of Salvation,

Part 11: The Church, with separate Chapters on the Nature of the Church, the Role of the Church, the Government and Unity of the Church, the Initiatory Rite of the Church (i.e. Baptism), and the Continuing Rite of the Church (i.e. the Lord's Supper/Communion),

Part 12: The Last Things, with separate Chapters on Introduction to Eschatology, Individual Eschatology, the Second Coming and Its Consequents, Millennial and Tribulational Views, and Final States.

Hopefully, you, the Reader, can see from this outline of the "Contents" of *Christian Theology*, how that book, systematically, comprehensively, and completely, from the very beginning (*Creation*) to the very end (*the Last Things/Eschatology*) covers all of the fundamental facts, tenets and Doctrines of our Christian Faith. Our Author, as to each fact, tenet and Doctrine, describes the fact, tenet or Doctrine, and then goes through Church History showing how the fact, tenet or Doctrine was originated and how it has (if it has) evolved over time. He describes any differences or disputes which have existed or now exist as to the fact, tenet or Doctrine, and in most cases proposes a resolution for any such differences or disputes. I know that this book is a textbook, and might well be considered by highly learned scholars as being a "beginning textbook of Christian Theology", but in my theologically uneducated view it is much more than that. It is a veritable encyclopedia of the Mosaic of Christian Beliefs. It identifies What We Believe, and it describes How Each Belief Has Originated, and Evolved (if it has), and Why It Is Defensible.

Remember how I started this Review of the three books, *Believing Philosophy*, *Thinking About God*, and *Christian Theology*. Remember how I said that I thought that we, as Thinking, Reasoning Christians, need to emphasize "What We Believe", "Why We Believe that Which We Believe", and "Why Our Beliefs are Reasonable, Rational, and Defensible". We learned how to state our arguments for our Beliefs and our Arguments against those who attack those Beliefs,



using the tools of Philosophy and of Philosophical Reasoning, through what we learned in the first two books, *Believing Philosophy and Thinking about God*. Now with our third book, *Christian Theology*, we can acquire a thorough knowledge of What Our Beliefs Are, in systematic and comprehensive terms. So, in your Reviewer's opinion, these three books go together hand in glove. Their contents mesh and merge into sources of knowledge which are essential to those who I call *Thinking or Reasoning Christians*; those folks who want to truly have a Faith based on Understanding, not just a Faith which one of our Authors, Morris, refers to as a *Feel Good Faith*.

#### HOW TO READ THESE BOOKS (IN WHAT ORDER OR WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PARTS):

This Section of this Review of our three Books is a Section that your Reviewer has been urged by the person assigning your Reviewer's book reviews to include in such Reviews. It is a Section which I have a great deal of difficulty in dealing with. My (your Reviewer's) strong inclination is to actually "Read" a book, not try to skip around in it and thereby find what is important or what is not important. As to the three Books, which are the subjects of this Review, *Believing Philosophy, Thinking About God, and Christian Theology*, it is your Reviewer's opinion that the only way to "read" these books is to actually read them, in the order in which they are presented in this Review, and to read them completely, cover to cover. That urge to read, cover to cover, is certainly true as to the first two Books, *Believing Philosophy and Thinking About God*. If you want to become mildly acquainted with Philosophy, the tools of Philosophy and how those tools can be used by thinking, reasoning Christians, then you need to completely read and study these two books. Now, admittedly, one can make a reasonable argument that you don't need to read *Christian Theology*, cover to cover, in order to gain a substantial benefit from that book. Your Reviewer will concede that, if you are aware of the "Contents" of the Book (as they are outlined above in this Review), and have a general knowledge of the contents of the various Parts and Chapters of the Book, then you can put the Book on your library shelf and use it, from time to time, as a reference book, when you need assistance in conducting some research or in preparing a Pastoral Message, or in teaching a class, or in answering some question about a Doctrine which might have been presented to you. So if you just want a reference book for your library, then use *Christian Theology* in this fashion, and as a reference book. That said, I can say, without reservation, that I have personally benefitted from struggling to read this book, cover to cover, over a period of several months. I believe that you will be similarly benefitted by such a cover to cover reading. If you are teaching a class, which I might identify as a *Class For Thinking and Reasoning Christians*, then I would assign this Book, the entire Book, as Assigned Reading, as I would all three of these Books.



WHAT CONTRIBUTIONS OR BENEFITS WILL PASTORS OR CHRISTIAN LEADERS OR TEACHERS OR TEACHERS OF CLASSES FOR EMERGING CHURCH LEADERS (ECLI) TAKE FROM THIS BOOK?:

I hope and trust that I have, in the above Sections of this Review, already answered this Question, more than once. However, I will try to summarize my opinions with respect to this question. Your Reviewer (me) joins with our Author of *Believing Philosophy*, Morris, in decrying what she (and I) see as an emerging emphasis in the Church of that which she calls *Feel Good Faith*, with churches seemingly marketing themselves as some sort of source of “self help”, where people can come, and leave, feeling “good”. Serious questions of faith are not raised, and are frankly frowned upon. This Feel Good approach will work for some, maybe many, but there are those of us in our increasingly complex, secular minded, society and culture (such as J.D. Vance, who is an extremely bright guy, regardless of what you might think about his politics, and also including me, your Reviewer) with whom this approach will not work. I apologize for feeling this way, and apologize to any of you, the Readers, who might be offended or put off by my feelings in this way, but I believe that there are many, intelligent, good people, who want to have a strong Faith, and who simply slide in and out of our churches because they don’t make them “feel good”. People of this sort want to know, and understand Christian Beliefs, and they want to find that such Beliefs are Reasonable, and are a whole lot more likely to be true than are contrary beliefs. Look at what they are taught, or have been taught in the schools and colleges and universities. They are taught that the universe, and this world, and all that is in it, and in particular they, themselves, are nothing more than the results of some happy accidents, and that they are nothing more than an assembly of some cells, with really no purpose or higher power to whom they must answer. You are not going to deal with these folks by some happy, feel good arguments that “Hey Man, There is A God, and Jesus, and they Love you, and you need to Turn to Jesus to Deal With Your Problems”. No! You need to meet these folks on the same level at which they have been taught and have been brought up, and you need to be able to clearly articulate, define and defend What We As Christians Believe, and Why We Believe Such, and Why Such Beliefs are Rational, and Reasonable, and are a Whole, Whole Lot More Likely to be True than Are any Contrary Beliefs.

If we can learn to reason, and think and speak in the ways which are urged by these three books, then we will be able to perform huge services for the Church, and more importantly God. So, once again, I urge that it is appropriate for our churches or Christian organizations to offer a class for *Thinking and Reasoning Christians*, and to build that class around these three books.

WITH APOLOGIES I REMAIN YOUR FRIENDLY BOOK REVIEWER

DAN SIMON



