



Surprised by a Paradoxical God: Finding Truth Masquerading as Contradiction

Jim Norris

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When confronted with the paradoxes inherent in Christianity, even those who call themselves followers of Jesus may be tempted to turn away from him, just as some of his disciples did when they could not reconcile who and what he was with their ideas of what he should have been. For those who stayed with him, paradox became a way of life, for the one they followed was not “of this world,” but rather, as Jim Norris describes him, he was an “alien” who brought with him the ways and culture of another world. Jesus spoke of that other world, the “Kingdom of God,” as his real home and said that it was also their home, and that they could find it within themselves. He addressed the God of his people, whose name, due to fear and reverence, could not be spoken aloud, as “Father,” even “Daddy,” and assured his followers that they, too, were God’s children.

While laying no claim to being a theologian in conventional terms, Norris, who holds an MBA from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and studied theology at Piedmont Baptist College, affirms that he received his theological training informally in the “difficult trenches of life.” Norris describes how the challenges he faced led him to the margins of faithlessness and back again, and his wise and thought-provoking book confirms that this “informal training” has taught him well.

Norris has done an exceptional job of exploring the many paradoxes at the heart of Christianity, including that of the existence of evil in the world—a major stumbling block when suffering comes to those who believe their God to be good, holy, loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful. Norris addresses this issue and many others with a logic informed by faith and tempered by real-life experience. He leads the reader to contemplate a paradoxical God—with no status who continually surprises by being not only glorious but vulnerable, immutable yet emotional, boundless yet limited in action, merciful yet just.

Along with the author’s conversational writing style, this timely book also benefits from a graceful and eye-pleasing layout, ample endnotes, and attractive cover art that conveys a message of hope under difficult circumstances. However, though Norris’ text is obviously directed toward Christian readers, it may also be picked up by the curious. As such, the author would do well to identify the underlying beliefs upon which he expands rather than assume understanding and agreement from his audience.

Current world events may lead many to question their beliefs and to seek a deeper and broader understanding of God’s ways. While living with paradox is never easy, readers will find in Norris a perceptive, insightful, understanding, and humble guide.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January 27, 2012)

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