

**Chasing Mystery: A Catholic Biblical Theology. By
Carey Walsh. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press,
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Reviewed by: Jonathan Burroughs, *St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland.*

Chasing Mystery is written as a response to the rise of secular culture, which ‘has had a corrosive effect on biblical literacy’ (p. 2). While the challenges of atheism are discussed at various junctures (esp. pp. 114–20), Carey Walsh acknowledges that her study is not a defence of God against atheism, ‘but more a proclamation of wonder at the divine possibility in our midst’ (p. 11). Adopting a hermeneutics of trust (i.e. the Bible is revelation by God), the intention is to offer a work in biblical theology that appreciates the liveliness of the God of Scripture. At the heart of her study is an exploration of biblical descriptions of God’s presence and absence, which she contends are ‘simply ways to negotiate divine mystery’ (p. 141). For Walsh, God’s absence does not equate to non-existence. She aims to show that divine presence is *evoked* (and not only described) in the process of reading the Bible.

After setting the parameters of her study in the first two chapters (chapter one: Where Did God Go? and chapter two: Mystery and Modernity), Walsh deftly discusses various key texts for negotiating God’s presence and absence in the Bible (chapter three discusses Jacob’s Wrestling with the Angel, Jesus’ instruction to Ask and Seek, the losing of Jesus in the Temple, and Israel’s Wandering in the Desert). While *Chasing Mystery* is overtly Catholic in perspective (as indicated by the subtitle—A *Catholic* Biblical Theology), the focus, perhaps unexpectedly, is mostly on texts from the Old Testament in chapters four to seven. Walsh points out that, as the sacred authors ‘filtered their understandings of the divine through the circumstances they knew’ (p. 107), descriptions of God’s presence are lively and fluid

throughout the Bible (chapter five considers angels, holy sites, and prophets). Walsh attributes particular significance to the story of Moses and the burning bush, and understands it as the ‘paradigmatic tale of encountering the holiness of God in the Bible’ (p. 58). Moses is vividly proposed as a model for approaching divine presence: the reader is to approach the biblical text in the same way that Moses approached the burning bush, that is, receptive to an encounter with the divine mystery. Despite attending primarily to the Old Testament, Jesus is discussed in chapter eight. Walsh perceptively argues that ‘Jesus, who is visible in the flesh, incarnate—is still quite elusive, just like his father. . . . Jesus, then, is not God made clear; he is God made *clearer*’ (p. 124). She suggests that both ‘divine presence and absence is crucial for preserving God’s mystery and for drawing out our interest’ (p. 141). The paradox of faith is that it requires ‘distance in order to exist and flourish’ (p. 144). After providing a solid scriptural foundation throughout the book, Walsh concludes by calling for her reader to emulate Moses and to recognize the burning bushes in their own daily lives (p. 150).

The main strengths of this book are its engaging style and its insightful reflections on how certain key biblical texts evoke the presence of God. While Walsh is to be commended for her approach, perhaps a more detailed and fuller engagement with some of the biblical texts under discussion would add further depth to her study. Furthermore, more comment on the challenges of texts that treat the absence of God may be desirable for some readers. In conclusion, *Chasing Mystery* would be of particular interest for ‘those who truly and genuinely wonder if God could be real and, if he is, then why it should be so difficult to encounter the divine in our world’ (p. 5).