Wolfhart Pannenberg is probably the most important Protestant systematician to emerge on the Continent since Karl Barth. This being the case, a substantial introduction to his life and thought that sets the central themes of his theology in historical context, wrestles with the most penetrating criticisms found in the secondary literature, and perhaps even raises a few new questions along the way would be very welcome. At its best, *Reason for Hope* is only an approximation of this sort of project.

*Reason for Hope* is almost exclusively concerned “to present a synopsis” of Pannenberg’s three-volume *Systematic Theology* (English, 1991, 1994, and 1998,
respectively). Grenz states this as his first and primary objective. His other two stated objectives are to “implicitly” indicate “the extent to which the dogmatic presentation flows out of his methodological program” and is thereby coherent with his thought as expressed in the rest of his corpus and “to interact with the discussion that Pannenberg’s writings have generated” (5). Of the three stated objectives, however, the first objective—to present a synopsis—dominates the book, even within the portion of each chapter devoted to interacting with the secondary literature on Pannenberg’s theology. This is clearly reflected in the structure of the book, which follows the outline of Pannenberg’s Systematic Theology: Grenz devotes one chapter each to Pannenberg’s theological method, doctrine of God, doctrine of creation and anthropology, Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology, respectively.

The first edition (Oxford, 1990) was awkward. Pannenberg himself noted this in the foreword: “It gives a somewhat peculiar feeling to an author,” he wrote, “to write a foreword to a public presentation of the final synthesis of his thought by somebody else before the author himself has had a chance to publish his work.” He goes on to admit that Grenz’s anxiousness “touched me as an expression of a typically American desire to always be ahead of time.” In the end, Pannenberg decided “not to deny Stan Grenz the right of using my lectures for his purpose” for two reasons. First, Pannenberg believes that Grenz’s work might be useful in “correcting a long series of earlier misrepresentations of my thought.” Second, it might also prove useful to the English-speaking audience during the decade or so he anticipated it would take before an English translation of his still largely unwritten Systematic Theology would be available (ix).

However awkward the first edition may have felt in hand, it should be noted that Pannenberg also commends the work. He writes that “concerning the overall synthesis of my theology it provides a correct picture.” Marc Kolden, a reviewer of the first edition (Journal of Religion 72 [October 1992]: 606-7), provided an objective confirmation of this when he concluded that “Grenz has described Pannenberg’s position in significant detail with accuracy and insight” (607). There are good reasons to believe that these evaluations remain valid for the second edition. Now that Pannenberg’s Systematic Theology is complete and widely available, Grenz is able to present a much more decisive summary of Pannenberg’s theological scheme and take into account the past fifteen years of critical debate on his methodological and dogmatic positions. The result is a larger, clearer, more confident work free from the awkwardness that accompanied the first edition.

Nevertheless, at least two criticisms raised by David Cunningham against the first edition remain true of the second (Christian Century 108 [March 20-27, 1991]: 338-39). “If the book is intended as an introduction to Pannenberg’s theology for non-specialists then I fear that Grenz’s work will not prove very helpful.” Not only does Grenz continue to employ “a rather extensive theological vocabulary” (Cunningham, 338), but at times he also assumes some level of familiarity with at least the main contours of Pannenberg’s thought. In this
regard, *Reason for Hope* is not a very accommodating synopsis. On the other hand, if Grenz is writing for an audience capable of reading Pannenberg with understanding, then “the need for a purely descriptive account of Pannenberg’s work is unclear” (Cunningham, 339). Pannenberg himself justified the first edition on the provisional grounds that it will suffice until his *Systematic Theology* is widely available in the English-speaking world. This provisional justification no longer applies. Although the second edition is perhaps not “purely descriptive” it comes very close to this, even in those portions of each chapter devoted to the secondary literature. Now that Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology* is available, the audience Grenz seems to have in view—that is, those already somewhat acquainted with Pannenberg’s *magnum opus*—would have been much better served by a work that focused on providing historical context, penetrating analysis, and critical interaction rather than what amounts to a roughly three-hundred page synopsis.

—Bruce P. Baugus