

BOOK REVIEW

Khaldoun A. Sweis and Chad V. Meister, eds. *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 560 pp. Hbk. ISBN: 9780310325338.

Christian Apologetics is a reference work of fifty-four primary source readings that examine a variety of apologetic issues related to the Christian faith. The selections represent a fairly broad theological spectrum of Christian writers, and are structured according to a classical apologetics methodology, moving from Theism to Christianity. Following a very brief general introduction, the book is divided into eleven major topics: history and methodological engagement, the existence of God, the Trinity, the incarnation, the Bible, miracles, the resurrection of Jesus, the argument from mind, the problem of evil, Christianity and science, and finally, the relationship of the Christian worldview to the world. Each new part or section has a helpful introduction guiding the reader through the rationale for the selection of sources, the basic message of each submission, and the general relationship of the readings to one another. At the end of each major section, the editors give a series of questions for discussion and then a list of further readings related to the topic.

In the introduction, the editors state that their work provides a “snapshot of Christian apologetics at its best across the spectrum of time and culture” (p. 16). This goal has been adequately accomplished through the diversity and quality of the selections. The contributions cover a wide range of authors and theological positions as well as the history of the church. Scholars as diverse as the Apostle Paul, Origen, Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, René Descartes, Blaise Pascal, William Paley, C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, Peter Kreeft, John Polkinghorne, Alvin Plantinga, and William Craig are all

represented, along with twenty-seven others. The vast majority of the readings are of the highest quality of Christian scholarship relative to their period of church history. The editors even include an article by pluralist John Hick and young earth creationist Kurt Wise. While some may not agree that these two scholars represent the best that Christian apologetics has to offer, there is no doubt the inclusion of their contributions shows a commitment to a diversity of viewpoints in dealing with the various apologetic issues facing Christianity. The editors are also ambitious in their attempt to cover a wide variety of apologetic concerns, evidenced by the eleven major parts of the work.

Some sections are especially strong in terms of the content and material presented. The first section—on history, methodology, and engagement—includes Paul’s classic defense of the Christian worldview in Athens (Acts 17), a short history of apologetics by Montgomery, an overview of methodology by Beilby, an article on interreligious apologetics by Netland, a discussion of the knowability of history by Geisler, and advice to Christian philosophers by Plantinga. Each of these articles is full of rich insight into the nature and practice of doing Christian academic apologetics. The second section, which is the longest, covers all the significant arguments for the existence of God—cosmological, teleological, ontological, transcendental, moral, and experiential—and generally has the best representative apologist for each distinctive argument. Almost all the sections have very good articles, although some are especially strong. The bulk of the articles in the sections on miracles, the resurrection of Jesus, the problem of evil, and Christianity and science are well selected, covering some of the best arguments and evidence for the Christian worldview.

There are, however, a few significant weaknesses in this collection. The most obvious is the distribution of space to the different issues addressed. Almost a quarter of the book is given over to the arguments for the existence of God (approximately 130 pages). In light of the fact that the editors committed to address eleven major areas of the defense of the Christianity, and the fact that many apologists do not believe that the arguments for God’s existence are the most important evidence for the

Christian worldview, some readers might rightly question the allocation of the largest proportion of the book for this purpose. As a result of this decision, it is not surprising that some sections are much smaller and more lightly handled than one would hope (e.g., just 36 pages for the Bible, of which France's article was just 7 pages). Other topics—such as the Christian view of the nature of truth and the uniqueness and exclusivity of the Christian faith among world religions—are not even addressed. Another weakness is that, in an attempt to have representation from a variety of different periods and theological positions, some articles do not seem to be especially appropriate to the topic of their section (e.g., the article concerning Athanasius on the incarnation does not really focus on the truth of the incarnation) and others seem less fitting to an orthodox defense of Christianity (e.g., the pluralist John Hick's article). In addition, some articles are certainly appropriate to the topic but seem to be removed from their larger context (most likely because of space) and so the reader lacks the necessary framework to understand the argument fully. The introduction to each section is helpful, however, giving some context, providing a rationale for inclusion of the particular readings, and orienting the reader to the writers' basic arguments.

One of the clear challenges for the editors was to cover a considerable amount of apologetic territory (concerns and issues), as well as represent a variety of apologists from different time periods, while still presenting "Christian apologetics at its best" and to do so in a limited amount of space (538 pages). Sweis and Meister themselves acknowledge, "We were limited in what we could include for many reasons, not the least of which were space constraints" (p. 16). Although they do not identify any other reasons, certainly the issue of space itself was an obvious barrier in light of the primary goal of providing a broad representation across time of the best arguments for the Christian worldview. Inadequacies can be forgiven in light of the huge undertaking of this project.

Collections such as this are not numerous, so this work is a welcome tool to help students glean some of the best arguments for Christianity from outstanding Christian scholars across the

history of the church. Anyone interested in going beyond the popular level of understanding the apologetic task should have this work as a reference tool for learning how the church has addressed key apologetic concepts and issues through the centuries.

Rick Buck
Emmanuel Baptist Church, Barrie, ON