

Groothuis, Douglas. *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022. pp. 839. \$60.00 (hardback). ISBN: 978-1-5140-0276-6.

In this new edition of his grand Christian apologetic, Douglas Groothuis clearly still sees himself working in the tradition of thinkers like Lewis, Shaeffer, Chesterton, and Craig, all of whom appear throughout, both in the body and in the footnotes of the text. Groothuis's tome has three main parts. First, he offers "apologetic preliminaries." The second part is the meat of the book, where he defends "the case for Christian theism." This part includes coverage of (most of) the standard arguments for the existence of God, a defense of the soul, and a fascinating foray into Pascal's apologetic. The final part responds to some "objections to Christian theism."

Groothuis, a professor of philosophy for many years at Denver Seminary, seems right in his intuition that a significant portion of a contemporary apologetic (the first 144 pages of this volume) needs to be dedicated to ground-clearing and scene-setting. In a postmodern context, truth itself cannot be assumed. Thus, Groothuis spends eight chapters laying out his method, most crucially what truth is and why it matters. His conviction, as a Christian philosopher, that faith and reason can never really contradict shines through, as when he says, "the Bible ... speaks of the *knowledge of God* gained through various rational means" (91). In addition to updated material, the second edition comes equipped with seven new chapters which fill out his defense. "Original Monotheism" (ch. 9) now stands in the second part, as well as a chapter on God's hiddenness (ch. 20), two chapters on the atonement (chpts. 23–24), an additional chapter on the Resurrection (ch. 26), a defense of the Church (ch. 28), and a moving chapter at the conclusion of the third part entitled "Lament as Apologetic for Christianity" (ch. 32).

This first part is stimulating, especially as it progresses. That said, the early section on *Method* can at times feel *ad hoc*. For example, the criteria for discerning a defensible worldview are supposed to be "intuitively obvious" (50). Reading this part not as a definitive defense of apologetic methodology but rather merely as an articulation of the roadmap for his own approach, that can be forgiven. The first part concludes with one of Groothuis' strong suits, as he gives an elaborate and thorough treatment of Pascal, illustrating the existential weight of his

(in)famous Wager. For example, Groothuis recounts, “One of my own Christian students had such an aversion to this argument that he refused to attend my lecture on it” (147).

The second part of the book contains a detailed and illuminating survey of all the chief elements of a good Christian apologetic. He first gives an articulation of original monotheism and natural theology (chpts. 8–9). From there, he proceeds to the classic proofs for God’s existence (chpts. 10–17)—including a detailed analysis of Darwinism (ch. 14). His next stop is a defense of the soul (ch. 18) and a Pascalian anthropological argument (again a Groothuian strong suit) (ch. 19). Finally, he transitions to theology proper, where he touches on God’s hiddenness (ch. 20), defends Jesus’s historical veracity (ch. 21), claims (ch. 22), Atonement (chpts. 23–24), Incarnation (ch. 25), and Resurrection (chpts. 26–27), before concluding with a defense of the Church (ch. 28). He helpfully contextualizes the proofs for God: “While the effectiveness of each kind of theistic proof must be evaluated individually, the savvy apologist can combine several types of arguments to form a cumulative-case argument for theism that is stronger than the force of any argument taken by itself” (147). This is an especially important dialectical point when our scientific imagination fallaciously suggests that all fields of human inquiry should operate like a geometrical proof.

With careful dependence upon the clear-sighted argumentation found in names such as Craig, Swinburne, Plantinga, Lewis, and Anselm, Groothuis ably navigates through the ontological, cosmological, design (and beauty), fine-tuning, moral, and religious experience arguments for God. The arguments are presented at a well-struck pitch that avoids both scholarly obfuscation and popular triviality. In the early arguments, one does wonder why Thomas Aquinas and his classic Five Ways are passed over. Aquinas’s classic argumentation fits well with Groothuis’ project in a few different places: Aquinas had a response to Anselm’s ontological argument; his First Way would have contributed productively to Groothuis’s cosmological argument (especially by making it work atemporally); and, lastly, Groothuis’ own concern with the radical contingency of the world is corroborated by the Third Way. Given Aquinas’s stature and his relevance to the themes, including the thinker would only have helped achieve the author’s aims.

Groothuis’ treatment of human consciousness as the hallmark of the

soul comes next (ch. 18). He helpfully outlines several different positions in the scholarly literature and debate on the “philosophy of mind.” He argues quite forcefully and compellingly against a naturalism that would leave unexplained some of the most fundamental aspects of human life—from consciousness to love. He concludes that Christianity is committed to a substance-dualist picture of humans: we are both body and soul, and each is a substance. While this position is certainly a consistent and plausible biblical position, some Christian thinkers like Bonaventure and Aquinas have held other views; namely, Aristotelianhylomorphism. That said, substance-dualism stands in as a clear and compelling alternative to reductionist naturalism.

Craig Blomberg’s “guest appearance” in chapter 21 offers a satisfying overview of the historical knowledge we have of Christ. After the two chapters contending with Christ’s claims and the logical coherence of God becoming Incarnate, Groothuis moves on to spend two chapters discussing the Atonement. While the first is largely expository, the second provides some fuel against detractors like Kant and Hitchens. He rounds out the middle part of his work with two delightful chapters on Christ’s Resurrection. At times he rings a triumphalist note as he defends the evidence of worship at the empty tomb and Jesus’s appearances to the Apostles: “Of all the world’s religions Christianity alone purports to be based on the resurrection of its divine founder” (567).

The final part of the book is fairly brief as the author offers thoughtful treatments of religious pluralism (ch. 29), Islam—including Americans’ apathy to its challenge—(ch. 30), the problem of evil (ch. 31), and his new chapter on suffering (ch. 32). In these twilight moments of the book his lucid prose becomes at times personal and touching, especially as he describes his own experience with suffering. Thus, when Groothuis says, “Some souls suffer better than others” (699), and that, “Christianity [is] the only religion or worldview that gives meaning and purpose to suffering such that the human lament does not end in frustration or final defeat” (702), he does so with palpable credibility.

Though it may be unfair to expect that an apologetic work would contend with developments in Christian strategies of evangelization more broadly, one does wonder what Groothuis would make of Joseph Ratzinger’s comment several decades ago that reason in modernity has become a “blunt” instrument. Famously, he advocates the witness of saints and the beauty of art as more effective tools of evangelization.

112 Groothuis of course avoids hyper-rationalism and acknowledges that “one’s favorable standing with God ... comes by grace alone and is received by faith” (37). But how far *can* reason take us? It would be interesting to hear more of Groothuis’ proposed apologetic “strategies” extending beyond the formal structure of the arguments he presents.

It is important to note that Groothuis writes from a largely Reformed perspective, which most clearly comes out when it becomes necessary for him to make precise theological points. Perhaps more attention could have been given to those beliefs that separate his specific type of “biblical faith” (18–41) from other Christian denominations; but then again, he is engaged in a uniting and positive endeavor. Being aware of his perspective, though, helps the reader to contextualize his discussions of Reformed epistemology, the sacraments, and free will.

I conclude with three virtues of this accomplished book that no doubt will build upon the success of the first edition. As a thorough introductory or even intermediate exposition of the Christian faith, *Christian Apologetics* will no doubt be helpful to not only the zealous individual seeking answers, but also continue to serve as one of the best textbooks of its kind at Christian colleges and seminaries. Groothuis is a master at foreseeing and replying to objections to a given apologetic stance. Setting aside his chapters that are justifiably expository, one does not feel that a monologue has prevented the opponent from speaking. Second, he successfully motivates his positions at the beginning of each chapter, often with timely and engaging examples. Lastly, he often deals with the rhetorical as well as the technical side of the argument, providing some guidance on the way a skilled apologist will use the tools he has provided. And his laudable hope and prayer—to quote the conclusion’s title—is that we the readers, now apologetically informed, will “Take It to the Streets.”

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