

Book Review

Apologetics for the 21st Century

by

Louis Markos

(Crossway: Wheaton, Ill., 2010)

Reviewed by Craig Parton, Santa Barbara, California

Louis Markos' *Apologetics for the 21st Century* might more aptly be entitled *The Answer to Almost Every Modern Objection To Christianity Ever Asked, As Given By Almost Every Modern Apologist Who Ever Lived*. The book attempts to cover **all** major modern apologists and just about **all** ancient and modern arguments marshaled on behalf of the faith, while also providing a roadmap for operating in postmodern times. That said, the book rather remarkably succeeds in committing some fatal sins of omission.

Markos is a recognized authority on C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton and the red meat of this volume is not surprisingly found in the first section devoted to their apologetical legacy. Markos correctly concludes that section by noting that "evidentialism is the mainstream modern approach that issues out of Lewis." He goes on to lament that "dry and academic" Calvinistic presuppositionalism has been "far less effective and useful" in real world discussions with unbelief, a contention buttressed by the relative paucity of useful public debates between presuppositionalists and non-Christians. The approach of working inductively from the bottom up by means of facts and evidence, notes the author, is where common man lives and moves and has his daily being. Evidentialism finds it structurally organic to start and end with the fundamental priority of defending a Christ born outside a greasy motel in Bethlehem and later crucified under a greasy Roman Procurator outside of Jerusalem.

Helpful discussions of several of Chesterton's works follow the more comprehensive treatment of Lewis, with particular emphasis on Chesterton's "Cosmic Christian" view of history found in *The Everlasting Man*. Markos' then moves on to the apologetical contribution of Dorothy Sayers. There he focuses on her utterly original defense of the Trinity based on an analysis of the human creative process (see, *The Mind of the Maker*). The author goes on to show how the "evidential legacy" of Lewis was advanced by the uniquely "American" contributions of Francis Schaeffer, Josh McDowell, and Lee Strobel.

Markos quickly jumps from original thinkers like Lewis and Sayers to popularizers like McDowell and Strobel. This is not fatal, though showing some

familiarity with the contributions of Edward John Carnell, Harold Lindsell, and Wilbur Smith (founding members of the “Old” Fuller School of Theology a half century ago) would have provided a useful dosage of intervening *gravitas*.

Markos does a yeoman's job of cataloguing many of the giants of modern apologetics. But herein lies the Achilles Heal of this book. For reasons utterly mystifying, Markos' Apologists Hall of Fame omits the one name without whom there would be a very different apologetical landscape both here and across The Pond—namely, John Warwick Montgomery. Ironically, the front and back covers of Markos' own book sing out with praises to Markos from no less than three apologists who themselves have noted their *direct* debt to the work of Montgomery over his five decades of writing, debating, and teaching (Francis Beckwith, Craig Hazen, and Gary Habermas). Nary a mention is made of Montgomery or his contribution to historical and evidential apologetics (*History, Law and Christianity/Faith Founded on Fact/Christianity for the Tough Minded*), to legal apologetics (*Christ Our Advocate/The Law Above the Law/Jurisprudence Reader*), to philosophical apologetics (*Tractatus Logico-Theologicus*), to ethics (*Human Rights and Human Dignity/Situation Ethics*), to literary apologetics (*Myth, Allegory & Gospel/The Transcendent Holmes*), and to biblical authority (*God's Inerrant Word/Crisis in Lutheran Theology*). Instead, one is left with the disfigured impression that modern American apologetics begins and ends with Fran, Josh and Lee. To be charitable, this omission surely cannot be intentional but does suggest the author is not rowing with all his oars in the water. If it **is** intentional (and I must admit I find it hard to believe someone so widely read in apologetics is so unaware of the remarkable contributions of Montgomery whose over fifty books and ten published public debates are legendary), then the flaw is inexcusable.

Another fur ball that coughs up from this footnoteless book is Markos' maddening inability to engage in any verbal smack down of contemporary Christian leaders anxious to jump into the philosophical bed with postmodernism. Remarkably, his section on “Nonapologetic Apologists” cites, without any serious blood being spilled, to the likes of Brian McLaren and James Choung. To include these two (and to then shovel onto the pile references to “apologists” Joel Osteen and Rick Warren) in a survey of modern apologetics while entirely ignoring Montgomery is like including an extensive section on Liberace in a volume on the history of music while forgetting to mention J.S. Bach. As just one example of Markos' naively uncritical literary style, the author compliments (or at least attributes with no challenge) James Choung's “vision” of Christian salvation as providing (I am not making this up) a “*fuller gospel*.” One may be excused for asking: But fuller than *what*? The *existing* gospel? That gospel needs something *more*? If so how much more shed blood does one get with the *fuller* gospel?

Returning now to a happier place.....*Apologetics for the 21st Century* does properly chronicle (and laud) the development of the Intelligent Design movement and the critical efforts of Phillip Johnson, Michael Behe, and Bill Dembski to create the so-

called “wedge” within the scientific community’s monolithic, indeed Pavlovian, response to Intelligent Design. Not to leave unaddressed any major apologetical issue, Markos also has useful sections on the traditional arguments for the existence of God, on Dan Brown’s *Da Vinci Code*, and on Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and the new Atheists.

Louis Markos has made an effort to document the work of modern evidential apologists, though he has neglected entirely the significant and fruitful field of legal apologetics (Greenleaf, Sherlock, Linton, J.N.D. Anderson, Luckhoo, Clifford, Ellul, Archer, Lord Hailsham, etc. etc. etc.). I suppose he can, with effort, also be excused for omitting the important contributions of the likes of Montgomery, Carnell, Lindsell and Smith in exchange for fixating on their popularizing descendants like McDowell and Strobel.

The greatest benefit of getting this basic handbook on modern apologists? It *might* save you some shelf space, which should then be immediately stuffed to the proverbial gills with the works of John Warwick Montgomery, in order that one might more fully and competently engage in apologetics for the 21st century.

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