

MAKING THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY: Responding to Modern Objections. Edited by Korey D. Maas and Adam S. Francisco. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2014. 206 pages. Paper and ebook. \$19.99.

Some accuse the Lutheran church of being guilty of quietism, having the propensity to sit on the sidelines, being content with its theology as it watches the world pass by. This accusation might be termed the “Lake Wobegon effect,” named for the fictitious boyhood home of Garrison Keillor in his popular radio show *A Prairie Home Companion*. Keillor refers to Lake Wobegon as “the little town that time forgot, and the decades cannot improve.” In contrast, many Christian denominations have been actively engaged in addressing challenges to the church posed by contemporary issues and concerns. Concordia Publishing House (CPH), the official publishing arm of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), has rightly perceived a need for more books in the field of apologetics, the defense of the Christian faith. The book, *Making the Case for Christianity*, contains seven topical essays authored by members of the LCMS, who “evidence a continuing recognition of the utility of Christian apologetics as both an aid and complement to the church’s evangelistic activities, perhaps not least because the cultural environment in which the church today finds itself differs so dramatically from that of Luther and his immediate theological heirs” (page 6).

The editors are Korey Maas, Hillsdale College, and Adam Francisco of Concordia University, Irvine. Maas notes in the preface that this work “cannot pretend to be a comprehensive defense of the Christian faith; nor, conversely, is it meant to be a general introduction to apologetics, surveying various lines of defense in the absence of any particular context” (page 6). Instead, the aim of the essays is to introduce readers to specific intellectual objections to the Christian faith and demonstrate how they might be answered, not to argue people into the faith (page 7).

Gene Edward Veith writes in the book's forward that several themes occur throughout: the negative influence of historical-critical approach to Scripture; the perspective that apologetics is a work of the law, not Gospel; and an emphasis on the objective, historic facts of Jesus' life on earth, his death, and the empty tomb. "This approach to apologetics—which derives from the great apologist John Warwick Montgomery (cited throughout these essays), a Missouri Synod Lutheran—is in accord with the Lutheran emphasis on objectivity. (For example, justification is not merely a subjective experience nor an intellectual conclusion, but an objective work of God.)" (page xi).

In addition to the two editors, contributors include Joshua Pagán, Concordia Theological Seminary; Mark Pierson, Concordia University, Irvine; attorney Craig Parton of Santa Barbara, California; John Bombaro, pastor of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, San Diego; and Angus Menuge, Concordia University Wisconsin. Pagán offers rational arguments for the existence of God and focuses on the Kalam cosmological argument developed by contemporary apologist William Lane Craig. Readers of the *Global Journal* might be interested to know that a brief, but powerful, video about that argument can be seen on the web at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CulBuMCLg0>.

In the next two essays, Pierson and Parton answer challenges to the reliability of the biblical text and the facticity of the bodily resurrection. Parton asserts that the evidential approach to apologetics has the advantage because, like legal reasoning, it eschews substantive, content presuppositions, relies on facts and evidence, and strives for verdicts based on fact: "We will establish that the case for the central claim of Christianity is established 'beyond a reasonable doubt and to a moral certainty'" (page 74). Adam Francisco takes on Islam's critique of the deity of Christ. Islam sees Christianity as an innovation, invented after the time of Christ.

Ironically, Islamic scholarship uses contemporary biblical criticism, such as that by Bart Ehrman, to support its claims.

Bombaro addresses the challenge of religious pluralism. People today are willing to tolerate Christianity as long as it does not come with “bad news” from God; however, without the particularity of Christianity, there can be no sin, no guilt for sin, no judgment, and no need for a Savior. In a similar vein, Korey Maas wrestles with the allegation by anti-theists that Christianity is the root of many of world’s problems including slavery, war, genocide, and oppression. Maas demonstrates that many secular philosophers like Locke and Kant either championed slavery or were racist and that, in contrast, Christians were at the forefront of the drive to abolish slavery.

For me the highlight of *Making the Case for Christianity* is the article by Angus Menuge. Ed Veith agrees: “Angus Menuge addresses what may be the most challenging argument from non-believers—the question of how a good, all-powerful, and omniscient God could allow so much evil and suffering in the world” (page x). This is a perplexing problem that either prevents people from believing or drives them from the faith. Menuge explains many traditional arguments such as the claim that even though it might seem there is gratuitous evil, “finite, fallen creatures are not well-placed to discern whether or not an omniscient God has a reason to permit evil, so we cannot reasonably claim that some evil is probably pointless” (page 150). Ironically, atheists have trouble justifying the existence of evil because for them nothing counts as objectively evil (page 153). Another, oft-used reply to the problem of evil is the “soul-making argument.” We are like clay in the hands of a potter, and evil offers the opportunity for character development, moral responsibility, initiatives to change, and responses to the suffering of ourselves and others. The author’s most powerful and appropriate response, however, is to

redirect discussion to the Savior. Menuge writes, “Only in Christ’s cross do we see the truth about ourselves and God’s gracious and loving response. Only here can we face gratuitous, horrendous evil, and show Christ’s suffering, with us and for us, as the answer of a loving God” (page 164).

Francisco asserts in the concluding chapter that several groups denounce Christianity as a myth or a delusion, but “to shrink from apologetics in this environment is suicidal and, as J. P. Moreland puts it, a betrayal of the Gospel” (page 199). This reviewer agrees with that assertion. Lutheran congregations, seminaries, and universities need to incorporate apologetics as a centerpiece of their educational activities. *Making the Case* could serve well as a supplemental resource for academic courses in apologetics—though probably not as a standalone textbook because it lacks several key elements: introductory chapters on the history and methods of apologetics; sections covering other important challenges to the faith, for example, homosexuality; and a topical index. *Making the Case* could certainly be supplemented with more comprehensive books such as *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources* by Sweis and Meister (Zondervan, 2012), or the most recent of Montgomery’s contributions to the field, *Christ as Centre and Circumference* (Wipf and Stock, 2012).

Making the Case for Christianity is a worthy effort, and this reviewer wholeheartedly recommends it for use in Bible classes, pastors’ discussion groups, and even as a resource for preaching (it contains a useful scripture index). Hopefully, Concordia Publishing House will see fit to publish other similar works on Christian apologetics. It is an area of dire need.

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