

Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2011.

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A book on apologetics that claims it is presenting a “*comprehensive* case for biblical faith” is certainly swinging for the fences. The work of Denver Seminary professor Douglas Groothuis in this regard, however, does not make it to first base due to having committed two unpardonable sins of apologetical omission. First, the book ignores the field of literary apologetics and the work in that regard of the most important apologists of the 20th century (J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, and Dorothy Sayers). Second, Groothuis manages to also ignore legal or juridical apologetics completely and the contribution of lawyers to the defense of the faith over the past 400 years (nary a reference to the important contributions to this field by the likes of Hugo Grotius, Thomas Sherlock, Simon Greenleaf, Sir Norman Anderson, Edmund Bennett, Francis Lamb, Lord Hailsham, and especially John Warwick Montgomery).

As fatal and revealing as these omissions are, the problems go even deeper. The book comes off as a kind of love fest within the faculties of Biola University and Denver Seminary. The author himself, apparently unconscious of his strange obsession with the importance of his writings, cites to his own books and articles more than he does to those of Tolkien, Lewis, Sayers, Chesterton and Montgomery *combined*. This telling oversight may have been made necessary because this “comprehensive” 752 page case for “biblical faith” includes sections on such critical apologetical topics such as “The Spirituality of the Christian Apologist,” “Prayer and the Apologist,” and the importance of “hospitality and conviviality.” Groothuis reminds us more than once that “humility is the cardinal virtue of the apologist” (the martyred apostles probably wrongly thought the cardinal virtue was love of the truth), being sure to footnote to his own Quakerish writings on the subject (along with that of higher life evangelist, Andrew Murray). This emphasis on the personal life of the apologist has predictable results—Christ and what Luther calls the *extra nos* or wholly objective nature of the Gospel are hardly to be found in these sections that comprise monastic-type detours into the “deeper life” relating to the true motives of the apologist.

When the author does venture beyond the parapets of Biola or Denver (quoting someone other than J.P. Moreland, Craig Blomberg, and William Lane Craig, who between them are cited over

150 times in the book) his treatment can be disturbingly far off base, displaying little to no depth of familiarity with important apologists and their approaches.

For example, Groothuis presents Montgomery initially in a footnote as an irrationalist who minimizes the importance of philosophy and logic. This will come as more than a bit surprising to those who have benefitted from careful analysis of the over 50 books by Montgomery (an English Barrister and French Avocat, whose intellectual rigor has terrorized a generation of debate opponents) that defend the faith in such diverse areas as history, law, human rights, literature, and yes, philosophy. Groothuis, however, actually manages the remarkable achievement of finding a John Warwick Montgomery who is ambivalent about the need for logical consistency in his arguments (p. 26, ft. 10).

Groothuis, incredibly, contends that Montgomery's apologetical method is "summarized and systematized, *but without full documentation (strangely), in Tractatus Logicus Theologicus (sic)* (Bonn: Culture and Science, 2002)." (emphasis added)(p. 69, ft. 57). If there had been even the most minimal familiarity with Montgomery's *Tractatus*, the answer to this apparent quandary for Groothuis would have been easily discovered. Montgomery writes that references in his *Tractatus* were "purposefully omitted" so as not to "invite the lazy and the unscrupulous to use the citations independently, out of their contextual connections," which is fully consistent with the book being structurally modeled after Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. (See Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus*, at p. 205.) If Groothuis wants "references" to support Montgomery's apologetical approach, the choices are legion. He could have, for example, cracked open *Human Rights and Human Dignity* (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public Policy, 1995), which weighs in at 440 footnotes, and which details his historical apologetic and the case for Christ and its implications for law, ethics and human rights.

Which brings us to another unforgivable omission in Groothuis' self-described "magnum opus." In his introductory acknowledgments, the author thanks his master's thesis advisor in philosophy for showing him "the rigors and virtues of analytic philosophy and what it could mean for Christian philosophers." (p. 10). That is the last mention of the subject (with no mention either of logical positivism, verification and falsification and their value in Christian apologetics, or Ludwig Wittgenstein's colossal impact on philosophical investigation in the 20th century and the surprising opportunities it offers in Christian witness) in this so-called "comprehensive" case for Christianity, and lost was an opportunity to show the important insights that analytical philosophy provides for the defense of the faith. [For a corrective, see Michael Murray's edited volume, *Reason for the Hope* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999) and the application of analytical methodology to Christian truth claims by Alvin Plantinga in *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1979); see also Montgomery's provocative use

of analytical insights in defending the total trustworthiness of Scripture—Montgomery, *Crisis in Lutheran Theology*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Bethany Books, 1973), pp. 33ff.]

Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith does have some redeeming value. It sets forth the traditional proofs for the existence of God in detail (arguably *agonizing* detail when the ontological argument alone gets 22 pages). It also nicely summarizes the problems with neo-Darwinism and carefully chronicles the substantial insights of the Intelligent Design movement. To his credit, Groothuis also does present historical evidence in support of Christian truth claims. The problem is that it takes him **438 pages** to get to the case for Jesus Christ, and only after first building the case for Christian theism.

There is a deliberate and troubling reason why the author feels it necessary to first go through the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the design argument, evidences for intelligent design, the moral argument, the argument from religious experience, the argument from the uniqueness of humanity, and Pascal's anthropological argument before getting to the evidence for Jesus Christ. Groothuis believes the "best apologetic reasoning is hypothesis evaluation and verification." (p. 49). This means that Christianity is first presented as the best explanation of **all** truth and the Christian theistic worldview is verified "by arguing for its essential elements one by one." (p. 60). How does one present this methodical argument? As follows: "...carefully, slowly and piece by piece." (p. 50).

Herein lies an essential problem with the book's presentation of this apologetical method which Groothuis cheerfully assures us resists the errors of both classical apologetics and evidentialism: It may be "comprehensive" in some sense, but it is sadly not Christo-centric in any sense. By being comprehensive concerning what is secondary in terms of Gospel preachment (i.e., laboring through a plethora of world views and tediously presenting the Aristotelian traditional proofs for the existence of God before getting eventually to the case for Jesus Christ), apologetics slips into something other than presenting Jesus Christ and Him crucified for sinners.

There is solid biblical authority that one can enter the kingdom of heaven even without having *any* (let alone a *comprehensive*) familiarity with the ontological, cosmological, teleological, or moral arguments for the existence of God. Any "comprehensive" case for Christianity, however, should first get to the person and work of Jesus Christ for He, and He alone, is the comprehensive alpha and omega of all of human history.

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