PRAISE FOR
Making the Case for Christianity

Making the Case for Christianity is a carefully reasoned and clearly written defense of some of the central truth-claims of historic Christianity. This collection of helpful and timely apologetics essays responds specifically to some of the popular and controversial claims made by various current critics of Christianity. This volume testifies well to the truth that historic Christianity is a faith that involves knowledge and is indeed compatible with reason.

—Kenneth Samples
Senior Research Scholar at Reasons to Believe
Author of 7 Truths That Changed the World (Baker, 2012)

This book is a brilliant compilation of fresh articles addressing and answering the major, current objections the devote Christian is forced to address or give in to a murky and intellectually suicidal faith. A murky faith is one that is not critically examined at all, and believed blindly, and an intellectually suicidal faith is one that cannot stand the test of critical objections and inquiry when put to the test. This book demolishes both of these theses. This is an exceptional book that I enthusiastically endorse.

—Khaldoun A. Sweis, PhD
Chair and Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Olive-Harvey College in Chicago
Editor of Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources (Zondervan, 2012) and Debating Christian Theism (Oxford, 2013)

This book is distinctively Lutheran, patently Christian, and genuinely winsome. As such, believers from all branches of Christendom will find this volume both attractive and beneficial. Although the chapters in this fine text focus on a range of topics and are written by different
contributors, their commonality is this: every page of this book communicates the Gospel and exalts Jesus. Indeed, such a Christocentric methodology is the best way to make the case for Christianity.

—David W. Jones, PhD
Associate Professor of Christian Ethics
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Not a primer nor an encyclopedia, here is the mid-range apologetics we have needed. The authors address several recent challenges to the Christian account of life with responses that are sometimes contentious, sometimes sympathetic, always insightful, and ultimately constructive—a defense that is not merely defensive. The reader will find timely and useable discussions about current apologetics issues that matter.

—Russ Moulds, PhD
Professor of Psychology and Education
Concordia University Nebraska
Editor and author of A Teacher of the Church (Wipf & Stock, 2007)

Making the Case for Christianity is a page turner, with plenty to reward both budding and seasoned apologists. I’ve worked on and around these issues for decades, but I found myself repeatedly underlining and circling new things to incorporate into upcoming talks.

And the citations are a treasure. Where I found myself taking a different tack with my answers, I still appreciated their pointed and clear-spoken observations.

—Mark Coppenger, PhD
Professor of Christian Apologetics
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky
MAKING THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY

RESPONDING TO MODERN OBJECTIONS

EDITED BY KOREY D. MAAS
AND ADAM S. FRANCISCO

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE • SAINT LOUIS
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The word *apologetics* comes from the Greek word for “defense.” Christian apologetics is not necessarily about trying to argue someone into the faith, if that were possible. At its heart, apologetics is about defending Christianity from those who attack it. Today Christianity is being attacked from so many different sides, tarnished with so many false charges, and obscured with so many misconceptions that the apologetics enterprise—that is, defending the faith—is critically important. The attacks need to be fended off, the charges answered, and the misconceptions cleared up so that Christianity can at least gain a hearing, which is all the Word of God needs to create faith (Romans 10:17).

G. K. Chesterton has described how Christianity is “attacked on all sides and for all contradictory reasons.”¹ Some criticize Christianity for its gentleness; some for provoking so many wars. Some think Christianity is too optimistic; others that it is too pessimistic. Some attack it for its gloom and others for its joy. Sometimes, such contradictory criticisms can be found in a single tract or conversation. Chesterton wrote,

What again could this astonishing thing be like which people were so anxious to contradict, that in doing so they did not mind contradicting themselves? . . . If this mass of mad contradictions really existed, quakerish and bloodthirsty, too gorgeous and too thread-bare, austere, yet pandering

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preposterously to the lust of the eye, the enemy of women and their foolish refuge, a solemn pessimist and a silly optimist, if this evil existed, then there was in this evil something quite supreme and unique. . . . And then in a quiet hour a strange thought struck me like a still thunderbolt. There had suddenly come into my mind another explanation. Suppose we heard an unknown man spoken of by many men. Suppose we were puzzled to hear that some men said he was too tall and some too short; some objected to his fatness, some lamented his leanness; some thought him too dark, and some too fair. One explanation (as has been already admitted) would be that he might be an odd shape. But there is another explanation. He might be the right shape.\(^2\)

Today Christianity is being attacked for being too rational and for being too emotional, for its moral strictness and for its immorality, for being unscientific and for claiming to be true. Modernists dismiss Christianity for its subjectivity; Postmodernists dismiss Christianity for its objectivity.

This book is a collection of essays that defend Christianity from the various charges against it that are being made today. Many of them come down to cases of circular reasoning in which underlying tacit assumptions (e.g., the material world is all there is) determine the conclusions (anything miraculous cannot be real). Others assert as facts statements that just are not true (such as Christianity being responsible for war, slavery, and genocide). Some of the reasons given today for rejecting Christianity are philosophical (God’s existence violates science or is disproven because of the problem of evil). Others are moral (Christianity is unfair; God allows evil; the Christian cultural legacy is immoral). Others are existential (Christianity cannot be “the only truth” in a culture of religious pluralism). These essays give good reasons for thinking otherwise.

Joshua Pagán explains a variation of the cosmological argument for the existence of God (“All things that exist have a cause. . . .”) that

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is adapted to the findings of contemporary science. The “Kalam Cosmological Argument” begins, “all things that begin to exist have a cause.” Old-fashioned materialists insisted that the universe has always existed and so denied that it needed a cause. But now, nearly all scientists accept the evidence for the Big Bang theory, which means that the universe did, in fact, “begin to exist.” Since the universe had a beginning, it must have a cause, and that cause must be outside the universe. That cause must be a necessary being, something—or Someone—without a cause; that is to say, God. Thus, contemporary science makes a classic argument for God’s existence credible again.

The “Kalam” argument is a contribution of medieval Islam. Challenges to Christianity today come not only from atheists but also from believers in other religions. Adam Francisco takes on Islam’s critique of the deity of Christ. John Bombaro deals with the challenge of religious pluralism—how Christianity can claim to offer the only means of salvation in light of the multitude of world religions.

Ironically, challenges to Christianity also come from ostensibly Christian scholarship. A common theme throughout these essays is the influence of the historical critical approach to Scripture. That the Bible is not historically accurate, that the supernatural events recorded in the Gospels are embellishments of an oral tradition, and that the historical Jesus evolved into the Christ of faith as a construction of the church are notions taken for granted in mainstream biblical scholarship and are widely taught in Christian seminaries. This book shows how the historical critical approach to the Bible as developed by liberal theologians is being used both by the “new atheists” and by contemporary Muslims to attack the teachings of Christianity.

In this book, Mark Pierson and Craig Parton offer spirited defenses of the historical reliability of the Gospels and the central fact they record: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This view of Scripture is also supported by Dr. Bombaro, who cites the observation that the message of the Gospel is not “good ideas” or “good advice,” but “good news.”
Korey Maas addresses the “new atheists’” contention that Christianity is the source of slavery, war, genocide, oppression, and virtually every other social evil. These charges are not only grotesque slanders, as almost every historian would agree, but the fact is that Christianity also actively countered these evils. Dr. Maas shows how Church Fathers such as Augustine, Cyprian, Clement, and Gregory of Nyssa opposed slavery, as did the medieval popes. The defenders of slavery did so on the authority of Aristotle, and race-based slavery was largely a product of the Enlightenment, with Voltaire, Hobbes, and Locke defending the practice. Those who crusaded for the abolition of slavery, on the other hand, were nearly always Christians motivated by their faith. Dr. Maas agrees that Christians have been complicit in sinful practices in a fallen world—after all, Christianity is about sin and its forgiveness, not creating a utopia—but it is absurd to deny that Christianity has been an influence for good.

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. Dr. Menuge gives a lucid survey of the issue in its different forms and in the different answers that Christian thinkers have given to the problem. But then he does something more profound. He distinguishes between “philosophical theism,” in which God is imagined as an abstract, transcendent collection of qualities who looks down from above on a suffering world, and Jesus Christ, God incarnate and crucified. The Christian belief that God in Christ bore in his body the sins, the sufferings, the afflictions, and the evils of the world to redeem that world transforms the whole question.

This is a distinctly Lutheran apologetic. Dr. Menuge is employing Luther’s distinction between the “theology of glory,” which seeks glib answers and confident understanding, and the “theology of the cross,” which finds God in weakness and suffering. Our trials force us to depend not on ourselves but on Christ, who bears our burdens. Dr. Menuge concludes, “Christ is God’s answer to the problem of evil.” And in his resurrection—again, the fact of the empty tomb—we can find God’s triumph over evil and hope for our lives.
The other essays, too, while making the case for Christianity in general, are distinctly Lutheran in their approach. Instead of speculating about God as a philosophical principle, the authors do as Luther recommends, bringing the discussion to God incarnate, to the very tangible Jesus Christ.

Therefore whenever you consider the doctrine of justification and wonder how or where or in what condition to find a God who justifies or accepts sinners, then you must know that there is no other God than this Man Jesus Christ. Take hold of Him; cling to Him with all your heart, and spurn all speculation about the Divine Majesty; for whoever investigates the majesty of God will be consumed by His glory. I know from experience what I am talking about. . . . Christ Himself says: “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6). Outside Christ, the Way, therefore, you will find no other way to the Father; you will find only wandering, not truth, but hypocrisy and lies, not life, but eternal death. Take note, therefore, in the doctrine of justification or grace that when we all must struggle with the Law, sin, death, and the devil, we must look at no other God than this incarnate and human God.3

Thus, every essay keeps coming back to the concrete, historic, tangible fact of Christ and the proof of his identity in the objective reality of 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.) Lutheran theology also emphasizes the realm of the physical and the material (in the incarnation, in the cross in which Jesus bore the sin of the world, and in the Sacraments, in

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which the saving grace of God is conveyed through water, bread, and wine). As Dr. Bombaro puts it here, “with the incarnation the eternal touches time, supernatural becomes natural, the metaphysical dons physicality, the unseen is seen, grace invades nature.”

The other characteristically Lutheran emphasis in these essays is the emphasis on the Gospel. Craig Parton’s legal argument for the Resurrection culminates in a proclamation of what the Resurrection means: “In Jesus Christ we find the announcement that, though we have brought about our own doom by our cosmic rebellion against God, God himself has acted to effect a reconciliation wholly incapable of being effected by sinful man.”

Believers as well as non-believers can benefit from Christian apologetics, which builds the conviction that the teachings of the Christian faith—the triune God, the cross, salvation, everlasting life—are not just good ideas or comforting teachings; rather, they are objectively, actually true.

GENE EDWARD VEITH
INTRODUCTION

Korey D. Maas

Our twenty-first century is increasingly described as part of a new “post-Christian” era in western civilization. Long gone is the millennium and more of Christendom, during which the Christian religion infused and informed—often in an official capacity—virtually every aspect of western life and thought. Also fading away is the less cooperative yet still accommodating modern era ushered in with the Enlightenment, which, while refusing officially to sanction any uniquely Christian truth claims or any ecclesiastical role in the public ordering of society, continued to allow for significant Christian influence by virtue of the simple fact that the individual inhabitants of the western world continued in the main to profess Christianity.

Demographic and ideological shifts, however, continue to alter the religious landscape of a twenty-first century characterized by developments such as globalism and its accompanying pluralism. Twentieth-century inventions such as the internet and satellite television have brought, and continue to bring, us continually closer to geographically distant people and theologically distant ideas than was the case even a century ago. The ease of international travel made possible by the airplane further allows us not only to know much more about peoples with very different lifestyles and beliefs, but to know these people themselves. Thus even the smallest American cities can increasingly be described as cosmopolitan—world cities which reflect the pluralistic cacophony of competing religions, philosophies, and lifestyles present in the wider world itself.
Acknowledging with the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, though, that there is “nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9), one might note that the contours of this post-Christian era are not, strictly speaking, new at all. Indeed, they look increasingly like those of the pre-Christian era of the Early Church, those centuries before the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine and the eventual elevation of Christianity to the privileged status of “official” religion of the Roman Empire and, subsequently, the western world. The Christian religion was born into, and rose to prominence within, a cultural milieu no less pluralistic than our own. The apostles and their successors in the centuries immediately following proclaimed the Gospel throughout an Empire bustling with an officially tolerated Judaism, imperially sanctioned Greco-Roman cults, mystery religions imported from the East, and various local, tribal, and familial pieties. They were further confronted with philosophies such as Platonism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism, each with its own religious connotations and expressions.

Given this pluralistic context, combined with Christianity’s status both as a minority faith and a suspiciously “novel” religion, it is perhaps not surprising that the century following the death of the last apostle would come to be known as the golden age of Christian apologetics, of intellectual defenses of the Christian faith made to those—Greek philosophers, Roman emperors, adherents of Judaism and the multiple other religions of antiquity—either skeptical of or hostile to the unique tenets of Christianity. Though the prerogatives of post-apostolic Christians certainly need not be deemed normative for the contemporary church, it is nevertheless suggestive that the Early Church, encountering a religious and philosophical pluralism very much like our own, felt compelled to formulate and to present defenses of the faith to those who would reject and even persecute it. Further suggesting that a similar apologetic thrust might be especially valuable today is not only the similarity between Christianity’s first centuries and the twenty-first, but also one very notable difference.

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While the Christianity of the first three centuries, as today, found itself continually in competition with a variety of alternative religions, it did not face anything like the popular atheism, or even anti-theism, present in our own day. While the debates of antiquity swirled around the question of which particular religion was true, the atheism prominent since the nineteenth century—and more than usually vocal in our own generation—brings a strident new voice to the debate, one which dismisses all religious belief as fundamentally irrational.

Being cognizant of the intellectual and cultural context in which the church now finds itself, a pluralistic context in which antipathy to Christianity is ever more common, the Christian remains well advised to be “prepared to make a defense [apologia] to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). To the extent, however, that “making a defense” might involve “having an argument”—even if conducted, as the apostle exhorts, with gentleness and respect—some object to apologetic endeavors by pronouncing that one cannot “argue people into faith.” This is indeed true; but it is also beside the point since the apologist neither presumes nor proposes to argue people into faith. The defense of Christianity is a defense of that religion which proclaims unambiguously in its Scriptures that saving faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit at work in the proclamation of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 12:3; Romans 10:17).

And yet faith is never without an object; it remains always faith in something, or, more specifically, someone. Therefore, Christian apologetics primarily addresses itself to those objections—explicit, implicit, or assumed—which the non-Christian embraces in his or her attempts to justify a dismissal of the Gospel’s content. Unsurprisingly, these objections are most frequently aimed at matters of fact, at those Christian claims which might at least in theory be verified or falsified either by some deductive logical means or by some inductive empirical means. The proclamation to unbelievers that their sins are forgiven on account of God becoming man, dying and rising again, might of course meet objections on any number of levels. The unbeliever might object that he does not even believe God exists, so any talk of God becoming man is superfluous. She might accept that there is a God, but reject that Jesus was in fact God, ever
claimed to be God, or perhaps even ever existed. He might object that Jesus, if he did exist, did not and could not have risen from death. But the objection will almost certainly not be: “Yes, I believe that God exists, that he was incarnate in Christ, and that Christ did actually die and rise again; I just don’t believe that my sins are forgiven as a result.” In other words, the non-Christian’s objections are not to “things unseen,” such as the removal of sin, but to those truth claims which are at least in principle open to logical or empirical evaluation.

That the Christian faith even allows for such investigation of its central claims is one of the features that makes it strikingly distinct, as the great majority of religions jostling for attention in our pluralistic age make not the slightest pretense of being objectively true in any verifiable manner. They are instead what Gene Veith accurately describes as “cultural religions,” religions which serve primarily “to sanction social practices.”² Many of Christianity’s fundamental tenets, by contrast, are expressible in propositions capable of being verified or falsified by means of the rational weighing of evidence. To ask whether Jesus existed, or whether he publicly claimed to be God incarnate, or whether he rose from death to establish that claim is not at all to ask an esoteric “religious” question such as, “what is the sound of one hand clapping?” It is to ask a question about objective, historical facts.

It is therefore not surprising that the apostles themselves regularly appealed to empirical evidence in their proclamation of Christ.³ John, for example, insists that he writes about what he and his companions “have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands” (1 John 1:1). Peter, in presenting the case for Christ to a skeptical, even hostile, audience, not only reminds his hearers that he was an eyewitness to the events described, but refers to these events having happened “as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22). In similar fashion, the modern

² Gene Edward Veith, Jr., The Spirituality of the Cross: The Way of the First Evangelicals (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 92.
apologist says merely, if there are certain objections to the faith which can be addressed by reasonable appeals to evidence—or certain foundational facts which can be similarly established—then, when speaking to the rational unbeliever, one should make every possible use of reason and evidence.

Nevertheless, many Christians, perhaps especially those Protestants within the Lutheran tradition (the tradition in which each of this volume’s contributors stand), may remain wary of any confidence in or appeals to the utility of human reason. In our fallen state, it may be argued, the effects of sin inevitably prevent us from reasoning rightly in divine matters. Referencing Luther himself, one might further point out that this was the reformer’s own conclusion, such that he could dismiss reason as “the greatest hindrance to faith,”⁴ and “the devil’s greatest whore.”⁵ The context of such pronouncements must ever be borne in mind, however, as it consistently reveals that Luther’s objection is not to the use of reason per se, but to its use (or abuse) in speaking beyond or against divine revelation in theological matters. Thus, for example, when defending the clear proclamation of Scripture, he can be so bold as to say that “we must use our reason or else give way to the fanatics.”⁶

Luther’s positive regard for such a ministerial use of reason—subservient to, as well as in defense of, divine revelation—was not only clearly acknowledged, but also widely appropriated by the “orthodox fathers” of seventeenth-century Lutheranism, who thus allowed apologetic arguments to figure prominently in the


prolegomena of their dogmatic works.⁷ That the apologetic interest evident in early Lutheranism has waned in subsequent centuries—centuries in which the challenges to the Christian faith have greatly multiplied—has, we submit, benefited neither the Lutheran church nor the church universal, to say nothing of those yet outside the church. The contributors to the present volume, each of whom is a member of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 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.

In view of this contemporary environment, the essays here gathered are intended to provide readers, particularly those who have had little introduction to or experience with apologetics, with a series of “case studies” in the discipline. As such, 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. Instead, in the fashion of case studies, the aim of each essay is to introduce readers to a specific intellectual objection to the Christian faith as exemplified by one or more influential contemporary thinkers, and then to demonstrate how this objection might rationally be answered and how counter-evidence and counter-argument might further substantiate the Christian assertion in question. Given the current popularity of many of the critics with whom this volume’s contributors engage—often best-selling authors and speakers whose output is geared toward a non-professional audience; that is, the sorts of detractors whose arguments will very likely be familiar to the neighbor, co-worker, fellow-student, or even fellow-parishioner of most North American Christians—it is our hope that this collection of

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INTRODUCTION

essays might in some modest manner better equip the faithful to
defend their faith against any who would dismiss its proclamation as
irrational or lacking evidence. Not that any might be “argued into
faith”; but that by means of reasonable and persuasive argument, as
by means of the law, “every mouth may be stopped” (Romans 3:19).
And that, with mouths closed, way might be made for ears to be
opened.
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Joseph Smith, Founder of Mormonism

Alvin J. Schmidt

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Alvin Schmidt has undertaken the challenging but informative task of documenting, discussing, and analyzing over seventy parallels that exist between Joseph Smith Jr. and Muhammad. He cites valid arguments why parallels between noteworthy individuals in history need to be studied in order to understand why they engaged in similar acts that left major marks in history. This fascinating book provides many facts not commonly known about Joseph Smith and Muhammad and will help readers see and understand how the teachings of these two men contradict biblical Christianity. (P) 296 pages. Paperback.

I Am Not Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare
True Accounts from the Lutheran Church of Madagascar

Robert H. Bennett

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Translated and Edited by Matthew Carver

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Jarrett A. Carty

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The canon of western political theory has long misrepresented Luther’s political thought, mistaking it as a forerunner of the “freedom of conscience” or the “separation of church and state,” or an ancestor of modern absolutism and even German totalitarianism. These misleading interpretations neglect Luther’s central point: temporal government is a gift from God, worthy of honor and respect, independent yet complementary to the purpose and mission of the Church. Spanning Luther’s career as a reformer, the writings in this anthology will demonstrate his resolve to restore temporal government to its proper place of honor and divine purpose. (P) 544 pages. Hardback.

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