

Review of *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, edited by W. C. Campbell-Jack & Gavin McGrath, consulting editor, C. Stephen Evans, Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2006, cloth, \$45.00.

When Norman Geisler published his *Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* in 1999 he provided the Christian community with a helpful, if slanted reference book on the defense of the Faith. Like the Catholic *Handbook* by Kreeft and Tacelli, it reflected a heavily Thomistic approach. This offering from the UK, produced by IVP and including articles by many contributors, reflects a more diversified approach.

The choice of articles is on the whole excellent. It appears that a lot of thought has gone into the selection. We find good coverage of such pertinent topics as “Advertising,” “Authority,” “Critical Realism,” “Foundationalism,” “Globalization,” and “Islam.” Included also are many cameos of important thinkers (e.g. Augustine, Barth, Dooyeweerd, Henry, Lewis, Newbigin, Wittgenstein) that support the formal entries.

The dictionary is divided into two parts; the first fifty pages being given over to six essays on the history, role and relevance of the discipline. These essays range from the excellent (K. Vanhoozer on “Theology and Apologetics”), to the mediocre (A. M. Robbins on “Legitimacy of Apologetics”). The first essay, by W. Edgar, is a skillful historical survey of the subject with good observations about the future. Next is C. S. Evans limited treatment of “Approaches to Christian Apologetics.” It could be summed up as excellent on Plantinga, useful on Swinburne, not much use besides. As with Christian philosophers generally, one gets the impression that Evans and others are not overly familiar with the work of many important evangelical apologists. Then follows Robbins’ piece, which is worth reading for its insights on postmodernism, but is quite generic otherwise. I confess that I found it difficult to follow his reasoning in places. It was also off-putting to read an essay on the legitimacy of the apologetic task that did not cite Scripture!

K. Birkett’s essay on the viability of apologetics in our non-Christian culture mentions some essential matters with which apologists must always be concerned (e.g. the interface between faith and reason; the importance of clear terms), even if she fails to provide much help in the way of how these matters have been and may be dealt with by apologists. She also seems to regard *apologia* as purely defensive and inward looking (33). But this would be incorrect in view of 1 Peter 3:15 (cf. Jude 3) which surely involves a challenge to non-Christian outlooks from the perspective of God’s right to be God.

Skipping Vanhoozer’s contribution for a moment, the sixth introductory piece entitled “Christian Apologetics in the non-Western World, is quite good, even if it is more accurately described as a survey of how “Christians” – very broadly conceived, have approached doing apologetics among Indian Hindus. The article, by A. Aghamkar, is purely descriptive, which sorely limits its value.

As already indicated, K. Vanhoozer on “Theology and Apologetics” is superb. Not only is it abreast of the latest thinking in the related areas of philosophy of religion and hermeneutics, but it is self-consciously aligned with the theological construct of Scripture. The author is skeptical of the agenda of classical apologetics to “prove” that theism in general is true (35, 39). Drawing on the insights of certain non-conservatives like Hans Frei, John Milbank, and Bruce Marshall, he asserts that “When Christian beliefs are taken as true on their own terms, all other truths in the world fall into their proper place.” (40). Unsurprisingly, Vanhoozer focuses attention on “the epistemic primacy of Jesus Christ” (39-40) and the Christological interpretation of reality (42). He even supplies a brief programmatic framework within which this form of rational defense can take place (41-42). Perhaps the piece is a little shallow when discussing the place of evidences, but one can’t ask for everything. Whether intentionally or not the ghost of Cornelius Van Til (correctly understood!) looms over Vanhoozer’s essay. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a more VanTilian thesis that failed to mention the Westminster polymath.

We have felt it necessary to interact somewhat with the articles in Part One of the dictionary. As for the articles in the second (and main) part of the volume, they are, of course, of differing quality, but, on the whole, the standard is high. Among the best this reviewer came across are “Accommodation Theory” – A. Billington; “Certainty,” “Infinite Series” “Self-refuting Statements” “Unregenerate Knowledge of God” – J. Frame; “Evil”, “Satan” – H. Blocher; “ “Deity of Christ” – T. R. Thompson; “Historical Apologetics” – J. Beilby; “Miracles in Scripture” – P. G. Bolt; “Noetic Effects of Sin” – W. Edgar; “Gnosticism,” “Pascal” – D. Groothuis; “Monism” – A. F. Holmes; “Thomism” – A. Vos; “Nature of Truth” – P. Hicks; “Worldview”- A. Wolters.

Groothuis – a verificationist, covers both “Theistic Proofs” and “Point of Contact.” Both essays are very informative. As a thorough-going presuppositionalist this reviewer is far from agreeing that a good theistic argument only provides “*sufficient* reason to believe that monotheism is objectively true” (italics mine). 1 Peter 3:15 does not endorse reasoning to a god. And I cannot for the life of me understand why opponents of Van Til cannot represent his views on point of contact correctly. Anybody can read Van Til’s treatment of this in, e.g., his *Christian Apologetics* and see that the epistemological point of contact does exist by virtue of the fact that every man knows his Creator in some sense. Furthermore, the Christian is not all he should be (or will be), and the non-Christian cannot live upon all he professes to believe and live rationally in this world. The antithesis between saved and lost is not absolute, nor, in this age, can it be. The writer of the piece on “Common Ground” is even further off-beam in this regard. While we are on the subject of Van Til, it was surprising to read P. Hicks’ opinion (“Evidentialism”) that Reformed Epistemologists were partly influenced by him. A survey of even the best thinkers among this school reveals that they suffer from similar false impressions in this regard to those just mentioned.

As might be expected from a reference work arising out of Great Britain, the articles on “Origins” (R. J. Berry) and “Scientific Dating” (R. S. White) are none too sympathetic towards young-earth creationism. The former is by a theistic evolutionist and leaves a

decidedly unpleasant after-taste in the mouth. There are other qualified men in the U. K. – one thinks of Stuart Burgess and Andy McIntosh – who might have been called upon to provide a more satisfactory effort.

The pieces on “Natural Theology” by R. C. Koons, and “First Principles” by S. Theron I found to be a little confusing. The contribution on “Fideism” (J. W. Ward) was so inclusive as to bring all faith commitments, even biblical ones, under its purview.

If I were to choose just one article to have someone read it would be either the aforementioned essay by Vanhoozer in Part One or the one on “Certainty” by J. Frame. **This article is such an outstanding display** of the antithesis between Christian and unbelieving views of the subject that it acts as a sober reminder that we are to be fully committed to the revelation of God in the Bible.

Overall, the *New Dictionary of Apologetics* is a success. This reviewer might have singled out many other entries for commendation or criticism, but this review is already long enough. One might have one or two gripes about some matters (the most glaring deficiency for this reviewer was the decision not to indicate who wrote what within the list of contributors). But for all that, this addition to the apologetics literature of evangelicalism is most welcome.

- Paul Martin Henebury