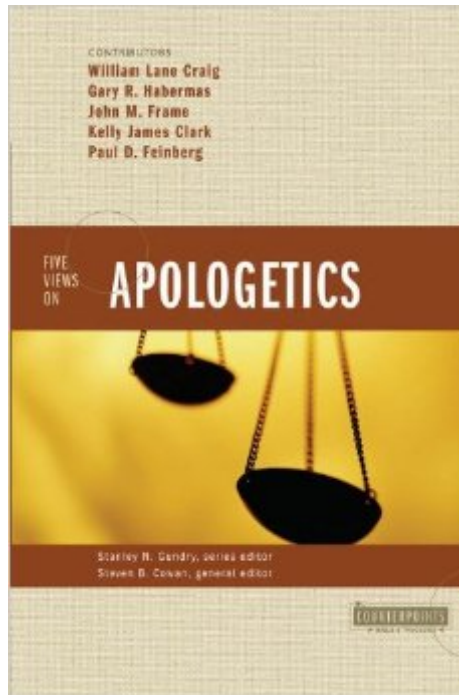


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Five Views On Apologetics (Counterpoints: Bible And Theology)



Synopsis

The goal of apologetics is to persuasively answer honest objections that keep people from faith in Jesus Christ. But of several apologetic approaches, which is most effective? Five Views on Apologetics examines the "how-to" of apologetics, putting five prominent views under the microscope: Classical, Evidential, Presuppositional, Reformed Epistemology, and Cumulative Case. Offering a forum for presentation, critique, and defense, this book allows the contributors for the different viewpoints to interact. Like no other book, Five Views on Apologetics lets you compare and contrast different ways of doing apologetics. Your own informed conclusions can then guide you as you meet the questions of a needy world with the claims of the gospel. The Counterpoints series provides a forum for comparison and critique of different views on issues important to Christians. Counterpoints books address two categories: Church Life and Bible and Theology. Complete your library with other books in the Counterpoints series.

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Customer Reviews

Few books have seriously tackled apologetic method, or how Christianity should be defended rationally. The last book I know of that surveyed options in this regard was Gordon Lewis, "Testing Christianity's Truth Claims" (Moody Press, 1976; republished by University Press of America). This book presents five different approaches, each represented by one of its exponents: Classical Apologetics (William Lane Craig), Evidentialism (Gary Habermas), Cumulative Case Method (Paul Feinberg), Presuppositionalism (John Frame), and Reformed Epistemology (Kelly James Clark). Much ground is covered concerning the Bible's approach to apologetics, where apologetic arguments should begin, how certain arguments for Christianity are, and so on. I will simply make a few comments. The presentations by Craig and Habermas are the most worthwhile because they are the most intellectual rigorous and well-documented. They also tend to agree with each on most things and reinforce each others views. While I tend to favor a cumulative case method (influenced by E.J. Carnell and Francis Schaeffer, but with more appreciation for natural theology), Feinberg's comments are the weakest by far. He never mentions the leading exponent of this view in our generation (Carnell) nor Carnell's apt and well-published student (and my esteemed colleague), Dr. Gordon Lewis. Not one word about either one! His comments are brief, his documentation is thin, and he fails to advance anything very creative or helpful, I'm afraid. A better person should have been chosen, such as Gordon Lewis. Frame gives his "kinder, gentler" version of Cornelius Van Til, which still suffers from the same kinds of problems--most notably the fallacy of begging the question in favor of Christianity.

Before I write anything, I would like to suggest that the reader of "Five Views on Apologetics" first read "Faith Has Its Reasons" by Kenneth Bow and Robert Bowman, Jr. (NavPress). Doing so will give you a good overview of the methodology taken by the different positions; it would be akin to reading a preview of this afternoon's football game, with a summary of the players and the strategy that will be used fully explained. Overall "Five Views on Apologetics" is worthwhile for the serious-minded Christian. I do like these "View" books because they allow all sides to take part in a dialogue that certainly has more potential to get things accomplished rather than a free-for-all live debate. All sides get to give their side with succeeding rebuttals. This book certainly had some lively discussion as all of the participants had their own ideas of how apologetics should be handled. The five positions were: William Lane Craig (classical); Gary Habermas (evidential); Paul Feinberg (cumulative); John Frame (presuppositional); Kelly James Clark (Reformed Epistemological). However, there were three weak points that I need to point out. First, I'm not sure the debaters were the best representatives of the positions they defended. For instance, Craig could

be described as a combination classicist/evidentialist. Much of what he said could have been written by Habermas, as even Habermas admitted. Feinberg had, I believe, the weakest argumentation, as I just never did track with his thoughts. Meanwhile, Frame certainly has his own twist on Van Til's ideas, yet these twists make his position a "kinder, gentler" version of Reformed apologetics and thus is not truly representative of Van Tillians--and there are plenty of these thinkers out there.

This is a book written by apologists, for apologists. It is not a book whose primary emphasis is to present a meticulous apologetic for the Christian faith that everyday Christians can use and draw personal strength from, but is rather a book that debates what the best apologetic method is for going about erecting such an apologetic. As such, its use I think is somewhat limited beyond the rather small audience that likes to have discussions like this. A point needs to be made about this entire subject matter. I strongly sympathize with Frame's view that debates on apologetic method are actually pretty boring and in many instances, do not represent the best of Christianity or even Christian apologetics. Regretably, apologetics has too often become a collection point for Christians who frankly like to fight and enjoy conflict. While the contributors in this book generally refrain from doing that, which is good, the history of apologetics includes no shortage of individuals it seems who once played Cops and Robbers, but then grew up and realized they couldn't do that anymore, so they began playing Clarkians and Van Tillians, or Classicists and Evidentialists, and so on. While debate over apologetic method has value and does get into larger and arguably more important theological questions, this debate can be conducted much better than it has been in the past, and in that respect, one can hope that the generally civil tone of the contributors (though Craig and Clark in particular could sometimes use a course in remedial Christian love on occasion in here) will serve as an example of such discussions in the future. Relative to the book itself, many of the contributors are first rate apologists in their respective traditions.

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