

*Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition*, Andrew Davison, ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011; 169pp. Reviewed by Jerry Ireland.

In this volume edited by Andrew Davison, several scholars, mostly from the Anglican or Roman Catholic Tradition, offer their contributions to the apologetic task. The writers set out to re-imagine apologetics in light of methods and practices they deem problematic in more traditional approaches. They do this primarily by exploring avenues such as literature, the visual arts, ethics, and so forth, regarding how a Christian understanding of these fields might foster a more inclusive apologetic agenda. As such there exists an effort here to expand the role and meaning of reason to include “imagination”—or, what Davison calls a “thick account of reason” (16).

The book is divided into four parts—“Faith and Reason Reconsidered,” “Christian Apologetics and the Human Imagination,” “Being Imaginative about Christian Apologetics,” (I confess to being slightly confused as to the precise difference between parts two and three), and finally, “Situating Christian Apologetics.” Part one calls for a renewed approach to apologetics by claiming that “proof’s apologetics” is ill-conceived, and by issuing a call for apologetics within community, centering on a uniquely Christian understanding of reason that extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge. Part two explores apologetics and the role of imagination through popular literature and the thought of C.S. Lewis. Part three explores atheism, ecclesiology and ethics. Part four examines cultural hermeneutics, a somewhat random sampling of apologetic approaches throughout history, and finally apologetics and the natural sciences.

While an interesting read owing to its scope and variety, the text ultimately suffers in that much of what the authors put forth as in need of reconsidering is done so in a fragmentary way, and in the manner of straw-man arguments. By this I mean that at several points the authors criticize the notion of “proofs” in the apologetic task, but they do so by overstating the goals of most apologists, especially those in the evidential or classical traditions, with whom I suspect the authors primarily associate (wrongly, as I argue below) this notion of “proofs.” In my view, this constitutes a major weakness in the overall program of this text. My main problem with this text lies in the foundation and premises upon which it proceeds, and therefore I will direct a majority of my criticisms to that issue.

The first question raised here is, what do the author’s mean by “imaginative”? In the forward, John Milbank argues against “an assumption that the only ‘reason’ which discloses truth is a cold, detached reason that is isolated from both feeling and imagination” (xxii). In chapter one, Hughes argues further that imaginative apologetics refers to a unique account of reason that must also include the role of faith. Furthermore, he believes that attempts to “prove” Christian truth misunderstand the unique nature of faith and reason within Christianity. There is nothing particularly novel about this, though. But Hughes goes beyond merely advocating for the importance of both, and I will return to his thoughts on that subject below.

Meanwhile, Andrew Davison (chapter two) accuses classical apologists of presuming a neutral account of reason, one that fails to take into account the Christian worldview that provides the Christian interpretation to the objects of reason. Here, Davison sounds an awful lot like a Reformed Epistemologist operating on properly basic beliefs (see p. 15). He argues that one does not “argue to” these basic beliefs, but

“show(s) what difference it makes to think this way” (15). He goes on to add that Christian community holds forth the potential to “embody a particular ‘faith’ or worldview” (26). Leaning heavily here on Wittgenstein, Davison argues, “a healthy apologetic depends upon a healthy church” (28). His point seems to be that living out one’s faith constitutes defending it.

At several points, writers in this volume appear to lob hand grenades at an evidentialist or classical approach to apologetics. For example, in his forward, John Milbank decries what he deems a problematic attempt to defend Christianity on “grounds other than faith” (xiii). His argument here seems to be directed at evidence-based approaches to apologetics. But he only minimally defines “grounds other than faith” as the territory of one’s opponent. By “opponent,” Milbank means those to whom we direct our apologetic efforts, who presumably operate from a proof-centered perspective.

Similarly, John Hughes’s chapter (1) “Proofs and Arguments” directly attacks the notion of proofs as holding forth any promise in the apologetic task. Specifically, Hughes criticizes argument and evidence-based apologetics, in both the Catholic and Protestant tradition as recent developments founded upon an unwarranted western confidence in reason and common sense. Hughes’s chapter sets the tone for much of the book (being that it is, not by accident, the first chapter). In this chapter, Hughes decries the use of evidences related to the Resurrection, fulfilled prophecy, biblical archaeology and more. He also specifically singles out Richard Swinburne’s attempts to establish the probability of the Resurrection as part of an apologetic “project of proof” that is doomed to failure. But why is Swinburne’s effort doomed to fail? Because, according to Hughes, such an approach derives from a rather modern, Enlightenment epistemology (foundationalism), and because all “ultimate questions...are...incapable of proof” (7).

But there are several issues with the claims of Milbank and Hughes. First, the notion that modern, traditional approaches to apologetics depend on recent developments—“20 or 30 years ago”—has no historical basis whatsoever (3). Some of the very items Hughes mentions, such as fulfilled prophecy, have a quite ancient lineage dating to the first and second centuries in both the writings of the NT, and in early apologists such as Justin Martyr. Second, regarding Hughes’s critique of “proof”, *no* modern apologist that I know of in the evidentialist or classical tradition entertains any such lofty aspiration as that of “proof.” And so the frequent use of this word amounts to a straw-man argument. Even the example Hughes himself cites, that of R. Swinburne, by Hughes’s own admission is engendered toward probability. Evidential apologists simply do not aspire to proof per se. This is simply a false claim made by the authors of this text that has no foundation in reality. Second, while proof may be unattainable, one can work, based on available evidence—and there is a good bit of evidence to work with—toward the best possible explanation of the datum. This, I would argue, represents the program of most apologists who appeal to evidences, including Swinburne. Hughes’s gross overstatement of what evidential apologists aim for thereby undermines the books entire approach.

So too does a portion of a chapter by Craig Hovey, titled “Christian Ethics as Good News” (Chapter 7). Hovey suspects that “proof-apologists” (again, a terribly misleading choice of words), might believe that “the point of being a Christian is to be right or to be rational” (99). But I know of no apologist who makes such a claim, and indeed, Hovey offers no evidence in support of his assertion. I think most apologists who

employ reason and evidences would avow that “the point” of being a Christian is to know Jesus and to follow Him, and would simply avow that God has endowed human creatures with the capacity to reason and use our minds productively. The fact that they use evidences does not on any account imply that they understand “being right” as the goal of faith as Hovey suggests.

Hovey says, “we will never be able to say anything more true than the claims our living make” (110). He follows this up with the claim that “proof apologists,” by winning arguments, deny the need to embody Christian ethics. But that is just nonsense. Hovey sets the ideas of loving and disciple making in opposition to knowing and making arguments. This division though cannot be found in Scripture, which frequently and unambiguously advocates argumentation and encourages the acquisition of knowledge, all the while teaching the importance of loving people (see Luke 11:52; Acts 24:22; 2 Cor. 6:6; Phil. 1:9; 2 Tim. 3:14-16).

All this is to say that often the authors of this text at times labor to drive a wedge between so-called “imaginative apologetics” and more traditional methodologies that rely primarily on argumentation and evidences. Yet I see no reason why these approaches cannot and should not go hand-in-hand. Without denying the importance of Christian ethics, there are questions that cannot be answered by one’s behavior. How for example, can an ethical approach alone address the challenges of religious pluralism? Are there no loving Hindus or Buddhists? What can love tell a person about whether or not the resurrection actually happened? While living out one’s faith certainly has apologetic value, this must go along with reasoned defenses and arguments as the apostle Paul clearly models (Acts 17; 19). At times the authors hint that they too would agree with this. But their lopsided denigration of evidentialism as a method says otherwise.

While I stand in agreement with general idea behind this text—namely, that apologetics can and should extend beyond merely rational arguments, I also have other issues with some of the content. For example, Donna J. Lazenby’s chapter titled “Apologetics, Literature and Worldview” in essence advocates for using contemporary literature as a means of cultural assessment. I think this represents a valid point and one worth making. However, her essay lacks any reference to assessing how far an apologist should go to understand the culture, and what constitutes grounds that are “off-limits.” Perhaps in her view, nothing is off limits, and if so I strongly disagree.

To illustrate, Lazenby says that literature provides a means of discovering “what people are spiritually hungering for.” She cites Paul’s quoting of Greek poets as evidence that Scripture supports the notion of apologetics proceeding from a basis in popular literature. Up to this point I am very much in agreement. However, I strongly question the turn to the *Twilight Saga* as a worthy avenue of apologetic engagement. Vampire novels and the Greek poets cited by Paul are just not the same thing. A more *a propos* analogy for this sort of popular horror works might be found in the gladiator games of antiquity, rather than among classic literature. In other words, the grace of Jesus Christ, so central as it is to the Christian message, does not require that the apologist read about the graceless, violent, and lustful world of vampires, any more than it demanded that second-century Christian apologists participate in gladiator spectacles in order to better understand *that* culture’s debasing and inhumane appetites. Furthermore, we might do well to recall that the second-century Church father Irenaeus criticized the Gnostics for

their participation in gladiator games (*Against Heresies*, 5.3), and were he around today would likely have something similar to say about the *Twilight* series.

Even though I am largely in agreement with the notion of thick descriptions of reason as it applies to the apologetic task, I think the largely negative assessment of more traditional approaches is poorly argued in this text and founded upon false assertions. This results in an apologetic agenda that appears ill conceived, and in one that pits the values of Reformed and presuppositional apologetic methods against that of evidentialists and classical apologists. That the authors favor the former over the latter two approaches is apparent, and with that I have no problem. But, my criticisms could have easily been allayed by a fairer and sounder treatment of evidentialists and classical methodologies. I don't expect the authors of this text to agree with those who take an evidential approach, but I do expect them to fairly represent them, and they simply have not done this. That said, this text does make a useful conversation piece for an advanced course on apologetic method, and does highlight some of the strengths of Reformed and presuppositional approaches.

*Global Theology In Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission* by Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green, eds. Downers Grove: IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012; 267 pp. Reviewed by Ed Smither.

Global Theology is the volume that emerged from the April, 2011 Wheaton theology conference. Readers will be encouraged to know that Wheaton has archived many of the lectures given at the conference (which I had the privilege to attend). Edited by Wheaton professors Jeffrey Greenman (theology and ethics) and Gene Green (New Testament), both of whom contributed a chapter to the book, Global Theology is a rich introductory volume that offers a voice to a number of key international and minority North American theologians. Built on the conviction that Scripture is authoritative and that all theology (even Western theology) is contextual, and the acknowledgement that the majority of Christians today are from the Global South, this is a timely and important work. In terms of its general aims, the work resembles Ott and Netland's *Globalizing Theology* (2006), Tennent's *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (2007), and Parratt's *An Introduction to Third World Theologies* (2004).

Following a brief summary introduction by Green, Part One features three chapters: a historic "long view" of global Christianity and theology from Andrew Walls (chap. 1); a discussion of his well-known translation principle in missions history by Lamin Sanneh (chap. 2); and Green's reflective chapter on the challenge of global hermeneutics (chap. 3). Part Two is dedicated to non-Western theologies and features theologians from Latin America (Samuel Escobar and Ruth Padilla-DeBorst, chaps. 4 and 5), China (K.K. Yeo, chap. 6), India (Ken Gnanakan, chap. 7), Africa (James Kombo, chap. 8), and the Arab World (Martin Accad, chap. 9). In Part Three, the reader hears from four minority North American theologians: Terry LeBlanc (chap. 10) presenting Native American theology; Juan Martinez (chap. 11) discussing Hispanic theology; Amos Yong (chap. 12) surveying Asian-American theology; and Vincent Bacote discussing African-American theology (chap. 13). In Part Four, some next steps perspectives are offered by two (white) North American theologians who seem to have Western evangelicals as their audience. Mark Labberton (chap. 14) urges global Christians to pursue humility and a love for God, the Scriptures, and neighbor in the process, while Jeffrey Greenman invites global Christians to recognize their need for the richness of a global theology (chap. 15).

This book has a number of strengths. First, the Wheaton theology conference and book editors invited some of the finest theologians in the world to participate and have modeled a winsome, humble exercise in promoting global theologizing. When I saw the lineup for the conference, I happily traveled to Chicago at my own expense to hear these scholars, pastors, and missionaries. Now, English speaking students have the contents of the conference in one, affordable book. Second, this book serves as an excellent introduction to global theology. Each chapter, in 12 to 17 page bites, could be expanded into a book of its own and each author has offered a helpful short bibliography at the end that could easily become the syllabus for a course on theology in a given context. If *Global Theology* had been available this past January, I would have certainly assigned it as a required text in my global theology course—next time! Third, while on one hand Latin America seems overly represented, I think it is important that at least one female theologian (Padilla-DeBorst) was included. In his chapter, Escobar also did a good job alerting readers to the work of other Latin American women theologians (p. 84). Finally, the work is framed by an important look at history (Walls and Sanneh) and closes with admonitions to humility from two North Americans (Labberton and Greenman) who have modeled in their chapters the humble posture that they are advocating.

I have two critiques of the work as a whole. First, though Greenman acknowledges that there are no representatives of Western academic theology (p. 237), I think that the volume would have been more truly global if it had included an evangelical theologian who had worked through the realities of post-Christian, post-modern Europe. Though no one specifically comes to mind, I think a Scandinavian, French, Irish, or even Australian voice would have been appropriate—next time! Of course, though “Western academic theology” was not fully represented Green, Walls, Labberton, and Greenman are still theologians from the West who have certainly retained at least some of their theological Westernness. Second, and related, I think it would have been good if at least one of the editors was non-Western. While Green and Greenman have fine work, I think such a move would have made the volume even more credible and effective.

In this last section I want to engage with some specific issues raised in some individual chapters. While the scope and trajectory of the book is vast, I will limit my critique and discussion to points made in four chapters. First, Sanneh (chap. 2) argues that early Christianity “was defended more as a ‘Greek’ philosophy than as the way of Jesus” and “in the early missionary literature the reader is struck by the lack of local detail and color” (p. 41-42). It seems that Sanneh has in mind the Greek apologists (Justin, Athenagoras, Aristides) but I would argue that much color and insight into the life of the church can in fact be gleaned from early Christian literature such as the Didache, the Epistle to Diognetus, and even Justin’s First Apology and Dialogue with Trypho. Also, Sanneh mistakenly identifies Cyprian of Carthage as a “Greek convert and theologian” (p. 44) when Cyprian was African, Latin-speaking, and his theology was hardly philosophical or speculative.

Next, while Padilla-DeBorst has written a beautiful chapter (chap. 5), I do have a couple of quibbles. First, much of her material on the Latin American Theological Fellowship (formerly Fraternity) overlaps with Escobar’s presentation and it seems that the entire book would have benefited from some more editing of chapters 4 and 5. Second, in her conclusion (“composing songs of hope”) she seems to take particular aim at imposed theological constructs from North America, especially complementarianism (p. 100). My question is: how might she respond to other Latin American theologians who have come to the studied conclusion that only men should occupy the office of pastor or elder?

Third, In Yeo’s very stimulating chapter (chap. 6) on Christian Chinese theology in which he strongly asserts the authority of Scripture, he also looks to Confucian thought as the primary conversation partner in doing theology in the Chinese context. He writes, “our work . . . assumes the scriptures of the Confucian classics as the ideal text of Chinese culture” (p. 107). While I must admit my concern for syncretism—one that is alleviated largely by Yeo’s high view of Scripture—my bigger question is are the Confucian scriptures and accompanying worldview normative for all Chinese peoples? Are there Chinese Christians, including those from various cultural groups, for whom Confucius is not relevant? Finally, Yeo makes what I consider a troubling assertion: “[the] Confucian classics and the Bible are fairly close at certain points while differing radically from each other at others. Holding on to their incommensurability in tension is a challenging interpretative move of CCT that will fulfill each other’s blind spots” (pp. 114). Does Scripture have blind spots? Such a statement seems to contract his previously stated evangelical convictions.

Finally, Accad (chap. 9) asserts that Middle Eastern theology in a Muslim context ought to “move from a reactionary to a constructive theology” (p. 157). While I appreciate his peaceful and edifying spirit, especially in a part of the world where religious dialogue can be tense to say

the least, I would simply assert that much of the theological development in the history of Christianity (i.e. the Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed, Augustine's writings on grace) have often emerged in the context of defending the faith. The creeds in particular are certainly didactic (what should a Christian believe?) but also apologetic (what should a Christian believe in contrast to competing worldviews?). Eighth-century Arab theologians such as John of Damascus and the Nestorian bishop Timothy certainly advanced sound doctrine in an apologetic manner before a Muslim majority. Is there way in the Middle East in which Christian thought and even a Christian apologetic can be presented in a winsome, loving, and constructive manner?

I trust that these final critiques and questions contribute to the global theological dialogue initiated by the authors of *Global Theology*. Indeed, our aim is to be a global hermeneutical community gathered around the authoritative Scriptures and led by the Holy Spirit seeking to do theology in the context of the real issues of our day. I am grateful for *Global Theology* and I trust that other readers will be as well.

*Mission in the Old Testament: Israel a Light to the Nations* by Walter C. Kaiser. Rev. ed., Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, Michigan 2012; 107 pp. Reviewed by Andrew Mkwaila.

Walter Kaiser seeks to demonstrate that mission is the central story of the Old Testament and that God's desire was that both Israel and the Gentile nations come to a saving knowledge of the Messiah who was to come. In this brief but engaging text Kaiser first sets the context by exploring this subject as it unfolds in Genesis 1-11. Three man-made tragedies are described; the fall, the flood and the dispersement following man's conspiracy to construct the tower of Babel. These three tragedies precipitate three gracious counter words of Blessing. The promised blessings center around the coming of the Messiah. The Blessing promised in these early chapters forms the kernel of what follows in the rest of scripture.

A central expression of the promise in the Old Testament is made to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3. Abram was promised that he would become a great nation, that God, would personally bless him and that his name would be made famous. Kaiser argues that the hermeneutical key for interpreting these verses and thus the overall promise of blessing that Abram received is found in vs 3 when God states that God will bestow the threefold blessing on Abraham so that all the peoples of the earth may be blessed. Kaiser further argues that all peoples of the earth from nations to tribes would come to partake of the blessing as God extended to them when they exercised faith in the promise.

God's manner of dealing with Abram in fact becomes programmatic for his dealing with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. God's intent in blessing Israel was that Israel might become the agent through which that blessing is extended to all peoples of the earth. This is manifested not only on the level of Israel's interactions with various other nations but also significantly in the lives of individual Gentiles such as Melchizedek, Ruth and Naman. Kaiser makes the argument that saving faith required that conscious knowledge in the promise of the Messiah was necessary for saving faith and that the evidence strongly suggests that these individuals and others came not only to acknowledge Yahweh the God of Israel as the true God but also came to trust in the promise of the seed.

Kaiser concludes his text by a discussion of the role of the Old Testament in the missionary mandate of the Apostle Paul. Paul's understanding of his own mission as one to the Gentiles and to the ends of the earth is one which he explicitly rooted in multiple Old Testament texts. Thus indicating that the Gentile mission was not an addendum to God's plan rather it was evident throughout the scripture, albeit at times only in embryonic form.

Mission in the Old Testament has two main strengths. First is the clarity with which Kaiser makes his arguments. He succeeds in painting a portrait of mission in the Old Testament as a whole without being mired in any particular episode. Rather he demonstrates from various characters, genres of literature and periods in the Old Testament, that the promise of blessing is a theme that is continuously developed and reiterated and forms the basis of mission throughout the scripture. The other strength of the text is Kaiser's solid exegesis of the Hebrew text. His argument is supported by forceful explications of key texts related to the promise of blessing. It is to his credit that he does this while still maintaining the flow of the overall book. Some may take issue with the extent to which Kaiser argues that the nation of Israel had a missionary mandate



to the nations rather than functioning merely as a positive illustration of God's reign, however the careful exegesis mitigates against such criticism.

Kaiser's work has pressing significance for theology and ministry in Africa. This importance stems from his treatment of issues related to blessing. The concept of personal blessing and prosperity continues to be the driving force behind much of contemporary Christianity in Africa. Kaiser's exploration of mission in the Old Testament articulates through careful exegesis that the concept and purpose of blessing is to be understood through the rubric of God's salvific intent not only for the recipient but for all people of the earth.