

Christianity has never lacked articulate defenders, but many people today have forgotten their own heritage. Rob Bowman's book offers readers of all backgrounds an easy point of entry to this deep and vibrant literature. I wish every pastor knew at least this much about the faithful thinkers of past generations!

**Timothy McGrew**

Professor of Philosophy, Western Michigan University  
Director, Library of Historical Apologetics

This is a fantastic little book, written by the perfect person to write it. Bowman's new *Faith Thinkers* offers a helpful "Who's Who" of the great Christian apologists of history and is an excellent resource for students of apologetics!

**James K. Dew**

President, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Finally—an accessible introduction to many of history's most influential defenders of the Christian faith and their legacy. Always interesting (and often surprising), Robert Bowman's *Faith Thinkers* will give a new generation of readers a greater appreciation for the remarkable men who laid the groundwork for today's apologetics renaissance. Highly recommended.

**Paul Carden**

Executive Director, The Centers for Apologetics Research (CFAR)

# Faith Thinkers

30 Christian Apologists You Should Know

**Robert M. Bowman Jr.**

President, Faith Thinkers Inc.



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## INTRODUCTION

### *Two Thousand Years of Faith Thinkers*

Christian apologetics is the reasonable defense of the faith, the practice of giving others “a reason for the hope” that we have as believers in Jesus Christ (1 Pet 3.15). An *apologist*—someone who does apologetics—is a faith thinker: someone who thinks about what they believe and why they believe it and then shares their thinking with others. Many Christians are passionately interested today in learning about apologetics. They want to be faith thinkers. Yet the subject can seem intimidating. There are so many apologists, so many books, so many terms that get thrown around, and so many arguments or approaches to the defense of Christianity. It can be difficult to get one’s bearings.

This little book will introduce you to 30 books on apologetics issues written by 30 of the most influential Christian thinkers of the past two thousand years. Each chapter provides a glimpse of the world in which these thinkers wrote, especially the challenges to the Christian faith that they faced in their time. Although most of these authors wrote more than one book, in each chapter we

focus primarily on one particularly famous and influential book. We look at 15 apologists from before the twentieth century and then 15 apologists whose books appeared in the twentieth century (including a few who are still alive). This means, of course, that books first published in the twenty-first century are not included here. It also means that no women are included among the 30, simply because until recently few women were writing notable books in Christian apologetics. Thankfully, that has begun to change as such apologists as Nancy Pearcey have made outstanding contributions to apologetic literature.

At the end of each chapter are recommendations for further study of that chapter's thinker, both by him and about him. These selections are in many cases very selective, since some of these authors were truly prolific and a great deal has been written about them. The recommendations are usually (not always) introductory in nature and may include some podcasts, videos, or other online resources. I have often refrained from giving the full URL for a webpage since these tend to change every so often, but enough information is given so you can find them using a search engine.

In keeping with the introductory purpose of this book, I have focused on describing the apologists' views with very little in the way of criticisms. Before we criticize the views of others, it is important to have a basic appreciation of the issues and some understanding of the different approaches that thinkers have taken to those issues. Every Christian can learn a lot from all thirty of the

authors surveyed here, even those with whom we may strongly disagree on certain points. Becoming acquainted with many of the greatest Christian thinkers of the past two thousand years can help us all to develop into better faith thinkers ourselves.

Many, though not all, of the thinkers profiled in this book were discussed, usually in far greater detail, in an earlier academic textbook that I co-authored with Kenneth D. Boa entitled *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith*. (See “Further Resources” at the end for more information.) If *Faith Thinkers* whets your appetite for studying the great Christian apologists in church history, I hope you will take a look at that book.



# Part One

*Before the Twentieth Century*

# 1

## LUKE

### *Acts of the Apostles* (c. AD 61)

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. —Acts 17.30–31 ESV

Many of the books of the New Testament have an apologetic aspect. However, the two-part history by Luke (his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles) is the most overtly apologetical work in the New Testament, and it has had enormous influence on apologetics throughout church history. For these reasons, we start with Acts as the first of our 30 books by Christian apologists you should know.

Luke was a physician by profession and a co-worker with Paul in Christian ministry (Col 4.14; 2 Tim 4.11; Phlm 24). He was a traveling companion of Paul during some of his missionary travels and on his journey to Rome (Acts 16.10–17; 20.5–21.18; 27.1–28.16). Acts refers by name to many of Paul's other traveling companions known from his epistles but not to Luke, as one would expect if he were the author. For these and other reasons, the traditional identification of Luke as the author of Acts is very probably correct.

In the prologue to his Gospel (Luke 1.1–4), Luke announced that his work was based on careful historical research and would present an accurate record of the origins of Christianity. It turns out that this was no idle claim. The evidence for the historical accuracy of Luke's work is especially abundant for Acts. Internal evidence, external confirmation of numerous details from archaeology and contemporary literature, and comparisons with Paul's epistles demonstrate that Acts is an impressive work of historical writing in the best tradition of ancient Greco-Roman historiography.

The structure and content of Acts suggests it was written at least in part as a political apology for Paul. Acts ends with Paul under house arrest yet preaching freely in Rome, and it emphasizes (as does the Gospel also) that Jesus and the apostles (especially Paul) were law-abiding persons. The motif of Jesus' resurrection as vindication, his fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prophecies, and the charismatic phenomena on and after the Day of Pentecost are used as cumulative evidences of the messianic lordship of Jesus (Acts 2.36) and of the authority of the apostolic truth claims. Along the way Luke used the speeches of the apostles to present apologetic arguments to a wide variety of audiences, both Jewish and Gentile.

One of these speeches, Paul's address to the Athenians, has been extraordinarily important in Christian reflections about apologetics throughout church history. It is the only substantial example of an apology directed to a non-Jewish audience in the New Testament (though

see Acts 14.15–17). Thus, this one speech has traditionally been regarded as a paradigm or model of apologetics. In this speech, Paul argued in a manner that would connect especially with Stoics, though his content was rooted in the teachings of Scripture. He showed that paganism had failed to produce knowledge of the true God and explained that God had acted to reveal himself to all people (Acts 17.16–34).

If our Christian apologetics is to be faithful to Scripture, we must pay special attention to the examples provided in Acts.

### By Luke

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are, of course, found in every edition of the New Testament. Two of the many excellent study Bibles with helpful notes on these books are *The Apologetics Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2007) and *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008). *The ESV Study Bible* can be read free online ([www.esv.org](http://www.esv.org)).

### About Luke

Copan, Paul, and Kenneth D. Litwak. *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas: Paul's Mars Hill Experience for Our Pluralistic World*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014. Excellent analysis of Paul's speech in Athens (Acts 17.16–34).

Howard, Jeremy Royal, gen. ed. *The Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible: The Gospels and Acts*. Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013. A commentary focused on defending the Gospels and Acts. Darrell L. Bock, the author of the commentary on Luke and Acts, is a leading scholar on Luke.

## 18 | *Faith Thinkers*

Keener, Craig S. *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2015. A massive study that will be a standard reference for years to come.

Mauck, John W. *Paul on Trial: The Book of Acts as a Defense of Christianity*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson—Nelson Reference, 2001. Argues, persuasively in my view, that Acts was written as a defense of Paul's message for the benefit of Roman governmental figures.

## JUSTIN MARTYR

### *First Apology* (c. 155)

In order that we may follow those things which please Him, choosing them by means of the rational faculties He has Himself endowed us with, He both persuades us and leads us to faith. —Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 10.

The apologists of the second century modeled their arguments after contemporary philosophical refutations of polytheism and the critiques of pagan philosophy by Hellenistic Jews. Of the many apologists from this period, the most important by far was Justin Martyr (c. 100–165), a convert to Christianity from Platonism. Justin wrote three important works of apologetics, but perhaps the most notable is his *First Apology*. In this book, addressed to the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius, he appealed for the civil toleration of Christianity and argued that it was in fact the true philosophy. About ten years after writing the book, during the reign of Antoninus's successor Marcus Aurelius, Justin and six other Christians were beheaded in Rome for refusing to perform sacrifices to the Roman gods.

Justin began his defense of Christianity by arguing that Christians were not atheists. They rejected false gods

and idolatry, but they worshiped the true God, his Son (the Logos, who had become a man, Jesus Christ), and the Spirit. Christ taught a noble, ethical way of life, including obedience to Caesar as long as it did not compromise their exclusive religious devotion to God.

Justin drew some analogies between Christian beliefs and elements of pagan religion while insisting that pagan religion was the creation of demons. Christ was not a magician but was in truth the Son of God. The Hebrew prophets had predicted his birth, miraculous ministry, rejection, crucifixion, resurrection, and heavenly rule. (Justin was a pioneer of the argument from fulfilled prophecy, which he also advanced in more detail in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*.) According to Justin, any truth or semblance of truth in pagan mythology or in Plato's philosophy derived from Moses, whose writings predated them all. (Moses did predate Plato by centuries, but the idea that Plato was in any way dependent on Moses is now universally rejected.)

Justin finishes with a description of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, explaining their origins and refuting the scandalous claim that in the Eucharist believers were literally eating human flesh and drinking human blood. His conclusion includes, ironically, a supposed letter (commonly regarded as spurious) from Marcus Aurelius pleading for tolerance of the Christians.

It is easy for modern readers to find fault with various aspects of Justin's apologetic. However, his efforts were commendable given his place in Christian history (even

# Part Two

*The Twentieth Century*



C. S. LEWIS  
*Mere Christianity* (1944)

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. —C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 56.

Clive Staples Lewis (1898–1963), known to his friends as “Jack,” was almost without doubt the most popular Christian apologist internationally in the twentieth century. Reportedly over 200 million copies of Lewis’s books have been sold, including the beloved seven-volume Chronicles of Narnia, a three-book science fiction series, and many other books in addition to his works of apologetics. No wonder, then, that *Time* magazine labeled him the twentieth century’s “most-read apologist for God.”

Lewis’s best-known apologetic work, *Mere Christianity*, was really a combination of three books (*The Case for Christianity*, *Christian Behaviour*, and *Beyond Personality*).

A 1993 *Christianity Today* poll found it far and away the most influential book in readers' Christian lives, apart from the Bible. In its original form as BBC radio talks during World War II, *Mere Christianity* may actually have contributed in some measure to the Allied victory by encouraging faith and hope among the British people.

We will focus here on *The Case for Christianity*, the first part of *Mere Christianity*. This work is itself divided into two "books." Book I is entitled "Right And Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe." Here Lewis presents the moral argument for God. He explains that this argument shows that there is a Power, something or someone behind the moral law but does not prove that the God of Christianity is that Power. This Power, however, must be something like a Mind. Since this Mind expects moral behavior of us and we all too often fail to produce it, what we have found so far is bad news.

The good news is what Christianity has to offer, based on God having revealed himself. This is the subject of Book II, "What Christians Believe." Here Lewis argues that neither pantheism nor dualism can adequately account for evil, which is neither illusory nor a power equal to good. This leaves theism, the belief that God created the world and made humans with the capacity to make choices—a capacity we have misused by doing evil. God's response to evil was to come as a human being, Jesus. Here Lewis presents his most famous argument: that since Jesus claimed to be God, he must either be a very bad man (either consciously evil or completely insane) or actually

be God. Since Jesus clearly was not a very bad man, he must really be God. Lewis was quite aware, by the way, that many critics argue that Jesus never made divine claims, an argument he addresses elsewhere. Here Lewis focuses attention on the Gospel accounts of Jesus forgiving sins—something critical scholars would have an especially difficult time dismissing as later legend. As Lewis points out, Jesus was either incredibly arrogant to think he had the authority to forgive someone of every sin he had ever committed, or Jesus really had that authority.

75 years after it was first published, *Mere Christianity* is today constantly one of the bestselling Christian apologetics books on Amazon.

### By C. S. Lewis

Lewis, C. S. *The Abolition of Man*. New York: Macmillan, 1947.

A classic short book warning that relativistic ethics undermines human dignity. It seems almost prophetic now.

\_\_\_\_\_. *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*.

Edited by Walter Hooper. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970.

Important collection of essays that includes “Evil and God,” “Miracles,” “Myth Becomes Fact,” “The Grand Miracle,” “Christian Apologetics,” and more.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Mere Christianity*. Rev. and enlarged ed. New York: Macmillan, 1960.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*. 2nd ed. New York: Macmillan, 1960. Arguably Lewis’s most ambitious, rigorous apologetic work, thoughtfully revised in light of criticisms he received of the first edition.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Problem of Pain*. London: Centenary Press, 1940; New York: Macmillan, 1943; paperback ed., 1962. Lewis's insightful treatment of the problem of evil, still somewhat unusual in its approach.

### About C. S. Lewis

Baggett, David, Gary R. Habermas, and Jerry L. Walls, eds. *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness and Beauty*. Foreword by Tom Morris. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008. Essays by Peter Kreeft, Victor Reppert, Baggett, Gregory Bassham, and other scholars, many of whom have published one or more books about Lewis.

Bassham, Gregory, ed. *C. S. Lewis's Christian Apologetics: Pro and Con*. Value Inquiry Books Series 286. Leiden: Brill, 2015. Scholars debate Lewis's argument from desire, argument from reason, moral argument, "trilemma" (so-called) argument, and response to the problem of evil.

Brazier, P. H. *C. S. Lewis: Revelation, Conversion, and Apologetics*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012. Part of a five-volume series of books on Lewis. This book, by Paul Brazier, puts Lewis's apologetics in biographical, historical, and cultural context, and provides an overview of his apologetically oriented work in chronological order.

Downing, David C. *The Most Reluctant Convert: C. S. Lewis's Journey to Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002. Insightful, detailed biography of Lewis's early life, with important lessons for Christian apologetics.

Marsden, George M. *C. S. Lewis's Mere Christianity: A Biography*. Lives of Great Religious Books. Princeton: Prince-

ton University Press, 2016. Informative and insightful study placing Lewis's most influential nonfiction book in its historical and cultural context.

McGrath, Alister E. *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis*. Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014. One of several books about Lewis by this respected English Christian scholar.

Metaxas, Eric, host. *Discussing Mere Christianity: Exploring the History, Meaning, and Relevance of C. S. Lewis's Greatest Book*. DVD. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 170-minute DVD works through *Mere Christianity* through interviews with McGrath and several other noted Christian scholars. There is also a 120-page study guide by Devin Brown.

Reppert, Victor. *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: In Defense of the Argument from Reason*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003. Notable study on one of Lewis's famous arguments for God's existence.

[www.cslewis.org](http://www.cslewis.org). The website of the C. S. Lewis Foundation, which maintains a study center at The Kilns (where Lewis lived) and holds conferences and retreats.

And many, many other great resources!

EDWARD JOHN CARNELL

*An Introduction to Christian  
Apologetics (1948)*

Bring on your revelations! Let them make peace with the law of contradiction and the facts of history, and they will deserve a rational man's assent. A careful examination of the Bible reveals that it passes these stringent examinations *summa cum laude*. —Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, 178.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Calvinist philosophers on both sides of the Atlantic developed distinctively Reformed approaches to philosophy and apologetics. At the Free University in Amsterdam, Herman Dooyeweerd published works seeking to show that theoretical thought was always rooted in a set of religious presuppositions. At the newly formed Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Cornelius Van Til taught his students (through course notes unpublished at the time) a new approach to apologetics in which the truth of Christianity was to be set forth as the only adequate basis for knowledge, reason, and fact. Gordon H. Clark, first at Wheaton College and then at Butler University, developed a dogmatic approach to apologetics in which the truth of the Bible functioned

as the “axiom” of the Christian’s belief system. These “pre-suppositional” approaches to epistemology and apologetics posed direct challenges to classical philosophical arguments for God’s existence and to modern evidentialist defenses of Christianity. We will highlight Van Til’s and Clark’s contributions later (chapters 18 and 20).

Van Til had taught a generation of students when one of them, Edward John Carnell (1919–1967), published a textbook on apologetics advocating an approach that integrated Van Til’s presuppositional method with other perspectives. The book, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, was published in 1948, the same year Carnell became a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Carnell evidently suffered from clinical depression, and in 1967 he died from an overdose of sleeping pills. His emotional turmoil perhaps made him identify more sympathetically with Kierkegaard, and in fact he was one of the first American evangelicals to write a book about Kierkegaard’s thought. With the passing of time Carnell came to place increasing emphasis and priority on the experiential and ethical dimensions of faith. However, his apologetic method remained essentially unchanged from what he set forth in his *Introduction*.

Carnell held a mixed view of the classical approach to apologetics. On the one hand, he strongly emphasized the fundamental undeniability of the law of noncontradiction. On the other hand, Carnell rejected traditional arguments for God’s existence, such as Thomas Aquinas’s five ways, and he endorsed David Hume’s skeptical objections to