

Faith Thinkers

30 Christian Apologists You Should Know

Robert M. Bowman Jr.

President, Faith Thinkers, Inc.

Contents

Introduction: Two Thousand Years of Faith Thinkers

PART ONE: 15 APOLOGISTS PRIOR TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

1. Luke, *Acts of the Apostles* (ca. AD 61)
2. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* (157)
3. Origen, *Against Celsus* (248)
4. Augustine, *The City of God* (426)
5. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* (1078)
6. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1263)
7. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536)
8. Galileo Galilei, *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina* (1615)
9. Hugo Grotius, *On the Truth of the Christian Religion* (1627)
10. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (1669)
11. Joseph Butler, *Analogy of Religion* (1736)
12. William Paley, *Natural Theology* (1802)
13. Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (1844)
14. Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists* (1846)
15. James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (1897)
- 16.

PART TWO: 15 APOLOGISTS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

17. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1944)
18. Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (1948)
19. Cornelius Van Til, *Defense of the Faith* (1955)
20. John C. Whitcomb and Henry Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (1961)
21. Gordon H. Clark, *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God* (1964)
22. Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (1968)
23. John Warwick Montgomery, *History and Christianity* (1971)
24. Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (1976)
25. Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (1976)
26. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality* (1983)
27. William Lane Craig, *Apologetics: An Introduction* (1984)
28. J. P. Moreland, *Christianity and the Nature of Science* (1989)
29. Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (1991)
30. Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God* (1996)
31. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (1998)

Further Resources

About Faith Thinkers

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 Peter 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.

PART ONE: 15 APOLOGISTS PRIOR TO 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; Philemon 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).

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.

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.

2

Justin Martyr, *First Apology* (ca. 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 (ca. 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 before the process of collecting the New Testament canon was completed) and in view of his role as a pioneer in Christian theologizing and apologetics.

By Justin Martyr

Justin wrote several apologetics books, three of which are especially famous: *First Apology*, *Second Apology*, and *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*. The most accessible English translation of these works is still Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, rev. A. Cleveland Cox, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969 reprint [1888]), volume 1. The text of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* is available free online.

About Justin Martyr

Chadwick, Henry. "Justin Martyr's Defence of Christianity." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 47 (1965): 275–97. A classic article on Justin's apologetic by a respected church historian (currently available free online).

Geivett, R. Douglas. "Justin Martyr: The First Great Apologist of the Christian Church." *The Good Book Blog* (Biola University), June 10, 2015. Excellent overview by an evangelical Christian philosopher and apologist.

See also "Justin Martyr (c. 100 – c. 165)," at www.earlychurch.org.uk, for a good bibliography of resources, many with links to articles available online.

About Faith Thinkers

Faith Thinkers is an evangelical Christian apologetics ministry helping Christians to think more deeply and express themselves more clearly about what they believe and why they believe it. We direct believers to resources, mostly those produced by other apologists, from which they can find answers to their faith questions and become better equipped to share the truth of Christianity with others. Our aim is to help you love God with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself by speaking the truth to them in love. To that end, we encourage you to learn from a wide range of good Christian thinkers (as exemplified in this book) and to develop your own mature, well-informed Christian mind. We also provide research and editorial support for other Christians writing in apologetics. You can find us online at **www.FaithThinkers.org**.