Book Reviews
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By
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Introduction

I began recommending Christian books to students decades ago for the purpose of helping them know about some of the better resources available to them. Many of the books were about Bible study, theology, discipleship, Church history and apologetics. The response was almost always positive, so I decided to review books online to help even more students know about books that would both inform and challenge. Most of the books I review are new or of recent origin.

*Book Review Volume I* is the first in a series about books on the primary subject of “Apologetics” on FaithandSelfDefense.com. Another series you may find helpful is *A Reading Plan For Christian Apologists*, also on FaithandSelfDefense.com.

Our hope is that you will find books you can add to your Christian library — books that will become your friends and allies as you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
I want to begin this book review by saying ‘BUY IT!’ Okay, now to the review.

First, let’s meet the author: Dr. Brian K. Morley is professor of philosophy and apologetics at the Master’s College in Santa Clarita, California. He has been a member of the Evangelical Theological Society, the Evangelical Philosophical Society, and the Society of Christian Philosophers. He is also the author of God in the Shadows: Evil in God’s World.

Dr. Morley’s new book is titled Mapping Apologetics: Comparing Contemporary Approaches (IVP Academic, 2015). He focuses on how people decide what to believe and poses the question this way: ‘How do we answer life’s most important question—the one on which everything else in life depends?’ The subject of Morley’s book is the “foundational question of apologetics, the matter of proof.”

I strongly recommend that anyone interested in the “defense of the gospel” (Philippians 1:17) purchase this book and here’s why.
Foundational Issues

Whether you are an aspiring apologist or have been involved in apologetics for decades, the structure of Mapping Apologetics will serve you well for the remainder of your ministry life.

Dr. Morley’s method begins with an excellent Chart of Apologetic Approaches. It begins with Fideism (defined by Morley as ‘a denial of apologetics’) and moves through various apologetic approaches that increase emphasis on objective, independently existing evidence. Under each of the ten approaches are five important aspects of the apologetic groupings:

- Defining Characteristics
- Adherents
- Criticisms
- Epistemological staring point
- Summary

Dr. Morley explained in his Introduction that he organized the book according to a schema that he has used through much of his 25 years of teaching apologetics. That is one of the major benefits of this book: having a quarter century of apologetics’ classes poured into one great reference book.

‘I have also sought where possible to bring out the deeper, underlying issues separating the views, most of which are philosophical, having to
do with issues such as the following: how we know, how we have certainty (and how certain we can be); the relation between faith and evidence; the possibilities of reasoning by way of deduction, induction and abduction; the role of assumptions and presuppositions; the relation between evidence and worldview; the validity of intuition as a way of knowing and its possible divine origin; and whether we can know some things without inferring them from other things we know (i.e. foundationalism). Through all this I hope to bring the issues into sharper focus so as to facilitate more constructive dialogue on the subject of apologetic methods.” Dr. Morley, Mapping Apologetics, Introduction

Apologetic Methodologies

Even though Dr. Morley admits he was not able to give space to all of the primary adherents of the various apologetic approaches in the book (384 pages), he addresses some of the most important in each category. Some of the apologists that Dr. Morley wrote about in the book include Cornelius Van Til, John Frame, Alvin Plantinga, Mark Hannah, E.J. Carnell, Francis Schaeffer, Richard Swinburne, William Lane Craig, Norman Geisler, John Warwick Montgomery and Gary Habermas.

“I have tried to represent each thinker fairly, as they would describe their views. I have had the privilege of meeting and talking to most of those I have written about (including the late Greg Bahnsen), and whether by personal contact or only via their writings, I am glad to have been exposed to such brilliant minds who have worked hard on these complex issues over a lifetime.” Dr. Brian Morley, Introduction
Because Mapping Apologetics compares contemporary approaches, many of the apologists Dr. Morley wrote about in his book were able to respond to him:

“Dr. Morley is a careful scholar who does assiduous research and painstaking analysis.” Mark M. Hanna, Professor of Philosophy at Veritas Seminary

“Mapping Apologetics provides the most complete and best analysis to date of my overall apologetic approach.” John Warwick Montgomery, Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy, Concordia University, Wisconsin; Director of the International Academy of Apologetics, Evangelism and Human Rights, Strasbourg, France

“Brian Morley shows mastery of the details of my approach, including the qualifications and nuances.” John Frame, Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary

“In the volume Mapping Apologetics, Brian Morley treats the reader to an overview and examination of several very useful apologetic methods for defending the Christian faith.” Gary R. Habermas, Distinguished Research Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy, Liberty University and Baptist Theological Seminary
Summation

If you are new to apologetics, Mapping Apologetics will help you understand the many ways Christians are defending the faith around the world today. Dr. Morley’s writing is so clear and thorough that you should also be able to identify the type(s) of apologetics that fits the way you think. You can use that knowledge to continue your apologetics education and broaden opportunities for impacting the lives of people God will bring across your path.

If you have been involved in apologetics for many years, Mapping Apologetics will help you dive deeper into your particular apologetic methodology. Dr. Morley does a great job pointing to many books and other references that will help you understand how to use your gifts in even greater ways to reach people for Christ and bring glory to God.

If you are interested in Christian apologetics, Mapping Apologetics is definitely a must-have book for your library.

Reasons For Our Hope: An Introduction To Christian Apologetics by H. Wayne House and Dennis W. Jowers (B&H Academic, 2011) is a MUST for every Christian’s bookshelf. As Normal Geisler wrote in the Foreword to the book – “Never before has apologetics been needed more.”

Building an apologetics library that works in the real world of ‘faith defense’ is an important task for every Christian – especially parents and others who work with children, teens and young adults.

Reasons For Our Hope is a wonderful resource that addresses multiple aspects of Christian apologetics and is easy to use. The authors, who are both professors, bring the best of their seminary classes to this amazing document.

Dr. H. Wayne House (M.A., Th.D., J.D.) is distinguished research professor of Theology, Law, and Culture at Faith Evangelical Seminary in Tacoma Washington. He taught at Trinity Law School of Trinity International University and is a past president of the Evangelical Theological Society. Good credentials for someone writing a book about Christian apologetics.

Dr. Dennis W. Jowers (M.Th., Ph.D.) is professor of Theology and Apologetics at Faith Evangelical Seminary in Tacoma. Also good credentials for writing a book about Christian apologetics.
The authors divided *Reasons For Our Hope* into four major sections:

1. Apologetic Methodologies and Systems
2. Apologetics In Scripture And In History
3. Apologetic Problems
4. How To Use Apologetics In Engaging The World

I was impressed in reading the book by how thorough and in-depth the authors were in presenting the vast amount of apologetics material. They wrote what is seminary-level information in a way that most Christians will find interesting, clear and easy to understand.

*Reasons For Our Hope* covers every important aspect of Christian apologetics, so it’s like having several topical books in one cover. Here are some of the subjects covered in the book:

- Introduction to Apologetics
- Worldviews
- Approaches to Apologetics
- Categories of Apologetics
- How Do We Know the Truth?
- The Tension Between Faith and Reason
- Natural Theology and Its Contribution to Apologetics
- Speaking About God and Ultimate Reality
- Apologetics in the Old Testament
- Apologetics in the New Testament
• Early Apologists of the Second and Third Centuries
• Later Patristic and Medieval Apologetics
• Apologetics of the Reformers
• Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment Apologetics
• Contemporary Apologetics
• Use of Philosophy in Apologetics
• Skepticism and Its Cure
• Postmodernism and Defense of Christianity
• The Knowledge of God
• The Problem of Evil
• Can Miracles Occur and Do They?
• How Reliable Are the Sources for Christian Truth?
• Answering the Challenges of the Jesus Quests
• The Meaning and Importance of the Physical Resurrection of Christ
• The Compatibility of Biblical Truth and Modern Science

After giving detailed insight into the history of apologetics and various problems that Christians face in presenting the Gospel, the authors share a wealth of information about how to use apologetics in engaging cultists, secularists, postmodernists, Muslims, and new age mysticism.

I highly recommend Reasons For Our Hope: An Introduction to Christian Apologetics for every Christian interested in both understanding and using apologetics to reach unsaved family, friends, neighbors and co-workers. It's also a great guide for Christian parents to use in preparing their children to live in an ever-expanding secular society.
“Few contemporary books on the topic are more comprehensive, more systematic, better documented, or better illustrated than this one.” Norman L. Geisler, Ph.D., Professor of Apologetics, Veritas Evangelical Seminary

“Drs. House and Jowers have done a wonderful job at providing, in a single volume, a full-orbed education in the defense of the faith. We haven’t seen a book like this in a long time that delves into the definitions, the methodology, the history, the issues, and the practice of this crucial but neglected field of Christian Apologetics.” Craig J. Hazen, founder/director, Graduate Program in Christian Apologetics, Biola University

“The book’s real strength lies in its treatment of apologetic methodology and the biblical and historical basis of apologetics. It is a delight to see this book published, and I hope it gets into the hands of those who want to know the reasons for our hope.” J. P. Moreland, distinguished professor of Philosophy, Talbot School of Theology

As I mentioned at the beginning, this is a MUST for every Christian’s bookshelf. If you can afford to purchase only a few books about apologetics, be sure to purchase this one. If you can afford to purchase many books about apologetics, be sure to purchase Reasons For Our Hope.

Reasons for Our Hope: An Introduction to Christian Apologetics (Hardcover), By H. Wayne House, Dennis W. Jowers, B&H Academic, 2011
Os Guinness wrote in his new book, Fool’s Talk: Recovering The Art Of Christian Persuasion (IVP Books, 2015), that his own journey to faith was more than intellectual. He said it included a long, slow, critical debate in his mind during his school years.

“On one side, I listened to the arguments of such famous atheists as Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, and on the other side to such Christian thinkers as Blaise Pascal, Fyodor Dostoevsky, G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis.”

Guinness began writing books more than 40 years ago (The Dust of Death: A Critique of the Establishment and the Counter Culture, and the Proposal for a Third Way) and quickly became known as one of the best thinkers in Christianity. He went on to write more than 30 books (e.g. The Call, Doing Well and Doing Good, The Devil’s Gauntlet, Dining with the Devil, Time for Truth, In Two Minds, God in the Dark, Unspeakable, A Free People’s Suicide, The American Hour, Long Journey Home, The Case For Civility, The Global Public Square, Renaissance: The Power Of The Gospel However Dark The Times) while working as a freelance reporter with the BBC, as a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution, and as a guest scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies. He is also the founder of the Trinity Forum and project director of the Trinity Forum Study Series and was the lead drafter of the Williamsburg Charter and the Global Charter of Conscience. Guinness is currently a Senior Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics.
Dr. Guinness (DPhil, Oxford University) is known around the world as an influential speaker, social critic and thought-provoking writer. So, with all that he’s already said, what else can he possibly write that Christians should read?

In *Fool’s Talk*, Os Guinness turns to what may be the most important subject for Christians to consider, especially Christians who think of themselves as ‘apologists.’ That subject is Persuasion.

“We are all apologists now, and we stand at the dawn of the grand age of human apologetics, or so some are saying because our wired world and our global era are a time when expressing, presenting, sharing, defending and selling ourselves have become a staple of everyday life for countless millions of people around the world, both Christians and others. The age of the Internet, it is said, is the age of the self and the selfie. The world is full of people full of themselves. In such an age, ‘I post, therefore I am.’ (Introduction, Fool’s Talk, p. 15)

Guinness raises an important question for Christians to consider. With human interconnectedness in the global era raised to a truly global level, with unprecedented speed and on an unprecedented scale, ‘are Christians ready for this new age?’ Are Christians prepared to persuade people who are closed, indifferent, hostile, skeptical or apathetic?
“Loss of persuasion? It might seem bizarre, almost unimaginable, that Christian communication has lost something so central to its mission. Yet in profound ways it has, and that is why our challenge is to think about apologetics in ways that are not only fresh but faith and independent—faithful in the sense that they are shaped by the imperatives of Christian truths, and independent in the sense that they are not primarily beholden to ways of thinking that are alien to Christian ways of thinking.” (Fool’s Talk, p. 18)

One of my favorite chapters in Fool’s Talk is Chapter 6 – ‘Turning The Tables’. Guinness quotes from G.K. Chesterton’s dramatic story of Innocent Smith and the philosophy professor in the book Manalive (Arc Manor, LLC, 2008, original publication 1912), then launches into two pitfalls that await every Christian intent on serving God. The pitfalls come from the relationship of apologetics and evangelism.

“… in the overall task of Christian advocacy, we have to face up to two equal and opposite errors. One is the apologist’s temptation, which is to emphasize apologetics at the expense of evangelism, and the other is the evangelist’s temptation, which is to do the opposite and emphasize evangelism at the expense of apologetics.” (Fool’s Talk, p. 110)
Guinness goes on to explain that the two tasks (apologetics and evangelism) ‘should be joined seamlessly.’ He wrote that the isolation of apologetics from evangelism is the ‘curse’ of much modern apologetics, ‘and why it can become a sterile and deadening intellectualism.’ Guinness’ conclusion is that whenever apologetics is needed, it should precede evangelism, but must always lead directly to it (evangelism). ‘The work of apologetics is only finished when the door to the gospel has been opened and the good news of the gospel can be proclaimed.’

You may be wondering why Guinness titled his new book, ‘Fool’s Talk.’ He referred to a tiny silver donkey sitting on his desk. Guinness wrote that the donkey reminded him of the proper role of the apologist.

“Balaam’s ass is the patron saint of apologists. Madness, as we shall see, is an appropriate term for the unreality of unbelief. In order to counter it, we play our part, and we do the best we can. But even when our efforts are serviceable, our role is always humble and all too often inadequate and somewhat ridiculous. Christian advocates who understand their calling would never be too big for their books. The tai is not about us. It’s all about him [God], and he may be trusted to do what matters.” (Fool’s Talk, p. 60)
What do other apologists think of ‘Fool’s Talk’?

“In this landmark work, I am thrilled to see Os’s unique thinking on these crucial subjects, co-extensive with a lifetime of doing apologetics. It is a must-read for anyone interested in engaging the skeptic or seeker. Few thinkers today rise to the level that Os does, even as he plumbs the depth of vital issues in defense of the historical Christian faith.” Ravi Zacharias, author and speaker

“A remarkable book. Written with the benefit of decades of experience and reflection — this is one book on apologetics you will not want to miss. I wholeheartedly recommend it.” Michael Ramsden, Joint Director, Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics, International Director, RZIM for Europe, the Middle East and Africa

“Hardened skeptics and militan unbelievers are often a puzzle to Christian apologists. Arguments alone sometimes fail to stick to the souls of these unbelievers. Because of this, we need the rhetorical wisdom of Os Guinness, evangelicalism’s greatest living social critic. Fool’s Talk will make its readers wiser and more creative in commending the matchless gospel of Jesus Christ.” –Douglas Groothuis, Professor of Philosophy, Denver Seminary
Thank you, Dr. Guinness. May we all recover the ‘art of Christian persuasion.’

*Fool’s Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion*, IVP Books, 2015, hardcover, 270 pages
There Is No God – Atheists In America by David Williamson and George Yancey (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013) is one of the better presentations of what atheists think, believe and want.

I spent some time as an atheist in the 1960s and early 70s and have talked with scores of atheists in the years since. What Williamson and Yancey have presented from their research has a strong ring of truth about what atheists think, believe and want concerning religion and an expanding secular society, especially as it relates to government, politics and education.

One of the unique aspects of There Is No God is the inclusion of many quotes from atheists about important issues of our day: same-sex marriage, abortion, separation of church and state, and public school curricula, to name several. Reading what atheists think on these subjects in their own words should be helpful to anyone who wants to understand atheists and reach them for Christ.

Understanding Atheism

David Williamson and George Yancey are professors of sociology at the University of North Texas. They begin their book with a chapter on ‘Understanding Atheism in the United States’ and follow with ‘A Brief History of Atheism.’ These chapters are helpful in understanding atheism from ancient times to how atheists organized for action in the 20th and early 21st centuries.
Christians often tell me they’ve never met an atheist and don’t understand them. One of the most helpful aspects of *There Is No God – Atheists In America* is the authors introduce readers to atheists by sharing their first name, age, sex and education. That helps demonstrate that atheists are real people with real lives, hopes and dreams for their future and the future of society.

The authors first introduce the atheists in their survey by how they became atheists. Many were raised in religious home or were exposed to religion as children. Quite a few of them who admitted to having religious beliefs as children said they “lost their beliefs, at least in part, due to their experiences in colleges or universities” (p. 43). Another interesting research finding was that almost two-thirds of the atheists the professors interviewed stated that they “never had any doubts about their atheism” (p. 44).

It will come as no surprise that the vast majority of atheists surveyed viewed religious people as ‘irrational.’ The authors summarized atheist thinking this way: “atheists do not tend to rely upon positive arguments for atheism. Rather, they tend to point out what they perceive as the illogical thinking of people of faith.” I would agree with that based on my experience as an atheist.
Quoting Atheists

Here are a few quotes from some of the atheists Williamson and Yancey interviewed about how they view Christians and irrationality.

“The Christian probably just accepted his creed through tradition, fear and conformity, which I find weak and illogical.”

“Accepting things without evidence, in other words, faith or dogma, encourages people to accept things irrationally, which leads to harming others.”

“Religious people are susceptible because they are groomed not to question and to dedicate their lives to a ‘higher power,’ a power that is utterly silent (whether or not ‘God’ is deaf, he is without a doubt dumb).”

Quoting atheists is a strong point to *There Is No God – Atheists In America*. If you’re not familiar with atheist thinking, you will find this book eye-opening. If you are familiar with atheist thinking, you will find the book insightful and helpful in talking with atheists about God and the Christian worldview.
Contents

The book is filled with great information and guidance into understanding atheists that you can read in just a few hours. The chapter contents include:

1. Understanding Atheism in the United States
2. A Brief History of Atheism
3. Who Are the Atheists?
4. The Foolishness of Religion
5. Progressive Politics as a Tenet of Atheism
6. Toward an Atheist Morality
7. Atheism in the United States
8. Summary and Conclusion

Reviews

“Religious people assume that the growing atheist minority in America lacks a sense of morality. There Is No God gives a voice to committed atheists who have a strong moral compass, pointing not toward God but in the direction of rationality and humanism.” Ariela Keysar, Co-Principal Investigator, American Religious Identification Survey, Trinity College
“David A. Williamson and George Yancey have successfully walked the fine line between the two extremes of the religious-atheism divide. The authors’ messages are honest, thoughtful, and respectful of the people and points of view along the continuum of those with absolute god belief, absolute no-god belief, and variations in between.” Raymond F. Paloutzian, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Westmont College: Editor of the International Journal for the Psychology of Religion

“Williamson and Yancey ably integrate the sociology of religion with the political sociology in an insightful analysis of contemporary atheist Americans, a largely unknown and under researched minority.” Barry A. Kosmin, Director, Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society & Culture, Trinity College

Speaking as a former atheist who communicates with atheists every day about atheism, theism and the Christian worldview, this is a wonderful book to have in your library. It’s even more wonderful to read, study and use information in the book to minister to atheists in your family and neighborhood, at work and school.

*There Is No God – Atheists In America*, Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013, Hardcover, 150 pages
REDISCOVERING JESUS

An Introduction to Biblical, Religious and Cultural Perspectives on Christ

DAVID B. CAPE, RODNEY REEVES and E. RANDOLPH RICHARDS
“Rediscovering Jesus: An Introduction to Biblical, Religious and Cultural Perspectives on Christ” (IVP Academic, 2015) will get you thinking seriously about how both Christians and non-Christians view Jesus Christ. The authors (David B. Capes, Rodney Reeves and E. Randolph Richards) present a variety of views about Jesus from both biblical and non-biblical perspectives. They include the views of several individuals and groups including each of the Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), the Apostle Paul, the Gnostics, Muslims, Mormons, Liberals, Jesus Seminar, and Americans. Which one is right? Which view answers this question best: “Who is your Jesus?”

“Rediscovering Jesus” is an IVP Academic textbook, which may seem a little intimidating to non-academics, but I found the content and writing style to be at a level that most older Christian teens and adults would find comfortable and helpful. The authors are all Christian professors who have previous writing experience.

David B. Capes (PhD, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is professor of New Testament in the School of Christian Thought at Houston Baptist University, where he was founding dean of the Honors College. He has authored, coauthored or coedited books such as Rediscovering Paul, Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology, The Footsteps of Jesus in the Holy Land, The Last Eyewitness, Rebecca’s Children, The Voice of Hebrews and The Voice of Romans.
Rodney Reeves (PhD, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is dean of The Courts Redford College of Theology and Ministry and professor of biblical studies at Southwest Baptist University, both in Bolivar, Missouri. Previously a pastor with churches in Arkansas and Texas, Reeves is author or coauthor of *A Genuine Faith: How to Follow Jesus Today, Spirituality According to Paul: Imitating the Apostle of Christ* and *Rediscovering Paul: An Introduction to his World, Letters and Theology*. His articles have appeared in journals such as Perspectives in Religious Studies, Biblical Illustrator, Southwestern Journal of Theology and Preaching.

E. Randolph Richards (PhD, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is dean and professor of biblical studies in the School of Ministry at Palm Beach Atlantic University. He is a popular speaker and has authored and coauthored dozens of books and articles including *Rediscovering Jesus, Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes, Rediscovering Paul, The Story of Israel* and *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*.

They did a wonderful job presenting each perspective about Jesus into clear view and asked how each view is different than other views and what if each of the views were our only Jesus. That will get you thinking. Each chapter also includes more reading material and discussion questions, which are excellent for small groups as well as college classrooms.
I especially enjoyed the chapter about “The American Jesus” because that’s the Jesus I’ve seen taught and touted since I was a young child in the mid-20th century. We’ve seen the politically correct Jesus, the politicized Jesus, the Prince Charming Jesus, the pragmatic Jesus, the radical Jesus, and the Superman Jesus during the past 70 years. Then, on top of that, we have the ‘Cinematic Jesus.’ That’s the Jesus Hollywood has presented in dozens of movies and TV programs during the past 100+ years. I agree with the authors when they wrote, “It shouldn’t surprise anyone, but the American Jesus really isn’t about Jesus at all.”

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“The more Jesus we present the more gospel we present. Rediscovering Jesus is on that list of what I can enthusiastically recommend that is pure gospel!”—Scot McKnight, Julius R. Mantey Professor of New Testament, Northern Seminary

“Rediscovering Jesus is an accurate, readable and eye-opening account of the diverse perspectives on Jesus found in the New Testament and in other religious and cultural contexts … Capes, Reeves and Richards have produced a remarkably fresh, enlightening and convicting volume.”—Mark L. Strauss, Bethel Seminary, San Diego

“Rediscovering Jesus is like an expert journalist or photographer examining the subject—in this case, Jesus—from all sides and angles … Few textbooks do as good of a job as this one in helping students engage with Jesus’ question ‘Who do you say that I am?’”—Nijay Gupta, assistant professor of New Testament, George Fox Evangelical Seminary

“Making Jesus in our own image—a dangerous temptation. Capes, Reeves and Richards provide the antidote in this well-written and witty book that tackles two key questions: Who is the Jesus of the Bible, and how does he differ from claims made about him in other religions?”—Lynn Cohick, professor of New Testament, Wheaton College
“Rediscovering Jesus isn’t like other books on Jesus. As first-rate scholars and seasoned guides to interpreting the New Testament, Capes, Reeves and Richards provide wise and responsible answers. But perhaps more importantly, and what sets this book apart from others, they ask questions almost no one else is asking, questions that we all wonder about … I enthusiastically recommend it as an engaging resource for enriching our lives and leading us to follow the good but untamable Jesus of the Bible more faithfully.”—J. Scott Duvall, Fuller Professor of New Testament, Ouachita Baptist University

“Capes, Reeves and Richards have done it again! As with their former collaborative effort, Rediscovering Paul, Capes, Reeves and Richards have produced an excellent resource for an evangelical undergraduate course on Jesus of Nazareth. Rediscovering Jesus not only provides an overview of the Jesus of the four-fold Gospel, but also sketches the Jesus of the rest of the New Testament, providing a full-orbed biblical perspective on the meaning of Jesus.”—Joel Willitts, professor of biblical and theological studies, North Park University

“Professors Capes, Reeves and Richards are to be commended for their creative, interesting and intellectually honest look at the many faces of Jesus. Those interested in encountering Jesus in fresh and stimulating ways need to pay attention to this book!”—Christopher W. Skinner, associate professor of religion, University of Mount Olive
“Rediscovering Jesus is an inviting, insightful and creative survey of various portraits of Jesus from both inside and outside the Bible. Readers will be provoked to think through the implications of the Jesus they may already believe in and follow (whether they know it or not!), and to listen to all the witnesses with a discerning ear.”—Michael J. Gorman, Raymond E. Brown Professor of Biblical Studies and Theology, St. Mary’s Seminary & University

Rediscovering Jesus: An Introduction to Biblical, Religious and Cultural Perspectives on Christ, IVP Academic, 2015, 272 pages
W. Mark Lanier is one of America’s top trial lawyers. He was awarded the coveted Clarence Darrow Award in 2012 and was named to the U.S. News and World Report’s Best Lawyers list for nine consecutive years. Lanier was also named as the 2013 Top Class Action Attorney in America, having personally won $10-billion in lifetime verdicts. His courtroom work has been featured in The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, and he has been a frequent guest on CNBC and Fox Business News. Mark Lanier is also a Christian.

It’s interesting how that last fact surprises some people. They find it difficult to comprehend how someone who deals with evidence for a living could also be a follower of Jesus Christ. Isn’t Christianity about believing in things without evidence? Let’s see what Mark Lanier has to say about that.

Using his vast experience as a trial lawyer, Lanier puts Christianity on trial in this book. “Let’s put the witnesses on the stand,” Lanier said in a video describing the purpose of his book. “Let’s listen to the evidence, let’s examine the arguments, and then using common sense let’s make decisions as to what’s more reasonable, what’s more likely than not, because how you read the evidence and how you make your decision will affect the rest of your life and those that you love.”
I like the way Lanier laid out his case in *Christianity On Trial* .. similar to how he might make his case in court. He begins with an opening statement and ends with a closing summation. Lanier presents testimony from many witnesses – including the ancient biblical eyewitnesses and great minds of science, philosophy and theology of the past several hundred years.

The case Lanier makes for the existence of God, the credibility of the Bible and the reality of Christ’s resurrection is powerful. As Lanier invites his readers – “come with me, look at the evidence, and please let the lawyer make his case and then you decide the verdict.”

I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in talking with non-Christians about the Christian worldview and with Christians about the evidence for Christianity that can sustain them through a lifetime of challenges and opportunities in service to God.

**Opening Statement**

“Any exploration of Christian beliefs rightfully starts with exploring whether there is a God and, if there is, what kind of God. The Christian faith rests on core beliefs about God, humanity, truth, reality, right and wrong, the responsibility of human choice, the incarnate Christ, his death, burial, and resurrection, and a coming age where things are made right and Christ’s reign is apparent to all. These are issues that can and should be examined.” *Christianity On Trial*, Chapter 1, page 22
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10. The Audacity of the Resurrection
11. Death and Eternity
12. Closing Argument

Reviews

“A witty, well-paced and thoroughly engaging account of the place of evidence in the courtroom and in life. Mark Lanier makes a powerful case for the trustworthiness and reasonableness of the Christian faith.” (Alister McGrath, author of The Passionate Intellect)

“Historians, scientists and lawyers are after the same thing: to discover what really happened. Mark Lanier, one of America's best lawyers, introduces us to history's expert witnesses regarding our most profound
questions and tells a compelling story sure to convince any jury.” (David B. Capes, Thomas Nelson Research Professor, Houston Baptist University)

“Authored by one of the nation’s leading trial lawyers, Christianity on Trial brilliantly employs the truth-finding methods of the legal process to produce an eminently readable, highly persuasive work of Christian apologetics. This is an extraordinary trial lawyer’s version of Mere Christianity. In his inimitable fashion, Mark Lanier combines his superb expertise as a courtroom lawyer with profound knowledge of biblical scholarship and thoughtful reflection on daily life. Fearless in tackling the most difficult matters of belief, this engaging book speaks to all those interested in seeking truth—whether in the courtroom, in the library or in everyday life.” (Ken Starr, president, Baylor University)

“Mark Lanier has probably read more about the Bible than many biblical scholars and combines this with his experience as a leading trial lawyer. The result is a gripping read and a compelling case for Christianity. He touches on so many different kinds of argument that there is something for everyone in this feast.” (Peter Williams, Warden, Tyndale House, Cambridge, United Kingdom)

“Trial lawyers are often noted for incisive analysis, broad knowledge and the ability to spot the weakness in the opposition’s argument. Mark Lanier demonstrates every one of these instincts in Christianity on Trial. His expertise in using the biblical languages uniquely qualifies him to ask—and answer—all the really tough questions. As a fresh assessment
of the intellectual validity of the Christian, this book will delight pastors, theologians, church members and even critics.” (Paige Patterson, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas)

Christianity on Trial: A Lawyer Examines the Christian Faith, IVP Books, 2014, 230 pages
George Yancey (PhD, University of Texas) is professor of sociology at the University of North Texas, specializing in race/ethnicity, biracial families and anti-Christian bias. He is the author, coauthor or coeditor of books such as *Compromising Scholarship: Religious and Political Bias in American Higher Education*, *Dehumanizing Christians: Cultural Competition in a Multicultural World*, *There Is No God: Atheists in America*, *Beyond Black and White*, *Beyond Racial Gridlock* and *Just Don’t Marry One*. He is working to start the first academic unit on a secular campus that focuses on research that serves Christians and Christian organizations. (InterVarsity Press author introduction)

Dr. Yancey’s new book, *Hostile Environment: Understanding and Responding to Anti-Christian Bias*, is important for all Christians to read because it explores the growing anti-Christian bias in our society. Yancey calls it ‘Christianaphobia,’ defined as ‘an irrational animosity towards or hatred of Christians, or Christianity in general.’ (Macmillan Dictionary)

If you’ve been a Christian for more than 20 years, you should be aware that something is changing in the religious landscape of the United States. If you’ve been a Christian for more than 40 years, you ‘know’ things are changing and changing fast. Surveys conducted by experts like Yancey are demonstrating an increasing negativity toward Christians and Christianity, especially the conservative branch of Christianity.
Yancey and fellow sociology professor David A. Williamson (University of North Texas) recently wrote *So Many Christians, So Few Lions: Is There Christianophobia* in the United States? (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014) that was based on research with thousands of culturally progressive activists.

One of the benefits of good research, in addition to statistical findings, is verbatims – exact quotes from people surveyed in the research. Many clues to the animosity are found in the verbatims from Yancey’s research:

“Churches and houses of religion should be designated as nuclear test zones.”

“Kill them all, let their god sort them out.”

“The only good Christian is a dead Christian.”

“Religion in the political arena is dangerous to freedom and should be not allowed.”

“They are relentless, and I believe if we don’t stop them now, we will be living in another Nazi Germany.”

“We need more money spent on secular education, so less people become religious bigots.”
“They should be absolutely forbidden to have any role in politics, including collecting money and espousing platforms.”

“Keep your beliefs out of the public arena; they have no place in government.”

“Don’t want to hear about your choice of religion! AND it’s none of your business what I believe. Leave me the hell alone! Worry about yourself.”

It’s one thing for Christians to know that many members of society want them to shut up about their ‘faith.’ It’s quite another to know the best way to respond to that opposition. Dr. Yancey summed up his purpose for writing Hostile Environment this way:

“The focus of this book is Christianophobia and how Christians need to deal with it. It is a critically important topic that deserves our full attention. My goal is to point out the reality of this phenomenon to Christians and help them to think about how to adjust to it.” (Hostile Environment, p 23).

I believe Dr. Yancey succeeded in accomplishing his goal for the book and highly recommend Hostile Environment to any and all Christians who want to understand both the cultural opposition to Christianity and how to best respond in a way that bridges the spiritual gap and brings glory to God.
Contents

1. Introduction
2. Haters Gotta Hate: Roots of Christianophobia
3. Can’t Please All the People
4. Are Christians Responsible for Christianophobia?
5. The Particular Challenge of Homosexuality
6. Trouble Within
7. Hate Me Not
8. How to Deal with Christianophobia

References

Reviews

“Everyone should read George Yancey’s pioneering work on extreme hostility toward Christians. It is data-based, balanced and practical.” — Tony Carnes, publisher and editor, A Journey through NYC Religions, nycreligion.info

“George Yancey is a sociologist of consequence, and Hostile Environment represents his most significant research yet. In the book, Yancey provides a perceptive scholarly analysis of Christianophobia. He unpacks the root causes of anti-Christian hostility and helps Christians understand how to respond with wisdom, love and equity. Highly
recommended.” —Bruce Riley Ashford, associate professor of theology and culture, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Hostile Environment is a clearly-written summary of the increasing harassment of Christians. Some will want to withdraw from American society and become the twenty-first century Amish, but it will be better to learn from George Yancey and peaceably but firmly confront anti-Christian bigotry.” —Marvin Olasky, editor in chief, World News Group

“Christians working in the seats of power of the culture (e.g., universities, media, government) regularly experience challenges from those who oppose any sign of Christianity in the public arena. George Yancey’s book Hostile Environment combines empirical evidence with fair-minded, exacting analysis. Yancey has written a set of carefully reasoned principles and examples for Christians to consider in advancing their voices in what Richard John Neuhaus called ‘the naked public square.’ The book describes the underlying reason for the nakedness of the public square and the characteristics of those who aim to maintain its secularity. It offers principled remedies to all those who struggle to share the unique and productive knowledge that is in Christ to a society that thinks it has outgrown him. The work is fair minded, carefully researched, clearly reasoned and courageously argued.” —Mary Poplin, Claremont Graduate University, author of Is Reality Secular?
“Yancey urges us to get in the war in an honorable way, adding our courage and insight for cultural survival and renewal. At times we’re to fight fire with fire. That might mean calling out bigotry and hate where you see it. Love speaks. Love tells the truth. Love risks. Love does not fail.” —Kelly Monroe Kullberg, founder, The America Conservancy and The Veritas Forum, author, Finding God at Harvard

“Yancey is a clear and careful writer, defining terms, explaining research results, and differentiating between different types of prejudice. He provides a timely and thoughtful approach to understanding and responding to Christianophobia.” —Daniel Johnson, CBA Retailers + Resources, June 2015

Hostile Environment: Understanding and Responding to Anti-Christian Bias, IVP Books, 2015, 183 pages
TRUTH

ENGAGING THE SKEPTICAL DISTORTIONS OF THE BIBLE

IN A CULTURE OF DOUBT

ANDREAS J. KOSTENBERGER, DARRELL L. BOCK, AND JOSH D. CHATRAW
Truth in a Culture of Doubt: Engaging Skeptical Challenges to the Bible (B&H Publishing, 2014) is an excellent rebuttal to celebrity skeptic Bart Ehrman.

Ehrman is Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and has written several books that question the deity of Jesus Christ and the truthfulness of the Bible, including “How Jesus Became God,” “Did Jesus Exist?,” “Jesus Interrupted,” “God’s Problem,” and “Forged.” Ehrman is planning to release a new book in March 2016 titled “Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior.”

Ehrman has a large following within the atheist/agnostic/skeptic communities that are using his arguments in their attacks on the Bible and Christianity. Let’s meet the authors of Truth in a Culture of Doubt and see what they recommend for answering Ehrman and his followers.
Andreas J. Kostenberger is Senior Research Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Darrell L. Bock is Executive Director of Cultural Engagement and Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Josh D. Chatraw is Director of the Center of Apologetics and Cultural Engagement and Associate Professor of Theology and Apologetics at Liberty University.

These three men have done a remarkable job in addressing Bart Ehrman’s skepticism. Ehrman’s background in education includes Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton College and Princeton University. It was at Princeton that Ehrman concluded the Bible had errors. He said that led him from Christianity to agnosticism.

The authors of *Truth in a Culture of Doubt* explain the purpose for writing this book:

“We haven’t written this book to convince Bart Ehrman or other skeptical scholars of our views. Ehrman, we trust, knows most of the information we set forth in these pages and has chosen to follow his own line of reasoning due to a variety of factors. Instead, we are writing for those of you who have encountered Ehrman’s arguments (or others like them)
and need to better understand the other side of the argument.” Truth in a Culture of Doubt, Introduction, p 11

Many Christians may not have heard of Bart Ehrman, but they have certainly heard his arguments against God and the Bible. One of the great benefits of *Truth in a Culture of Doubt* is that it will greatly benefit all Christians.

Each chapter begins with the claims of Bart Ehrman that the authors will address, followed by a brief introduction about the general, then detailed responses to each of the claims. Each chapter also includes discussion questions you could use for a church or small group study. The format is easy to read and follow and also excellent for quick research when you are talking with people who have similar concerns to Ehrman.

I highly recommend *Truth in a Culture of Doubt* for your apologetics library.
Contents

Introduction: From Fundamentalist to Skeptic

Chapter One: Is God Immoral Because He Allows Suffering?

Chapter Two: Is the Bible Full of Irresolvable Contradictions?

Chapter Three: Are the Biblical Manuscripts Corrupt?

Chapter Four: Were There Many Christianities?

Chapter Five: Are Many New Testament Documents Forged?

Conclusion: Reasons to Believe

Videos

B&H has produced several short videos with Dr. Bock that share some of the excellent information available in Truth in a Culture of Doubt.

Dr. Darrell Bock on “Truth in a Culture of Doubt,” Part 1
Dr. Darrell Bock on “Truth in a Culture of Doubt,” Part 2
Dr. Darrell Bock on “Truth in a Culture of Doubt,” Part 3
Dr. Darrell Bock on “Truth in a Culture of Doubt,” Part 4
“Over the last number of years, Bart Ehrman has proven to be one of Christianity’s most persistent critics. In book after book, he has challenged Christianity's most cherished beliefs about Jesus and the reliability of the New Testament. I am so thankful that we now have this excellent full-length response to his claims. Kostenberger, Bock, and Chatraw dismantle the attacks of Ehrman one by one, showing not only that the New Testament is historically reliable but also that its teachings are coherent and consistent. In our current cultural climate of doubt and skepticism, this volume is a must read for every Christian.” Michael J. Kruger, President and Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina

“Disturbed by the numerous attacks on the historic Christian faith by Bart Ehrman’s revisionist writings? This wonderful book offers a one-stop-shopping refutation of virtually all of them. Never heard of Ehrman but concerned about how the Bible originated, how faithfully it was copied, if it is full of contradictions, how to respond to the problem of evil and related questions? Kostenberger, Bock, and Chatraw demolish the main contentions of skepticism in each of the areas they address—essential reading!” Craig L. Blomberg, Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary
“Together Kostenberger, Bock, and Chatraw put up a rigorous rebuttal of celebrity skeptic Bart Ehrman of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Herman has made many extravagant claims about Scripture as textually corrupted, fraught with contradictions, partly forged, and unable to provide meaningful answers to the question of human suffering. In response, these authors take up Ehrman’s challenge and show that, on closer reflection, Ehrman is telling a very selective and skewed story. Truth matters, and this trio of authors succeed in showing that the truth of the Christian faith can stand up to the most arduous of critics. A great resource for sobering up people who are drunk on new wine from Chapel Hill.” Michael F. Bird, Lecturer in Theology, Ridley Melbourne Mission and Ministry College, Australia

“Jesus said, while praying to the Father, ‘Your word is truth’ (John 17:17). Many are skeptical about this claim, and one of the most famous skeptics is Bart Ehrman. The authors of this useful and accessible book demonstrate that belief in the Scriptures does not represent the sacrifice of one’s intellect. Many will be strengthened in their faith and encouraged in reading this work.” Thomas R. Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary


Everyone has a “view of the world” that affects their perspective on life and guides the choices they make every day.

“… most people within any particular subculture, or demographic group, have a shared worldview that enhances the quality of community life and facilitates communication between group members. Our own worldview is affected by the perspectives that we see and hear.” (Introduction to Developing A Biblical Worldview, p 1)

Christians also have a worldview and it’s based on the Bible, God’s revelation of Himself.

Dr. Smith, Associate Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary, does a wonderful job defining what a Biblical Worldview is and what it isn’t.

“Far from being limited to a particular aspect of life, the biblical worldview is comprehensive. It includes everything related to the doctrines, values, priorities, and understanding of how the world works that the Bible commends and promotes. Its looks at the modern world through the lenses of the Bible rather than looking at the Bible using the lenses of the modern world. The Bible should determine how you
understand reality, yourself, and those around you, and how you solve problems. It is not something we ‘adopt’ in a single moment, but rather it is something we ‘develop’ over a lifetime. This is why it is more complex than a mere list of doctrines and moral values.” Introduction, What A Biblical Worldview Is, p 5

Dr. Smith explains the different “kinds” of worldviews and how to design a rubric that will raise questions that lead to serious examination. Smith uses four questions to examine a person’s worldview: Who am I? Where am I? What is wrong? What is the answer? He then looks at how various heroes in the Bible might have answered those questions in the middle of their specific challenges.

Two important chapters to Americans are Chapter 6 – “The Four Worldview Questions from America’s Perspective” and Chapter 7 – “Applying the Biblical Worldview to Popular Culture.” Dr. Smith shares great insight into the difficulties Christians face in presenting the Biblical Worldview because of the individualism and emotional disconnection of people in the U.S. His views on both our history, politics and media are a great help in understanding the call American Christians have to “make disciples.”

Dr. Smith closes the book beautifully by sharing “Barriers to Developing a Biblical Mind-Set” and “Developing a Biblical Worldview.” Here are a couple of important thoughts from each of those chapters:
Barriers to Developing a Biblical Mind-Set – “There are numerous barriers to developing a biblical mind-set. For one thing, we live in a culture that holds to a decidedly non biblical worldview in many respects, much as the church in the first century did. Unlike them we live in a world where Christianity is no longer ‘new’ or ‘radical’ but is seen as staid, ‘respectable,’ and even moribund. Many churches, and Christians, are much more influenced by the larger culture than by the Scriptures.”

Developing a Biblical Worldview – “Developing a biblical worldview is a lifetime process of learning and growing in Jesus Christ. We should commit to this lifelong process of growing spiritually, developing a more biblical worldview and living it out, even in the face of an increasingly unbiblical culture around us. We are always, in Christ Jesus, a ‘work in progress’ and we should rest in that reality.”

I “highly” recommend this new book by Dr. C. Fred Smith to every Christian who wants to defend the Christian worldview and make disciples of all nations.
Contents

1. Who Are We?
2. Where Are We?
3. What Is Wrong?
4. What Is the Answer?
5. Understanding Worldview through Scriptural Examples
6. The Four Worldview Questions from America’s Perspective
7. Applying the Biblical Worldview to Popular Culture
8. Barriers to Developing a Biblical Mind-Set
9. Developing a Biblical Worldview

Reviews

“Fred Smith has provided a marvelous tool to assist every believer….Eminently biblical, yet readable and practical, this book will equip you for frontline cultural engagement. Highly recommended.”
David Allen, Dean of the School of Theology, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Fred Smith’s Developing a Biblical Worldview is a breath of fresh air and a much needed corrective to our current cultural malaise. I highly recommend this book. You will be the better for reading it.”
Robert B. Stewart, Professor of Philosophy and Theology, Greer-Heard Chair of Faith and Culture, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
“Developing and applying the biblical worldview is essential for all Christians. Smith articulates a compelling and creative approach for all followers of Christ to develop the biblical framework for belief and action.” Lew Weider, Professor of Biblical Worldview, Liberty University

The Challenge of Jesus
Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is

N. T. Wright
With a New Introduction
I sometimes agree with N.T. Wright and *often* disagree with him. He has the kind of mind that challenges one’s thinking, even when you think you ‘know’ he’s wrong about something.

As I do with any of N.T. Wright’s books or articles, I go in with eyes and ears wide open. Dr. Wright is a brilliant academician. He has taught at Cambridge, McGill, Oxford and Harvard universities, and is currently research professor of New Testament and early Christianity at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. He was at one time Bishop of Durham, Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey, and Dean of Lichfield Cathedral. Wright is a prolific author of more than 30 books and travels the world speaking at major conferences. However, the question with any of his writings is not about his brilliance or his active schedule, but his accuracy. Is Dr. Wright right? Maybe he is or maybe he isn’t, but one thing we can count on with any of his writings is that we will find both our minds and hearts challenged by his.

The most immediate benefit for many may be that they did not read the 1999 edition of the book. However, even if you did read the original, you may find the new edition a good intellectual and spiritual exercise. I do have some reservations about parts of the book, which I will address briefly soon. First, the purpose of this edition.

Dr. Wright explained his reason for re-publishing *The Challenge of Jesus* with these words:

“Jesus continues to challenge us all in various ways. When I wrote the original lectures on which this book is based, in something of a hurry for the conference in January 1999, I never imagined the twists and turns that would be taken in the scholarly world, in the popular Christian world and in the wider world of the dangerous twenty-first century that was about to dawn. I remain convinced that the picture I sketched of Jesus, and of the challenge he presents to those who follow him in today’s world, makes good sense historically, theologically and practically. But new things have happened. In the world of scholarship, things have not stood still. Thought I have been working in other areas—in the life of the church and the study of Paul—three areas of continuing discussion have nonetheless caught my eye … Nobody imagined, in January 1999, what would happen less than three years later, as planes smashed into buildings and the world changed forever. The Western World, and the Western church, was embarrassingly unprepared, not just for the terrible and wicked deeds of September 11, 2001, but for the worldview challenges it offered.” Introduction, p. 1
My wife and I visited New York City in April of 1999 and we remember admiring the size and strength of the Twin Towers that were destroyed less than three years later. I found myself thinking as I read The Challenge of Jesus how much things have changed in our world since the book was first published in October 1999. It was helpful to remember that Dr. Wright first delivered these words to an audience of more than a thousand graduate students and university professors in a very cold, snowy Chicago in early January 1999. Perspective aids understanding.

Wright packs a lot of theology in a small number of pages (207 pages in the new edition). When compared to his longer writings (Thinking about Paul and the Faithfulness of God at 1,700 pages and Jesus Victory of God at 741 pages), The Challenge of Jesus is one of his shorter books. He breaks down his ‘challenge’ of Jesus into eight brief chapters:

1. The Challenge of Studying Jesus
2. The Challenge of the Kingdom
3. The Challenge of the Symbols
4. The Crucified Messiah
5. Jesus & God
6. The Challenge of Easter
7. Walking to Emmaus in a Postmodern World
8. The Light of the World
Difficulties

I think some Christians will feel uncomfortable with the first part of Dr. Wright’s book. I struggled with some of his views in the early chapters, but appreciated efforts in the latter. I especially liked the chapter about the resurrection of Christ from the aspect of the ‘apologetics’ of Jesus rising from the dead after being brutally beaten and crucified. As we will soon see, the Christian worldview succeeds or fails on the back of the historical reality of Christ’s resurrection from the dead.

Even as I recommend reading the book, I also recommend testing the waters of the early chapters and following the lead of the famous Bereans. They ‘searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.’ (Acts 17:11)

The Challenge of Easter

Since we are just days away from Resurrection Day 2015, I’d like to point to Wright’s perspective about Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Dr. Wright emphasizes the importance of understanding historical events in light of how people of the time period would have understood the reporting of those events. That’s an important method to grasping the full impact of the Bible.
“All our historical study, then, must be done to energize the church in its mission to the world … It is because we believe we are called to be the people of God for the world that we must take the full historical task with utter seriousness. Study all the evidence; think through all the arguments.” (p. 31)

The Apostle Paul made it clear in his first letter to the Corinthians that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was at the heart of the Christian worldview from the beginning.

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-8
Here is Dr. Wright’s perspective about the resurrection beliefs of the early Church.

“We find in verses 1-7 what Paul describes as the very early tradition that was common to all Christians. He received it and handed it on; these are technical terms for the handing on of tradition, and we must assume that this represents what was believed in the very earliest days of the church back in the early 30s.” page 141

Wright believes that the most important thing about what Paul wrote at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 15 is what Paul understood the resurrection to mean. Rather than it being a matter of the opening up of ‘a new religious experience’ or proof of survival, ‘of life after death,’ Wright believes Paul meant that Scripture had been fulfilled and –

“… the kingdom of God had arrived, that the new age had broken in to the midst of the present age, had dawned upon a surprised and unready world.” page 142
Dr. Wright concludes the chapter by saying the resurrection narratives of the Gospels are clear on three points.

1. ‘the sightings and meetings with Jesus are quite unlike the sort of heavenly visions or visions of a figure in blinding light or dazzling glory or wreathed in clouds one might expect in the Jewish apocalyptic or mystical traditions.’

2. ‘the body of Jesus seems to be both physical, in the sense that it was not a nonmaterial angel or spirit, and transphysical, in the sense that it could come and go through locked doors.’

3. ‘the accounts are quite clear that the appearances of Jesus were not the sort of thing that went on happening during the continuing existence of the early church.’

Wright does not believe that the Gospel accounts of the resurrection represent a late development in the tradition. He also does not believe that the resurrection narratives in the Gospels are derived from other literature. I especially agreed with this statement at the end of the chapter because it is at the heart of the Christian worldview.

“We had better learn to take seriously the witness of the entire church, that Jesus of Nazareth was raised bodily to a new sort of life, three days after his execution.” page 148
As the Apostle Paul wrote –

“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

It is amazing to realize there were people in the church only a couple of decades after the resurrection of Jesus Christ who were saying there was no resurrection of the dead. That certainly must have been a major concern for leaders of the Corinthian church who brought Paul news of many conflicts, divisions and wrong beliefs within the church. Paul wasted no time in addressing each of the concerns and met the greatest of them head on at the end of his letter.

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.” 1 Corinthians 15:20-21
Summation

There is, of course, much more to the book than just this one chapter, but at this special time of the year when Christians around the world are focusing their attention on remembering the greatest days in the history of the Church, the sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, we can agree with Dr. Wright that we need to take seriously what we believe and why we believe it.

The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is, By N. T. Wright, InterVarsity Press, 2015

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