

Title: to write a book review on Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli's *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003); in about **1000 words. (20%)**

Course: Christian Apologetics

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DECLARATION

I certify that this ASSIGNMENT is my own work. I have acknowledged all material and sources used in it, and that I have not plagiarised in part or whole the work of others without stating the references.

Kreeft and Tacelli's miniature guide to Christian Apologetics is somewhat brief for such a weighty subject matter, at a mere 143 pages (inclusive of preamble) and with at most a few hundred words on each page. Then again, it is a 'pocket handbook' (4.25 x 0.4 x 7 inches¹) version of their full 406-page *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*² – it is designed to be small, light and portable. As such, the handbook's contents are necessarily concise while still aiming to address many of the key issues of apologetics.

The handbook begins with an introduction to what Apologetics (pp.9-12) is all about, and how it links Faith and Reason (pp.13-18). The authors make it clear that their endeavour here is less concerned with methodology (p.10). This is a wise deference, considering that there is much intra-faith protest³ raised by certain proponents who doggedly champion their pet apologetic method (to the exclusion of all others⁴). The handbook also seeks to cater to as wide a swathe of orthodox Christendom as possible, however with no apologies given to liberal believers (p.12)!

The handbook covers several of the well-known and time-tested apologetics issues and arguments. For example, it kicks off proper with Arguments for the Existence of God (pp.19-29) such as Aquinas' Efficient Causality (p.20) and Anselm's Ontological Argument (p.23). Pascal's famous Wager is also covered (pp.27-29), which although it has been criticized in recent years, continues to have its proponents.⁵

Having argued that God does indeed exist, the natural next step would be to define what this God is like – in particular, that Christianity's descriptions of The Nature of God (pp.30-35) are true.

With the existence and attributes of God *qua* God covered, the handbook next moves on to addressing God's creation. Chief among modern controversies⁶ must surely be the issue of Creation and Evolution (pp.36-40) – indeed one of the hot button topics of the past century⁷. Rather than causing division with an exclusionary attitude⁸, the authors make room for the possibility of evolution being under God's control and direction.

Speaking of difficult apologetic issues, a lengthy chapter is devoted to addressing possibly the thorniest⁹ and longest-running¹⁰ issue of all – the Problem of Evil (pp45-57). Here, the authors plant

¹ Amazon, "Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics (The IVP Pocket Reference Series) Paperback – May 22, 2003", *Amazon* (accessed 28-Jun-2022): <https://www.amazon.com/Pocket-Handbook-Christian-Apologetics-Kreeft/dp/0830827021>

² Peter Kreeft & Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (IL/USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

³ Sye Ten Bruggencate, "Eric Hernandez vs Sye Ten Bruggencate (Classical vs Presuppositional Apologetics)", *Eric Hernandez* (accessed 27-Jun-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfJrww9QLHQ> [12:58 to 15:53]

⁴ Sye Ten Bruggencate, "Questions / Answers", *Truth* (accessed 27-Jun-2022): <http://www.proofthatgodexists.org/questions-answers/> [19. Why don't you use 'traditional' arguments for the existence of God like the 'cosmological' argument?]

⁵ Erik Manning, "In Defense of Pascal's Wager", *Testify* (accessed 27-Jun-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBpXAAAd73PA>

⁶ Barna Group, "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church", *Barna* (accessed 27-Jun-2022): <https://www.barna.com/research/six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church/> [Reason #3 – Churches come across as antagonistic to science.]

⁷ David Masci, "5 facts about evolution and religion", *Pew Research Center* (accessed 28-Jun-2022): <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/10/30/5-facts-about-evolution-and-religion/>

⁸ S. Joshua Swamidass, "William Lane Craig: An Exchange with Ken Ham", *Peaceful Science* (accessed 27-Jun-2022): <https://peacefulscience.org/articles/wlc-responds-ham/>

⁹ Greg Welty, "The Problem of Evil", *The Gospel Coalition* (accessed 28-Jun-2022): <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-problem-of-evil/> [Definition]

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, "Few Americans Blame God or Say Faith Has Been Shaken Amid Pandemic, Other Tragedies", *Pew Research Center* (accessed 28-Jun-2022): <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/11/23/few-americans-blame-god-or-say-faith-has-been-shaken-amid-pandemic-other-tragedies/>

their feet firmly in the free will / greater good / soul-building theodicies (pp.50-56) – an approach which I personally favour.¹¹

Through the aforementioned chapter, the authors lay the groundwork (especially on p.57) for the ultimate apologetic topic – Jesus Christ. For He is the greatest answer to all questions of evil and suffering, as acknowledged by various Christian personalities with apologetic/philosophical approaches as diverse as William Lane Craig (free will)¹² and John Piper (determinism)¹³. Jesus is the living theodicy, God in the flesh experiencing human existence and suffering to be our Great High Priest who empathizes with the human condition (Philippians 2:5-8, Hebrews 4:15, Isaiah 52:13-53:12). Hence, the handbook covers issues surrounding Christ’s Divinity (pp. 58-68) and the Resurrection (pp.69-78).

With the crux of Christianity (pun intended¹⁴) covered, the handbook addresses two types of major opposition to the Christian message. First is the modern trend of skepticism and secularism, which denies the supernatural. Hence, the handbook addresses Miracles (actually covered earlier in pp.41-45), whether the Bible is Myth or History (pp.79-87), Life After Death (pp.88-96), and Heaven and Hell (pp.97-111).

Second is religious plurality, whereby it is claimed that every religion has its own truth – and it is thus intolerant of Christianity to lay sole claim to *the* truth. Hence, the handbook covers Salvation (pp.112-120), Other Religions (pp.121-131), and Objective Truth (pp.132-138).

Finally, the Conclusion (pp.139-141) gives a brief evangelistic invitation – either directly to the reader if they are not Christian, or else useful to believers as a guide during any future opportunity to share the good news of Christ.

As mentioned at the start of this review, this handbook is designed to be handy to use and easy to keep on hand (again, puns intended) – and hence the details covered in each section are necessarily sparse. Even the Works Cited (p.142) lists a mere eight items, which does not lend much assistance in further investigation of the subtopics. It should therefore be used as either as a preliminary introduction to the field of Christian Apologetics, or as a portable reference and reminder to be used alongside a deeper study.

In my own short review of the handbook, I have included multiple references for just the abovementioned reason. I encourage the reader to delve deeper into those resources and continue to grow in the knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

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¹¹ For example, see my recorded sermons *Glowing Like Silver & Gold* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D75Hnk21edQ>) and *Why God Permits Evil* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lj8u_IWuE0o).

¹² William Lane Craig, “William Lane Craig on the Problem of Evil and Suffering”, *drccraigvideos* (accessed 27-Jun-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtx5GyP7i7w> [3:46 to 5:31]

¹³ John Piper, “Has God Predetermined Every Tiny Detail In the Universe, Including Sin?”, *Desiring God* (accessed 27-Jun-2022): <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/has-god-predetermined-every-tiny-detail-in-the-universe-including-sin> [last paragraph]

¹⁴ Dictionary.com, “crux”, *Dictionary.com* (accessed 28-Jun-2022): <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/crux> [ORIGIN OF CRUX]

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