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AN ABSTRACT OF

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FOUR CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC SYSTEMS

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The purpose of this study is to analyze and compare four approaches to Christian apologetics: rationalism, evidentialism, presuppositionalism, and subjectivism, and to present the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches as perceived by representative apologists.

The introduction to the study is followed by a discussion of the purpose, function, history, and method of apologetics. The four apologetic systems are then outlined and overviewed in terms of the fundamental issues addressed by each. They are also illustrated by sketches of the work of prominent representatives. Four separate chapters are devoted to the rationalist apologetics of Norman L. Geisler, the evidentialist apologetics of John Warwick Montgomery, the presuppositional apologetics of Cornelius Van Til, and the subjectivist apologetics of Soren Kierkegaard. The major distinguishing features of the four apologetic systems as represented by these writers are summarized by a concise presentation of their approach to ten typical problems of Christian apologetics: the relationship between philosophy and Christianity, the value of theistic proofs, the theory of truth, the noetic effects of sin, the character of revelation, the question of probability versus certainty, the problem of common ground or point of contact, the character of faith, the status of Christian evidences, and the relationship between faith and reason.

The four apologetic systems are then compared and contrasted with respect to these ten issues, and the final chapter explicates several strengths and weaknesses of each of the systems as perceived by representative apologists. The

study concludes with suggestions for a more comprehensive approach to Christian apologetics which utilizes elements of each of the systems (e.g., rationalism's affirmation of the coherence of faith and reason, evidentialism's stress on the historicity of Christianity, presuppositionalism's distinction between fact and meaning, and subjectivism's involvement of the whole person). This wholistic approach would take into account not only propositional and presuppositional factors, but also personal and predispositional factors.

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_____ (Kenneth D. Boa)
_____ (February 11, 1985)