

Review

Hofer, Elias. *Weltanschauung and Apologia: A Study in C.S. Lewis*. Wipf and Stock, 2022.

By Howard G. Andersen, PhD

Elias Hofer lives in Victoria, BC, and took an opportunity for early retirement from his financial sector career to pursue theological studies. He holds a master's degree in Christian apologetics from Trinity Western University and a PhD from North-West University in South Africa, focusing on worldview issues based on studies of the methodology of the great British poet, philosopher, theologian and novelist, C.S. Lewis. Dr. Paul Chamberlain, Hofer's research supervisor at Trinity Western provides the foreword to the book and appropriately highlights the importance and value of worldview considerations in Christian apologetics. The book is based on Hofer's PhD thesis and the first short chapter contains the usual obligatorics for such. Hofer's prose is thoughtful and weighty, yet clear and readable throughout.

The combination of worldview and apologetics holds substantial promise of good things to come. And Hofer delivers on that promise. Indeed, all theological discussions, including, and especially theological-scientific discussions, would be greatly clarified if worldview and epistemological considerations were made foundational. Starting premises are entirely determinative of outcomes in rational discourse, and far too much theological discussion evaluating aspects of culture, in the twentieth century for example, failed to take account of differing worldviews as starting points, and therefore have failed to be as enlightening as they might otherwise have been.

Similarly, the choice of Lewis as a kind of interlocutor for the book is well conceived and well executed. More than a century of troublesome and destructive historical criticism of the Bible during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries failed miserably to take into account that the Bible is, first of all, *literature* and not chronology and not science, and is filled with story, narrative, poetry, analogy, metaphor, proverb, parable, and more. Making Lewis's thinking the underlying framework of this book helps to answer literary questions more than adequately, as readers have come to expect from any consideration of this great litterateur.

Chapter two briefly outlines contemporary challenges to Christianity: challenges from secularism/naturalism, from pantheism/panentheism, from deism; and finally, from pragmatism/utilitarianism/new ageism. Chapter six is a slight restatement of this set of topics.

Chapter three is titled, “The philosophical and spiritual journey of C.S. Lewis.” This chapter traces Lewis’s life, beginning with his middle-class birth in 1898 in Belfast, Ireland, then his public school years, his tutelage at Bookham college, his Oxford days as a student and military officer, and finally, to his place as an Oxford Don and his conversion to Christianity. Hofer quotes extensively from Lewis’ works like *Surprised by Joy*, and his collected letters, most of them with his father. He cites various influencers on Lewis’ thought along with other interpreters of Lewis’ life and thought. This paints a picture of Lewis as a very thoughtful and imaginative individual from childhood, who eschewed the usual boyish pastimes of sports and outdoor activities, a young man experimental in social relations, looking for answers, and developing intellectually in an impressive way into manhood. He moved from childhood Christian faith to non-faith, to theism, then to his decisive conversion to Christianity while a Don at Oxford.

In “Dimensions of Lewis’s Worldview” in chapter four, the longest chapter, comprising more than half of the entire book, Hofer covers Lewis and romanticism, reason and imagination, Christian faith and science, literature, culture, theology, and apologetics as ministry, referring to Lewis’s works, especially *Surprised by Joy*, and other interpreters of Lewis. Chapter four quotes Lewis extensively and reveals the general tenor of Lewis’s work as being not just hard-core rationality, but filled with such deeply human feelings as longing, yearning, desire, satisfaction, wanting and delight, imagination, and awareness. This chapter is a helpful outline of worldview considerations.¹

Chapter five is titled “Worldview Dimensions in Lewis’s Apologetics.” It applies the previous chapter to apologetics, and covers, in turn, Lewis’ fictional and nonfictional works. Lewis’s work is far ranging, and whether one rubric sums up his contribution is debatable. Calling him an apologist for the Christian faith is not off the mark. Hofer makes the point that Lewis’s apologetics are made effective by having a Christian worldview serve as the underpinning assumption without making it explicit. Much of his apologetical is therefore subtle and subversive, yet appealing and helpful. This is a big part of the genius of Lewis’s work; it ought to be followed by more apologists and Christian writers today.

Hofer closes his analysis with chapter six, “Lewis’s Relevance for Present-day Apologetics.” This chapter covers, in turn, challenges from inauthentic non-supernatural Christianity, from deism, pantheism and panentheism, from naturalism/secularism, and from pragmatism/utilitarianism/new ageism. All these challenges are handled with competence and erudition.

¹ Lewis often used the term “world model” for what we mean by our term worldview. “Model” has the distinct advantage of connecting with current scientific practice, especially in digital and statistical analyses in the twenty-first century. This wording should be encouraged.

In his concluding summary chapter, Hofer argues that the objective he has been pursuing, namely, to discover how Lewis's worldview contributed to his apologetics, has been achieved. This fact makes Hofer's book particularly useful in the cultural climate of the early twenty-first century. At this time in Western history, Christianity and the world around it should be based on worldview and epistemological dialogue rather than simply in terms of hard-core issues like Christianity and evolution.

Hofer's book is highly recommended for those seeking clarity on how best to go about explaining their Christian faith to a wider world in the twenty-first century. Taking a worldview approach to explaining the faith is key and Hofer's book shows why. It is also recommendable as a textbook or supplementary textbook for undergraduate or graduate courses in apologetics.

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