

*[Review of The Case for Christianity, Sangre de Cristo Seminary Library. Unpublished]*

The Case for Christianity, by Colin Chapman; pp. 313; Eerdmans, 1981.

The Introduction states that the book was “developed for a youth club.” This suggests a rather low academic level; but the multiple quotations – more than half of the book is quotations – are taken from scholars, of different levels, and must be puzzling to young readers. Indeed, unless one has read widely in the history of philosophy, one will be at a loss to fit the quotations into their background. Nevertheless the book will prove interesting to nearly every serious reader. The plethora of pictures will interest the others.

To be specific, the section on Humanism (pp. 217-266, three columns to a page) quotes twenty three different sources, some three or four times. A few of them are H. J. Blackham (six times), Edmund Leach, Julian Huxley (three times), Nikos Kazantzakis, T. S. Eliot, Alvin Toffler, at considerable length, and Bertrand Russell. Obviously they are not all top-rate scholars.

The general argument seem to be “concentrated on Christian beliefs” (ital. his); and he asks, “Do [these beliefs] fit the facts of history and experience?” (p. 5) The next page, however, seems inconsistent: “We begin, therefore, not with Christian beliefs . . . but with ourselves, with man” (p. 6). Either way his case for Christianity seems to have an anthropocentric basis. One must therefore ask the question, which human beliefs are Christian and which are not? If one starts by citing various beliefs, or various men, can a conclusive case for Christianity be made? Can Christianity be based on history and experience? Whose experience? What historiography?

Indeed, page 112-113 reduced the knowledge of the events of Scripture to the level of the tentative conclusions of secular history books. The repeated phrase “in the same way” (pp. 117–121), for example, Christianity and physics are verified in the same way, is a virtual acceptance of Logical Positivism at worst and at best of 'scientism'. The reader should note that physics changes rapidly, while Christian truth is fixed and eternal.

Even on points of lesser importance, though more easily determined, the author's views are open to serious doubt. Not to mention the very unsatisfactory account of modern philosophy (pp. 161-174), some of his statements about Greek philosophy and science are just plain false. Page 124, col. 2,

the last three lines are: “The ancient Greeks had developed geometry, but their approach to science relied on deduction from first principles rather than on observation and experiment.” It is true that the Greeks had no microscopes or telescopes, and hence could not produce the fine measurements of our twentieth century, but that they did not use observation and depended on deduction is contradicted by the science of Democritus, the writings of Lucretius, and above all else by Aristotle's De Partibus Animalium, De Generatione, and The Opuscula. And do not forget Theophrastus.

With certain statements of Biblical doctrine that would satisfy an Anglican, but not a Reformed Theologian, and in spite of many solidly Biblical propositions, my conclusion is that the author's method had not constructed and cannot construct a good case for Christianity.