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Disputed Issues: Contending for Christian Faith in Today's Academic Setting

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Stephen T. Davis; *Disputed Issues: Contending for Christian Faith in Today's Academic Setting.*

(Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008)

Reviewed by Caleb Farmer

In *Disputed Issues: Contending for Christian Faith in Today's Academic Setting*, author Stephen Davis responds to a variety of challenges to Evangelicalism that, according to popular belief, have the potential to compromise the integrity of the Christian faith. In each chapter, Davis makes his case against a clearly articulated position, demonstrating its implausibility through cogent argument. Davis sets out to show that orthodox Christian belief can, in fact, be defended against the attacks that are constantly coming its way.

These issues are broken up into three parts; the first regards so-called “higher critics” of the New Testament, who have historical, textual, and believability disputes with the Scriptures. In this section, Davis points out flaws in the approach of the Jesus Seminar, as well as discusses presuppositions in exegesis. Davis then moves to theological issues, speaking out against arguments using Christian doctrine. Two topics Davis addresses in this section are religious pluralism and process theology. In the third set of topics, Davis wrestles with scholars who take aim at philosophy of religion. This section includes discussions on the mechanics of eternal life and fitting genocide into a worldview where God is in control.

Davis does a phenomenal job setting up each chapter to show his meticulous logic and calculated defense. In each argument, Davis is thorough in his position, unearthing as many counterpoints as possible. This comprehensive call to logic and intellect raises the bar for Christians who are in a position to defend Christianity. There just is not room for those that rely on circular logic, for instance, to be spokespeople of the faith, and Davis represents well the sort of thought that is called for today.

At the conclusion of chapter 6, Davis challenges Christians to think, integrate their faith, and ask questions. Not only has Davis left no room for a debate that ends on faith, but he reaffirms belief in a logical God, a God that intellectually-minded Christians can follow without being ashamed when they are called to provide the reasons for their behavior. This is a message that the students in our colleges and universities should hear loudly and clearly. Students from an evangelical background will profit from the textual styles as well as the content of *Disputed Issues*.

However, this book is not without its faults. Davis' book suffers from the absence of contrasting views, and he almost seems to state that he is the winner at the end of several arguments. The book would have benefited from an opposing voice, one with as much passion and intelligence as Davis. The frustration of the one-sided argument hits its pinnacle in his chapter titled, “Have the Infidels Refuted the Resurrection?”. Here he refers to specific passages of an opposing viewpoint but never explains the specific points that the opposing view employs. Rather, he simply uses a number system of “8-12” to identify the argument of the conflicting view. This creates

confusion and does a disservice to the whole point being made. This problem seems to dissipate as the book continues and clarity returns shortly thereafter, but this is, nonetheless, a serious hindrance to the reader.

Disputed Issues is a valuable book for student affairs practitioners who spend their time with intelligent and curious students. It is not a book that has every answer to the questions the world is asking about the Christian faith. In fact, if Davis' goal is to convert the world to Christianity by proving its logic, he has failed and is addressing the wrong set of questions altogether. Instead, *Disputed Issues* is a book that sets out an aggressively-minded brand of apologetics. According to Davis, people should not be afraid of questions that challenge Christianity and should have the courage to answer those questions without fear of who is opposing their beliefs.

Even still, much can be learned from how these arguments are modeled, and what types of issues are being addressed in the academic world. Student development practitioners would truly benefit from reading *Disputed Issues*, as many students ask questions based on several of these exact issues after hearing them discussed in their philosophy and theology classes. Some of these questions challenge the Christian faith that they may have depended on their entire lives. Because Davis' book is a great example of a systematic defense of the Christian faith, as he relies on logic and evidence and never retreats to a solely faith-based defense, *Disputed Issues* is a great tool for those who require a scholarly answer to some of the most important questions students face.

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