

Book Review

Collin Hansen, Skyler R. Flowers, and Ivan Mesa, eds., *The Gospel After Christendom: An Introduction to Cultural Apologetics*

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Church planters often prepare for post-Christian communities by expecting overt secularism. My own experience in New England has been different. Many of my neighbors still belong to churches they rarely attend, retain positive impressions of Christianity, and instinctively turn to the Church at moments of crisis. The challenge is not militant atheism so much as a culture shaped by consumerism, therapeutic individualism, and fragmented meaning. Into this context *The Gospel After Christendom* argues that evangelism must once again become an exercise in cultural apologetics: demonstrating not merely that Christianity is true, but that it makes sense of the world people actually inhabit.

Summary

The book contains 13 chapters whose authors have extensive experience in thinking and writing on the topic of apologetics. In *The Gospel After Christendom*, these authors define cultural apologetics, explain how it works, examine the questions cultural apologetics seeks to answer, and analyze the contexts where cultural apologetics is needed. While a description of each contributor's work is beyond the scope of this review, I will discuss four major themes that correspond to its four parts.

Cultural apologetics as pre-evangelism: Trevin Wax notes, “cultural apologetics is a form of preevangelism.... We shine the light of the gospel in a way that affirms their God-given deepest longings and aspirations while exposing the misdirection that leads to lies, half-truths, and unhappiness.” The work of the cultural apologist is “showing how the gospel fulfills the deepest longings of the people in a society *and* exposing the lies people in that society believe” (18). In this vein, Christopher Watkin points out that because the God who made our world has revealed himself in his Word, the gospel is “familiar but strange.” The Bible’s description of our world and condition “fits the human condition like a glove” (41). But gloves are strangely shaped so they can envelope the human hand. All our culture’s longings are perfectly addressed in God’s Word. Joshua Chatraw demonstrates that, though the term is new, the approach described as “cultural apologetics” appears across church history in the work of apologists from Origen to Augustine, Pascal to C.S. Lewis.

The posture of the apologist: Alan Noble argues that the apologist’s posture must avoid both cowardly accommodation and hostile condemnation. From a posture of grace the apologist desires to see the Holy Spirit working in their interlocutors, and this posture frees apologists from veering into confrontation or syncretistic compromise. Daniel Strange urges apologists to subversively fulfill the unrecognized desires of the culture. The utter uniqueness of the gospel both calls all human beings to repent of our failures and appeals to our deepest desires as fallen image bearers.

Sutanto delves into the multi-pronged goal of apologetics sketched above. Because God can change hearts, the apologist has hope for the outcome of their task. Gavin Ortland calls the apologist to expose unbelief as “unlivable” (102). Many members of Western culture today believe the world is disenchanted, meaningless, and lonely. The apologist gets to invite such broken people into the reality of wonder, meaning, and restored relationships.

Goodness, beauty, and truth: Rebecca McLaughlin shows that apologetics answers the question “Is Christianity good?” by demonstrating that the whole basis for accepted international morality rests on biblical presuppositions. Rachel Gilson demonstrates Christianity’s beauty by noting that beauty requires morality. Without morality there is no beauty; there is only the survival of the fittest. Churches must therefore “walk the talk” of exhibiting the beauty of moral integrity in order not to convey ugliness to people to whom they preach. Derek Rishmawy points out that the truth of Christianity is far more foundational than mere pragmatism. While Christianity’s truth “works” for people’s subjective needs, the Christian faith also must be universally true or it provides nothing.

The Church as the context of apologetics: Bob Thune notes that apologetics is essentially ecclesiological. People experience the gospel in the context of relationship; they experience Christ in his body, the Church. James Eglinton argues for the need for contexts where the implicit experience of Christianity could progress to explicit discussion of how Christianity shapes life. These settings can be ministries that serve the poor, small-group book clubs, public lectures, and invitations into a Christian home. Sam Chan translates Paul’s sermon in Acts 17 to address Western cultural idols: youth sports, step counters, movies, air travel, doing laundry. His insights are a helpful, practical challenge and reinforcement Christians’ practice of evangelism.

Analysis

Although nearly every contributor—all fellows with The Gospel Coalition’s Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics (The Gospel Coalition, 2026)—writes from North American or British contexts, the book raises fruitful questions for global missions. Missiology, it could be argued, is itself cultural apologetics: examining the assumptions and aspirations of particular peoples in order to communicate the gospel faithfully. The book therefore offers less a new missionary strategy than a fresh vocabulary for describing practices that cross-cultural workers have employed for generations. Readers serving outside the secular West will need to translate many of the book’s examples, but its central insight—that apologetics must engage the hopes and fears already embedded within a culture—is widely applicable. Indeed, what the editors describe as “cultural apologetics” will sound strikingly familiar to missiologists. Long before Western societies became post-Christian, missiologists have urged learning local narratives, identifying points of contact, exposing idols, and demonstrating how the gospel fulfilled rather than merely contradicted a people’s deepest aspirations. In that sense, the book represents not so much a new apologetic as the rediscovery of a missionary instinct within Western evangelicalism.

Conclusion

The Gospel After Christendom succeeds in recovering apologetics as a missionary discipline rather than merely an intellectual one. It reminds readers that evangelism is not simply the presentation of propositions but the communication of the gospel within particular cultures and imaginations. While the book’s examples arise almost exclusively from the contemporary West, its central conviction—that every culture possesses longings the gospel both fulfills and corrects—offers an

important framework for Christians engaged in witness wherever Christendom has faded, never existed, or is rapidly changing.

References

The Gospel Coalition. (2026). The Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics. TGC.
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/thekellercenter/>