

APOLOGETICS
FOR A
New Generation

Sean
McDowell
GENERAL EDITOR



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Verses marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189 USA. All rights reserved.

Verses marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®, Copyright©1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Verses marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture verses marked NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover by Abris, Veneta, Oregon

Cover photo © Ryan Klos / iStockphoto.com

Sean McDowell: This Work published in association with the Conversant Media Group, P.O. Box 3006, Redmond, WA, 98007.

ConversantLife.com is a registered trademark of Conversant Media Group. Harvest House Publishers, Inc., is a licensee of the federally registered trademark ConversantLife.com.

APOLOGETICS FOR A NEW GENERATION

Copyright © 2009 by Sean McDowell

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Apologetics for a new generation / Sean McDowell, general editor.

p. cm.—(ConversantLife.com)

ISBN 978-0-7369-2520-4 (pbk.)

1. Apologetics. I. McDowell, Sean.

BT1103.A66 2009

239—dc22

2008038016

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 / VP-SK / 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Foreword—David Kinnaman	9
Introduction: Apologetics for a New Generation—Sean McDowell ..	13
Part 1: A New Approach	
1. A Different Kind of Apologist—Dan Kimball	29
2. Truth Never Gets Old—Brett Kunkle	41
An Interview with Lee Strobel	55
3. A Fresh Apologetic: Relationships That Transform—Josh McDowell ..	57
4. Christianity and Culture: Defending our Fathers and Mothers—John Mark Reynolds	69
An Interview with J.P. Moreland	81
5. A Human Apologetic: Tilling the Soul—Dale Fincher	83
Part 2: New Methods	
6. Capturing the Imagination Before Engaging the Mind—Craig J. Hazen	97
7. Conversational Apologetics: Evangelism for the New Millennium—David Geisler	109
An Interview with Greg Stier	119
8. Storytelling and Persuasion—Brian Godawa	121
9. Apologetics and Emotional Development: Understanding Our Ways of Knowing and Finding Meaning—Mark Matlock	137
An Interview with Jeff Myers	146
10. Making Apologetics Come Alive in Youth Ministry—Alex McFarland ..	149
11. Home-Field Advantage—Chris Sherrod	161
Part 3: New Challenges	
12. Jesus: Risen for a New Generation—Jason Carlson	175

13. Apologetics and Race—Alison Thomas 189

An Interview with Mike Licona 196

14. Homosexuality: Know the Truth and Speak It
 with Compassion—Alan Shlemon 199

15. Abortion and Common Ground—Stephen Wagner 211

An Interview with Skip Heitzig 219

16. Defending Femininity: Why Jesus Is
 Good News for Women—Jonalyn Grace Fincher 221

 Appendix: Recommended Resources for Students 235

 Notes 237

A DIFFERENT KIND OF APOLOGIST

by Dan Kimball

Apologetics is desperately needed more than ever in our emerging culture. But I believe that a different kind of apologist may be needed.

I realize that some may disagree with me. I hear fairly often from some church leaders that emerging generations are not interested in apologetics: “In our postmodern world there isn’t interest in rational explanations regarding spiritual issues.” “We don’t need logically presented defenses or offenses of the faith.” These kinds of statements always confuse me. The reason is simple: In my dialogue and relationships with non-Christian and Christian young people for more than 18 years, I am not finding less interest in apologetics, but actually *more* interest. The more we are living in an increasingly post-Christian and pluralistic culture, the more we need apologetics because people are asking more and more questions. We desperately need to be ready to answer the tough questions of today’s emerging generations.

This increased interest and need for apologetics in our emerging culture fits very nicely with one of the classical and well-known Bible passages on apologetics:

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness

and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Peter 3:15-16 NIV).

Over the past couple of years I have heard apologists emphasize “gentleness and respect,” which is an absolutely wonderful shift. Some Christians who are drawn to apologetics can have temperaments which may not always come out with gentleness and respect as they engage non-Christians. But this passage includes something else that, oddly, we don’t hear much about. Yet it is critical for our discussion of apologetics for new generations.

People Can’t Ask If They Don’t Know Us

The passage in 1 Peter 3 says “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” Let me ask you, have you ever been standing on the street or in line at the supermarket and had a stranger walk up to you and say, “Excuse me. Can you tell me the reason for the hope that you have?”

That doesn’t happen, because strangers do not generally walk up to people they don’t know and ask questions like this. Strangers also don’t know the other person, so they wouldn’t be able to know if someone has hope or not. So how does someone know and trust Christians well enough to see the hope that they have and trust and respect them enough to ask them about it?

This is the biggest missing component in many of our approaches to apologetics today. It is one of the biggest shifts we are seeing with emerging generations. Apologetics is still needed today, but the apologist isn’t necessarily trusted in our culture today. In the 1960s and 1970s, many younger people left the church because they (rightly) felt the church was often irrelevant. The critical questions that younger generations had at that time were not being answered. The music and various approaches to preaching and worship were becoming outdated and not speaking to new generations at that time. So when churches revamped their approaches to worship and preaching and developed

clear answers for some of the questions people had, many people (even if they weren't Christian) became interested.

The culture still had a general respect for Christianity. So it was easier to communicate and also have a voice that folks would listen to. For those who grew up in a church but walked away, answers to their critical questions were extremely valuable. But today, Christians and the church aren't trusted like they were. Before, we were hoping to see people return to the church. Today, many have never been part of a church in the first place.

Times have changed. But the Spirit of God is still alive and active. People will always be created with questions about life, meaning, purpose, and God. Apologetics are still important today for new generations, but our approach must change.

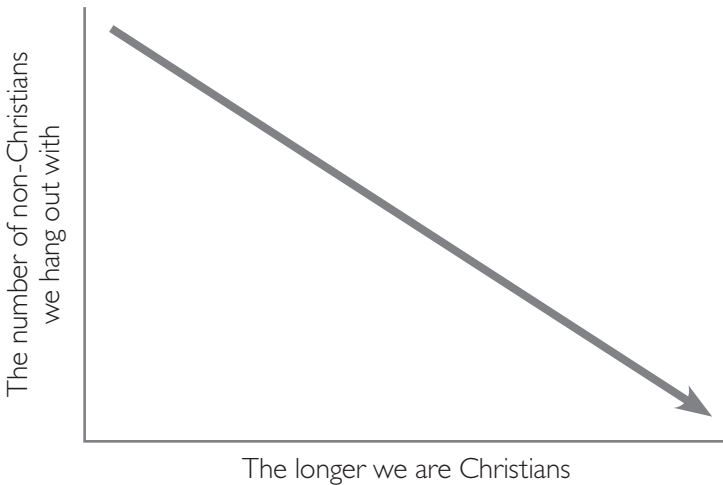
Hanging Out with the Wrong People

In my early days as a Christian, I constantly read books on apologetics so I could share with my non-Christian friends about my newfound hope. My friends were concerned that I was following a religion and reading a book (the Bible) that they felt was written by primitive, ancient, and uneducated people. So this challenge kept me studying to respond to their concerns. The more I read and studied, the more my confidence in Christianity grew.

I eventually joined a large, wonderful church and made some friendships with others who also liked apologetics. We spent hours talking about theology, reasons why we could trust the Bible, and ways to respond to common objections such as the problem of evil. I bought almost every apologetics book available and attended many apologetics conferences. I loved having Christian friends whom I could talk to about apologetics, but something slowly dawned on me: I wasn't really talking to any non-Christians anymore about apologetics. I realized that I was hanging out all the time with Christians who loved discussing apologetics and the tough questions about the faith. But I wasn't spending time with the non-Christians who were asking these tough questions.

As I began exploring this further, I discovered that many people who like apologetics primarily socialize with other like-minded people. Certain temperaments and personalities cause some Christians to become more interested in apologetics than others, and they connect with each other. Having community with other Christians who share common interests such as apologetics is a wonderful thing. But I realized that my Christian friends and I weren't using apologetics to engage non-Christians. We were only talking with each other.

I discuss this in *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, where I included this diagram, which lays out a typical pattern: The longer we are Christians, the less we socialize with non-Christians. We may work with non-Christians or have neighbors who are non-Christians. But the types of conversations we have and the trust that we build changes dramatically when we actually befriend and socialize with those outside the faith.



The danger is that we don't do this on purpose. It happens unintentionally. But because we have limited time and we enjoy hanging out with others who think like us, we can remove ourselves from the very ones we are sent by Jesus to be salt and light to (Matthew 5). As

the Spirit molds us to be more like Jesus, the majority of people who benefit from our growth are already Christians. We are salt and light to each other, not to the world. The more skilled in apologetics we get, the fewer people we know who actually need it.

You may resist hearing this, and I hope I am wrong about you. But let me ask you a question or three:

1. Think about discussions you have had about apologetics with people in the past six months. How many have been with Christians, and how many have been with those who aren't Christians yet?

Let me make this more direct and personal:

2. Who are your non-Christian friends?

When was the last time you went out to a movie or dinner or simply hung out with a non-Christian? If people are to trust us in order to ask us for the hope we have, we must spend time with them and build relationships. The typical answers I get from Christians quite honestly scare me. Again, I hope I am wrong about you. Do you intentionally place yourself in situations or groups where you will be likely to meet new people? For me, music often provides an open door. So whether I'm with the manager of a coffee house I frequent or the members of local bands, I try to have the mind-set of a missionary and meet new people. This sounds so elementary and I almost feel silly having to type this out. But this leads to a deeper question:

3. Who are you praying for regularly that is not a Christian?

Our prayers represent our hearts. What we pray for shows us what we are thinking about and valuing. When the unsaved become more than faces in the crowd, when they include people we know and care for, we can't help but pray for them. And we must remember: We can be prepared with apologetic arguments, but the Spirit does

the persuading. Are you regularly praying for some non-Christian friends?

Again, I feel almost embarrassed asking this. But when I started realizing that I had fallen into this trap, I wondered if I was alone. As I began asking other Christians about this, many seemed to be like me. I even asked an author of apologetics books to tell me about his recent conversations with non-Christians that included apologetics. But he couldn't remember any recent examples. He was talking only to Christians! This isn't bad, but it raises an important question: How do we know the questions emerging generations outside the church are asking if we are only talking with Christians?

I recently talked with a person who teaches apologetics to young people. As we talked, he shared how interested youth are in apologetics (and I fully agree). I asked about the types of questions he is hearing, and I was surprised that his experience seemed quite different from mine. I was working with non-Christian youth at that time, but he was speaking primarily with Christian youth at Christian schools and youth groups. Nothing is wrong with teaching Christian youth how to have confidence in their faith through apologetics. This is an important task we need to be doing today in our churches. But if we are focusing our energy and time listening mainly to Christians, how do we know what the questions non-Christian youth or young adults have? This brings me to my next point.

Providing Answers Before Listening to Questions

The effective apologist to emerging generations will be a good listener. Most of us have been good talkers. We Christians often do the talking and expect others to listen. But in our emerging culture, effective communication involves dialogue. Being quiet and asking questions may not be easy for some folks, but those are critical skills we need to develop in order to reach new generations.

A 20-year-old Hindu became friends with someone in our church. Eventually she began coming to our worship gatherings. I got to meet with her at a coffee house, and because I was sincerely curious, I politely

asked her some questions. How did she become a Hindu? What is Hinduism to her? What does she find most beneficial in her life about it? She eagerly told me stories that helped me understand her journey and her specific beliefs. As much as I wanted to, I didn't interrupt her or jump in to correct her when I felt she was saying things that may have been inconsistent. I didn't interrupt and tell her that there cannot be hundreds of gods, that there is only one true God. I simply asked questions and listened carefully.

Eventually, she asked me about the differences between Christianity and Hinduism. I gently and respectfully tried to compare her story and what she said with the story of Jesus and the narrative of the Bible. But I didn't try to discredit her beliefs or show why what I believed was true. She asked me about the origins of Christianity, and I was able to draw a timeline on a napkin that included creation, the Garden of Eden, and the fall. I explained that people eventually began worshipping other gods or goddesses, not the original one God. I then walked her through a basic world religions timeline I had memorized and explained where Hinduism fit in that timeline. It truly was a dialogue, as I would stop and see if she had any input or comments.

I didn't show her why I felt Hinduism was wrong; rather, I let our discussion speak for itself. The differences between Christianity and Hinduism became obvious. A few weeks later, she told me in a worship gathering that she had left Hinduism and chosen to follow Jesus. My talk with her was not the turning point. She had many conversations with other Christian friends in our church. They knew her beliefs, loved her, invited her into community, and lived out the hope they have. She could see it and experience it, and eventually she wanted to know the reason for the hope in her friends. I definitely needed to be ready with apologetics when I met with her. But the reason she even met with me was that we built trust first. Trust was built with some of her Christian friends. Trust was built during conversations I had with her when she came to our worship gatherings. Eventually, this trust led to her being open to dialogue specifically about her Hindu faith and to ask questions. First she was valued as a person and listened to,

and then came the questions about the hope we have. Let me ask you a few questions about this:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself as a listener in conversations about faith?
2. What are some of the questions you have been asked as a result of building trust and listening? Would anyone have asked those questions if you didn't build trust and listen first?

Stockpiling Ammunition or Building Trust

I recently heard of someone who was taking church groups on the street to walk up to total strangers and strike up conversations and then use apologetics with them. I respect the passion to reach lost people, but I was saddened by the methodology. The leader chose this area because it was highly populated with homosexuals. From my perspective, this is almost the opposite of the methodology that is effective with new generations. We may have our apologetics gun loaded, but we haven't built trust. We haven't gained a voice in their lives, so they don't trust us enough to listen to us. Walking up to total strangers and asking them questions about very personal things immediately puts them on the defense. The discussion begins in a semi-confrontational way. This reinforces some of the stereotypes of Christians we need to break. Non-Christians are often open to discussing personal beliefs about religion and worldviews, but this normally occurs in the context of trust and friendship.

I recently met a guy in his twenties who was working at a coffee house. I did my usual thing: I selected one place to frequent and eventually got to know those who work there. We eventually started talking about all kinds of things, mainly music at first. Eventually I told him I was a pastor at a church and began asking his opinion on things. I asked about his impressions of church and Christianity. I shared that I knew about Christians' bad reputation and that I wanted to know how he felt about that. This wasn't the first

thing we talked about, and we had begun to build a friendship, so he was happy to talk to me about this. One of his main issues was that the Christians he met knew nothing about other religions, but they would tell him he should be a Christian. His concern was that Christians were naive about anything but what they believed, and he didn't respect that.

As I listened, I didn't try to butt in and comment when he would say something I disagreed with. Instead, I listened, asked clarifying questions, took notes, and thanked him for each opinion. I asked him what he believed and why he believed what he did. And then the inevitable happened—he asked me what I believed.

Knowing his beliefs, I was able to construct an apologetic that catered to his story and specific points of connection. As with so many people, the issue of pluralism and world religions was a major point of tension that he felt Christians are blind about. Eventually our conversation moved to the resurrection of Jesus, which he saw as a myth. I used the classical Josh McDowell resurrection apologetics, explaining various theories of the stolen body and why they fell apart upon scrutiny. I shared about the guards at the tomb and how they would defend the sealed tomb. I was ready (thanks to Josh McDowell), and my friend was absolutely fascinated by that. I could tell he had never heard this before, and as we ended our time together, he thanked me. I didn't press him for a response.

The following week I went back to the coffee house, and he told me that he now believed in the resurrection. He had been totally unaware that there are actually good reasons to believe it is true. Over the weekend he got a copy of the Bible to read the resurrection story and had no idea it was repeated in each of the Gospels. This is why I am convinced that regardless of how postmodern emerging generations may be, they receive apologetic arguments when trust is built. Of course, it is the Holy Spirit who does the work in someone's heart—not clever arguments. But God still uses apologetics in our emerging culture.

Consider these questions:

1. When you are studying apologetics, does your heart break in compassion for the people you are preparing to talk to? Or are you stockpiling ammunition to show people they are wrong?
2. When you have used apologetics with those who aren't Christians yet, do you find your tone being humble, broken, and compassionate, or is your tone argumentative and perhaps even arrogant (although you would not like to admit that)?

Critical Apologetics Issues

I know that most apologists are not arrogant, ammunition firing, non-listening people who don't have any non-Christian friends and only talk to other Christians. But at the same time, a little hyperbole may raise up some ugly truth we perhaps need to admit. As I shared, I know I have been guilty of these very things. We must all examine ourselves and be brutally honest about it. Too much is at stake not to.

As statistics are showing, we are not doing a very good job of reaching new generations. Our reputation is suffering. But at the same time, I have so much optimism and hope. Apologetics is a *critical* factor in the evangelism of new generations. That is why I was thrilled to be part of this book.

If you are a leader in a church, I hope you are creating a natural culture in your church of teaching apologetics and training people how to respond to others when asked for the hope that they have. But again, *how* we train them to respond is just as important as the answers themselves. The attitudes and tone of voice we use as we teach reveal what we truly feel about those who aren't Christians and their beliefs. Our hearts should be broken thinking of people who have developed false worldviews or religious beliefs and don't know Jesus yet. How we teach people in our church to be "listeners" and build friendships is critical. Here are some of the key things we must be ready to answer today:

- *The inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible.* Everything

comes back to why we trust the Bible and what it says about human sexuality, world religions...everything. Why the Bible is more credible than other world religious writings is critical.

- *Who is Jesus?* Emerging generations are open to talking about Jesus but for the most part, they have an impression that He is more like Gandhi than a divine Savior. This gives us a wonderful opportunity to share why Jesus is unique and to provide an apologetic for His resurrection.
- *Human sexuality.* We need to be well-versed in why we believe what we do about the covenant of marriage between a man and woman, about human sexuality, and about sexual ethics in general.
- *World religions.* We must have an adequate understanding of the development and teachings of world religions. I don't meet many younger people who are hard-core Buddhists, but many are empathetic to Buddhist teachings. Many pick and choose from different faiths. They are often surprised to see that many religions are mutually exclusive.

The Most Important Apologetic

As I close this chapter, I want to remind us that the ultimate apologetic is really Jesus in us. Are our lives demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5), such as gentleness, kindness, patience, and love? Are we being salt and light with our attitudes and actions toward people? Are our conversations filled with grace and seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:6)? Do our lives show that we are paying attention to the things Jesus would, including the marginalized, the oppressed, and the poor? People watch and listen. If they trust the messenger, perhaps they will be more open to listen.

We can have all the answers ready to give people who ask, but are they asking us? If not, perhaps we have not yet built the trust and

relationship and respect that lead them to ask us for the hope we have. Maybe that's where we need to start—with our hearts and lives. If we will, I can almost guarantee that others will ask us for the hope we have.

May God use us together on the mission of Jesus as we are wise as serpents but as innocent as doves. May God use our minds and hearts to bring the reason for the hope we have to others. And may God put others in our lives who will ask for the hope as they watch us live it out.

Dan Kimball is the author of several books, including *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, and a member of the staff of Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz, California.